

No McDonalds for Musselburgh

by Marie Sharp Local Democracy Reporter

McDonalds' hopes of opening a new drive-thru restaurant in Musselburgh were thrown out by councillors, after claims it would be just a 180-second stroll from the town's secondary school.

The fast food chain applied for planning permission to build the new restaurant, which would open 24 hours a day, next to the town's Tesco store as it looked to draw customers from the supermarket into its drive-thru.

However, claims by the chain's representative Paula Reed-Smith that the number of visits to the restaurant from Musselburgh Grammar School, on the other side of the supermarket, would be 'limited' were disputed by local councillors.

East Lothian Council's planning committee met virtually to discuss the plans for land to the east of Inveravon Terrace, off Olivebank Road, and questions were asked about why McDonald's was looking to place a drive-thru in a town centre and near a secondary school.

Ms Reed-Smith told the committee: "We anticipate pedestrian visits from the school will be limited.

"We did not choose the location because of Musselburgh Grammar School, we chose it because of the location of Tesco."

However, ward councillor Andy Forrest told the committee it would be a short walk to the restaurant for youngsters.

He said: "From the back door of the school to the front door of the new McDonald's takes a 180-second stroll."

Councillor Stuart Currie, fellow Musselburgh ward member, who called in the application which was recommended for approval by planning officers, said children would "gravitate" to the restaurant.

He said: "About 400 kids go to Tesco at lunchtime. We will have hundreds of kids walking through Tesco car park to McDonald's, they will gravitate to it."

Musselburgh Area Partnership and Musselburgh and Inveresk Community Council both objected to the plans, which drew 157 objections and two statements of support.

Local resident Lynda Baird spoke in favour of the new restaurant, telling the committee that as a mother of four teenage children she welcomed it.

She said: "I worked for McDonald's and the food was always top quality; the hygiene standards and training offered is also top quality."

Ms Baird also hit back at social media "bullies" who she claimed had attacked her and anyone who spoke out in favour of the drive-thru on Facebook.

She told the committee: "There has been social bullying of people in support of McDonald's. I am badly dyslexic and was severely bullied by those against it.

"If you don't want it, don't go, but don't bully people who do want it."

But Kirsten Leask, another local resident, urged the committee to reject the McDonald's application, pointing out that the health and wellbeing of children was at the heart of council policy.

She said: "The proposed development's location is within walking distance of not just Musselburgh Grammar School but three primary schools."

Iain Clark, from the area partnership, also pointed out that three McDonald's restaurants near Musselburgh were based out of town centres and away from schools, adding: "Why should Musselburgh be the exception?"

Bernard Harkins, from the community council, pointed out that Musselburgh town centre was an Air Quality Management zone because of pollution caused by traffic congestion pre-Covid-19 lockdown.

He said: "During lockdown we did see pollution levels fall, with the weekend of May 16 seeing zero levels recorded. We should be building on that."

The council's roads department came under fire for ruling that traffic attracted by the drive-thru would not have a "significant" impact on current congestion after using a peak hour model to measure it.

Councillor Katie Mackie, Musselburgh ward member, said that she had recently timed a drive along the length of the road which would be used by the drive-thru and it took her more than five minutes.

She said: "I have had more complaints from local residents about this application than any other issue since I was elected in 2017.

"There is no peak hour in Musselburgh town centre, congestion is round the clock."

The planning committee voted to go against officers' recommendation and refuse the application on the grounds of its impact on traffic, air quality and noise impact on the amenity of the surrounding residences.

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