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Jagdeep Birk
Development Control
So'ton City Council
Civic Centre
SO14 7LS

12th January 2012

Dear Jagdeep Birk,

Planning Application: 11/02010/FUL
Address: 158 Portswood Road, Southampton, SO17 2NJ
Proposal: Part change of use of the ground floor from retail (class A1) to an estate agents (class A2) (retrospective).

I am writing on behalf of Highfield Residents Association to lodge our objection to this application. The association has around 600 member households, which includes members living on Portswood Road, and many of our members use this shop and Post Office.

We would like to object on the following grounds:

- There are already a significant number of letting/estate agencies in Portswood Road and in the general area. The survival of Portswood as a successful district shopping centre is based on a balance of small independent shops, medium-large sized supermarkets and community facilities. The loss of a retail unit puts this balance at risk and could potentially undermine the long term success of the district centre.

- Not only is another agency unnecessary but it also puts the operation of the Post Office as a viable business at risk. A Post Office is most commonly associated with some form of convenience store or supermarket operation to ensure a high footfall onto the premises. This promotes customers to make purchases across both operations. As you will appreciate, dramatically changing the nature of the attached shop is likely to have a detrimental, possibly fatal, impact on the Post Office's business because the chances of cross purchases are greatly diminished. Post Offices are a fundamental part of any local community, which has been recognised in legislation, and therefore require careful protection.
- The changes to the retail unit have already been undertaken without recourse to planning permission. As a consequence of the physical changes already made, the resulting estate agent's is completely out of character with other local agencies and retail units alike. Perhaps more worryingly, the internal changes have resulted in a significant loss of amenity to those using the remaining Post Office and there has been a very great loss of light. I have witnessed myself, disabled Post Office users in wheelchairs finding it difficult accessing the counters and then leaving. It also appears that it could have a detrimental impact on customers queuing to use the counter service and then leaving especially at peak times.
- Finally, a business of this kind often requires properties to be viewed and these are almost universally undertaken by car. Consequently, a new agency requires parking provision to ensure that the existing parking problems experienced in surrounding roads are not made worse.

While we trust that you will feel that the above concerns merit rejection of the application under delegated powers, we would request that, were you minded to recommend approval, this application be referred to the Planning and Rights of Way Panel for determination, and that Highfield Residents' Association be notified of the date of any hearing as we may wish to make representations direct to the Panel.

In the interests of transparency, I would like to declare that I have in the past stood in the city's local elections as a Liberal Democrat candidate in Portswood Ward. Please note that Highfield Residents' Association is a non political community group and it is in this capacity that I am writing.

Yours sincerely,

Keith Reed
Committee Member for Planning & Licensing