

Forest Hill Society Objection to Planning Application reference DC/11/78332/X and DC/11/78379/FT

Proposals:

DC/11/78332/X - The change of use of the ground floor at 76-78 Honor Oak Park SE23 to Use Class A5 (Hot food takeaway), together with the installation of a new shopfront at No 76, installation of new door at 78 and extract duct/air compressors to the rear at No 78.

DC/11/78379/FT - The display of 3 internally illuminated fascia signs, internally illuminated projecting sign and window sign at 76-78 Honor Oak Park SE23.

I am writing on behalf of the Forest Hill Society to object to both of the above planning applications. We wish to make it clear that we provide our objections to both of these applications in this single letter but wish our objections to be applied to both applications.

The Forest Hill Society has received concerns about this proposal from a significant number of local residents. We have carefully considered the proposals and set out below the principal areas of concern. In summary, these relate to:

- The loss of a substantial restaurant (A3) use on Honor Oak Parade and the negative impact this will have on the operation and activity of this area.
- The inappropriate change of use of the unit from restaurant (A3) to hot food takeaway (A5) that will change the character of Honor Oak Parade.
- Poor quality signage proposals and changes to the shopfront that are not consistent with the character or appearance of the building or area, and do not conform with the Lewisham shopfront design guide
- Negative impact on a locally important potential heritage asset (as yet undesignated).
- Lack of clarity around moped use and storage.

The main planning policy governing restaurant and hot food takeaway use is STC9, as set out below, and we are concerned that the proposals set out in this application fails against all of the tests in the policy.

STC 9 Restaurants, A3 Uses and Take Away Hot Food Shops

Restaurants, A3 uses and take away hot food shops will be granted permission where they satisfy the following principles:

(a) their location, design, parking and traffic generation is acceptable and does not conflict with other policies in the Plan;

(b) they do not harm the living conditions of nearby residents, including that created by noise and disturbance from users and their vehicles, smell, litter and unneighbourly opening hours; and

(c) parking and traffic generation is not a danger to other road users, public transport operators or pedestrians.

LOSS OF SUBSTANTIAL RESTAURANT USE ON HONOR OAK PARADE

Our most significant concern with this application is that it results in the loss of the largest restaurant space within Honor Oak Parade and that this will have a substantial and negative impact on the vitality and character of this local shopping area.

A broad range of types of active local centre uses are needed in any high street location in order to ensure that the area remains vibrant, attractive and economically sustainable. Honor Oak Park has a good mix of café's, restaurants, takeaways, shops and other businesses and this balance has worked well for a number of years. An important part of this mix are the range of restaurant uses that encourage evening use of the area and help keep it busy and well overlooked. The Old Bank (76-78 Honor Oak Parade) is one of the largest (if not the largest) restaurant use in this area and has always acted as an 'anchor' use for the rest of the shops and businesses. This works because of the way restaurants bring people to the area. It is also well located on route from Honor Oak Station and the constant changeover of people using the premises and sitting near the large windows on both sides has helped ensure that the street is well overlooked and that people feel safe in the area.

It is our view that this large, prominent unit should remain as a restaurant (within use class A3) in order to continue to provide this 'anchor' use on the parade and therefore we object to the loss of this important A3 use. The main restaurant space sits on the corner of Honor Oak Parade and Grierson Road and provides a strong and positive landmark and a strong sense of overlooking the street in both directions. Entrances to the restaurant are provided both on the corner building and in the 'second' shopfront along the parade that is also part of the restaurant use. The application does not make clear which, if any, of the large windows are to be obscured in the change from open plan restaurant to kitchen 'bake and serve area'.

We can well imagine that the applicant may argue that this building has been empty for some time. We do not believe this is because it is not a viable site for a restaurant use and have found no evidence for this to be the case. Members of the community are aware of local pub and restaurant operators who have attempted to bid for the site for A3 use.

The applicant also claims in the design and access statement that the addition of a pizza takeaway represents an additional 'service' for the local community. It is not clear how this in any way represents a service that is of any greater use or benefit to the community than the existing restaurant use for which the unit currently has planning permission and which, if not currently closed, would have the benefit of being able to operate both as a restaurant AND an ancillary hot food takeaway without requiring change of use.

CHANGE OF USE FROM A3 TO A5

We object to the change of use of this unit from a restaurant to a hot food takeaway on the basis that the unit is too large for this intended use and represents a waste of good restaurant floorspace. There are already a significant number of hot food takeaways on the parade and it is considered that more are not needed and will be detrimental to the use and activity on the parade. The character of a hot food takeaway is quite different from a restaurant use and large areas of the proposed use are likely to be used only for the storage of empty pizza boxes (see Domino's pizza in East Dulwich where pizza boxes fill the shopfront). The hot food takeaway is likely to be used largely for delivery of takeaway food, as acknowledged in the application, rather than attracting people to the area and keeping it busy through the

evening as would be the case with a restaurant use. This change will result in inappropriately located delivery motor bikes, additional litter, disturbance to residents, and a reduction in the range and scope of shop units in the area.

The change of use from A3 to A5 will also mean that a much smaller area of the floorspace is available for customers and public use. In the proposed floor layouts only a very small corridor along the Honor Oak frontage will be available for customers and the majority of the floorspace is to be given over to kitchen and staff use. This represents a very poor use of valuable floorspace within the area and in particular this prominent high street unit.

POOR QUALITY SIGNAGE PROPOSALS AND SHOPFRONT DESIGN

The signage proposals and changes to the shopfront proposed in this scheme are poorly thought through and do not reflect or relate to the historic character and appearance of either the building as it is now or many of the other shopfronts in the area. Whilst Honor Oak Parade is pretty varied in character a number of new and upgraded shopfronts have appeared in recent years and have had a positive impact on the coherence and attractiveness of the parade as a whole.

The signage proposals are not appropriate on a locally important landmark Victorian building in a prominent location and do not conform to the Lewisham Shopfront Design Guide, particularly in the containment within the original and high quality façade design.

The changes to the shopfront weaken the coherence of this part of the parade, would dominate the streetscene and form an unattractive arrival point onto the Honor Oak Parade.

NEGATIVE IMPACT ON A LOCALLY IMPORTANT HERITAGE ASSET

Whilst we do understand that 76-78 Honor Oak Parade is not listed we believe that this building is an important and high quality landmark within Honor Oak Parade. Its name indicates that its original use is likely to have been a banking hall and would have been a prominent building on the parade since its original construction.

The proposal site is at the ground floor across two linked Victorian buildings. The corner building has large, carefully proportioned windows that are highly articulated and mouldings and pilasters that are finely detailed. These windows provide a high level of intervisibility between the internal space and the street and together with the prominent corner location make it ideal for use as a restaurant. The two linked ground floor units are unified by a projecting rendered façade that relates strongly and positively to the street.

The design statement included within this application is minimal and does not explain or justify the impact of the proposals on the existing building or any contribution the changes would make to the positive character and appearance of the area as a whole.

LACK OF CLARITY AROUND MOPED USE AND STORAGE

The moped proposals set out in the application do not appear to fit well with the plans for the layout of the proposed use and it is not clear where the mopeds will be

stored within the building when it is open but they are not in use. If the mopeds are to be brought in through the door onto Honor Oak parade as set out in the proposal then it is not clear how they are to negotiate the two doorways, steps and other constraints within the building. The plans do not appear to show any link to the outside yard from this entrance, even though this is apparently where they are to be stored. Outside peak times they say that up to 5 mopeds will be stored in the yard to the rear of the building – this just does not seem realistic given the constrained layout set out in the plans. We are also concerned that the mopeds need to cross the pavement every time they are used and that this will present an additional danger to pedestrians on an already busy stretch of road.

Under any scenario we believe that the addition of up to 7 mopeds, coming and going into and out of the building and making deliveries at all times of the day and night will harm the living conditions of nearby residents and will cause noise and disturbance at all times it is to be open.

In conclusion, we believe that this application is contrary to planning policy STC9 and the shopfront design guide and will have a significant negative impact on Honor Oak Parade, other businesses and residents. We are supportive of new businesses coming into Forest Hill and Honor Oak and want to ensure that we have vibrant and well used high streets but we do not believe that this is the right location for a new hot food takeaway.

We hope that our concerns with this application are set out clearly. If you require any clarification on this matter please do not hesitate to contact us.
Kind regards