

Eton Avenue 'Piazza' – The Belsize Society request for ACV designation: information to support the case

This application is to be considered in order to recognise the importance and need for protection and improvement of the public realm around the Swiss Cottage community amenity area and specifically designation of the Eton Avenue 'piazza' as an ACV.

There is a great deal of local support for this and considerable fear that due to the lack of any official recognition and designation, the space may be prone to degradation or loss with future development pressures.

We believe the evidence collected from a quick survey of users of the space (234 online and 13 manual submissions) and shows overwhelming need for this protective measure.

Public open spaces are at a premium in densely populated, built up areas. The only remaining spaces within the Belsize area are the Swiss Cottage Open Space and Belsize Wood. The latter has limited accessibility due to its topography. The only two pedestrian, car-free areas, within the built environment are the Belsize Village triangle and the Eton Avenue square or 'piazza', both of which serve an important function of refuge, respite and community as well as opportunity spaces for event such as fetes, performances and exhibitions.

The Swiss Cottage community amenity area encompasses the Swiss Cottage Library and Leisure Centre, Hampstead Theatre, The Embassy Theatre and Royal Central School of Speech and Drama the Swiss Cottage Community Centre and café and Swiss Cottage Open Space. The latter has recently been extensively upgraded and improved and is a very popular and well-used space.

Also to be considered attached to this area are, on the island site, across Avenue Road (A41) are Swiss Cottage Odeon IMAX cinema and Ye Olde Swiss Cottage pub, currently closed but hopefully to be re-opened at some point. It has been designated an ACV and the iconic building which gives the area its name, will be included in the next iteration of Camden's Local List.

The area has been identified by many as a **cultural and artistic hub**, not only for the local community but for the wider communities drawn to the area, even being a popular draw for the Japanese community at 'Sakura' cherry blossom time.

By this application we are making the case for the Eton Avenue piazza being a crucial part of this overall community amenity area. We request its designation as an 'Asset of Community Value' to reflect its value to the local community, specifically in this case, 'land that benefits the social well-being, cultural, sporting and recreational interests of the local community.'

The community attributes of the Eton Avenue ‘piazza’

The Swiss Cottage community amenity area is bounded on its western border by the merging and diverging lanes of fast-moving traffic southbound on the A41, Avenue Road and College Crescent. This creates a noisy, hectic and hostile environment. Currently, in mitigation, the Eton Avenue Piazza offers a pleasant, tree-lined pedestrian area.

The local community use this haven extensively. It is well-frequented, visibly open and is considered by locals safe and at low risk of crime.

It provides non-hazardous, traffic-free pedestrian routes to the Swiss Cottage tube and the seven bus routes stopping at the station. It also allows access to the shops on Finchley Road and the island site via several controlled crossings and pedestrian subway tunnels. A safe, low speed cycle lane shares the space.

There are also two major pedestrian routes into the Swiss Cottage Open Space alongside both flanks of the Hampstead Theatre.

The area is well shielded from the noise and fumes of the A41 and allows a quiet place to rest in the shade of mature plane trees. It is a natural meeting place for locals and the ability to relax and take rest and chat to people is a valuable resource at this time of increasing stress, social breakdown and loneliness.

There are two markets operating in the space – Swiss Cottage Market 5 days a week 7am – 7pm run by Camden and the weekly Farmers’ Market run by London Farmers’ Markets each Wednesday.

Swiss Cottage Market has daily ethnic and natural food stalls which are well frequented by the local community including many workers from nearby businesses and the students and staff from the drama school – over 1,000 students on roll - who spill out onto the square at break times along with staff from Hampstead Theatre. These food stalls ensure high quality, healthy meals and drinks not otherwise readily available in this area – and somewhere quiet to sit and consume them.

A new theatre lab for the drama school with a garden is currently under construction and will open on to the piazza, further increasing its visual and environmental value.

The popular weekly Farmers’ Market is heavily used by locals seeking high quality naturally grown foods and a variety of produce and cooked meals from around the world, all at reasonable cost. There is a large social and educational value in talking with and buying directly from the producers. People, particularly those living alone, have the chance to choose appropriate quantities not usually available in supermarkets with pre-packed foods. Also, packaging is minimal, adding to the environmental credentials and shoppers are supporting UK growers and produce.

The fact that local people can walk to the market is seen as a major benefit and a positive environmental consideration. There are also excellent local transport

connections for users from further away and without facilities for car drivers encourages low carbon shopping.

Theatre goers congregate in the piazza, as the entrance to both theatres opens onto it. Hampstead Theatre brings a combined audience of 405 to its two auditoria 6 nights a week and matinees. Most arrive by public transport or walk, reaching the theatre across the piazza. The Embassy Theatre, owned by The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, a University of London college, runs around 30 performances a year of student plays with an audience of 234 as well as several studio theatres.

The piazza is extensively used by parents who can allow their children to run around or ride bikes in safety and with minimal supervision. This is a valuable resource, especially for the majority who do not have outside residential space in this high-density area. Children using the popular Swiss Cottage Open Space run or cycle around both areas freely.

There are several schools close by and the children from these also use the space to socialise and play in safety, away from traffic. Physical exercise for children is increasingly restricted and is a crucial part of their development and to protect against obesity.

Similarly for the many attendees of The Winch, which has premises adjacent and a large range of activities and projects for families, children and young people, many of whom also use the piazza.

The Winch is also running a Greener Neighbourhood project over the next two years to improve the local environment, which would benefit from this designation. Its recent Good Neighbourhood Collective identified six key focus areas to make Swiss Cottage (and South Hampstead) a fairer and greener place. Community members highlighted the need for safe spaces for youth and accessible gathering spaces for the whole community and are looking at translation into meaningful actions. The Eton Avenue piazza can be identified as a potential major contributor.

Older people and those with reduced mobility can take exercise here in this step-free, flat space, in safety, away from traffic. There are several residential homes close by; one, Mora Burnett House, on the eastern entrance to the piazza and residents from there, including those with physical and mental health difficulties, use the piazza regularly.

There is generally increasing importance being accorded to car-free pedestrian areas and the time is ripe for this space to be designated to protect it and allay local concerns of its possible return to vehicular traffic in the future.

History

Swiss Cottage market started in 1974 as an informal and unlicensed market in an area of derelict land owned by Camden Council next to the nearby junction of Eton Avenue and Winchester Road.

This was a popular community market selling homemade food, second-hand clothes and books as well as bric-à-brac and plants. At the end of 1981 the site was redeveloped and the market moved to a new location close to the sports centre which in turn was later redeveloped.

Camden Council designated the pedestrianised western end of Eton Avenue as a street market from 1 July 2003 allowing the formalised (licensed) Swiss Cottage Market and Swiss Cottage Farmers Market a permanent home. Swiss Cottage is the youngest of Camden's street markets and, from 2003 stalls, have been licensed and managed by Camden Council, operating 5 days a week 7am -7pm.

On Wednesdays the market hosts *Swiss Cottage Farmers' Market* which is run by [London Farmers' Markets](#) and started in 1999. [It was featured on Radio 4](#) soon after it opened. Its public opening hours are 10am-3pm though it generally seems to operate longer.

In November 2019 the then Prince Charles and his wife Camilla visited to mark the Farmers Market's twentieth anniversary. Prince Charles had visited the market once before in 2000.^[5]

The internationally renowned Hampstead Theatre, first on site in 1962, moved to its award-winning new building in 2003, the entrance of which opens directly onto the piazza.

In 2006, the Swiss Cottage Open Space was landscaped, winning a RIBA award. Not only is it an important green space and play area for children with its popular water feature but it also doubles as a performance space. It has recently undergone some changes, refurbishment and replanting as part of Camden's Green Space Improvement Programme. This area forms a contiguous surface with Eton Avenue piazza.

Swiss Cottage Open Space eloquently weaves together the evolving cultural and recreational needs of its diverse neighbourhood and is one of four interlinked landscape projects by Gustafson Porter + Bowman on this site: the Swiss Cottage Library entrance, the Eton Avenue market, and the Leisure Centre landscape. Co-ordinating these related projects and new architectural elements, transforms a collection of loosely related functions into a coherent communal setting with an elevated sense of place

Support from local people for the ACV

The piazza sees many hundreds of local pedestrians and a number of cyclists using it each day, some just passing through but many lingering, drinking a coffee, eating food, meeting people for a chat, playing, sitting, reading or just having a few moment's respite from a busy day.

We do not think the use of this space has been adequately evaluated and are fearful the space could be lost in future with the strong development pressures in the area.

The Belsize Society administered a quick and crude online opinion poll for our members and other users of the Eton Avenue piazza between September 15-29th and received 234 responses (and several manual submissions).

The questions asked were:

1. Why I value the Eton Avenue 'piazza' and why I think it needs protecting
2. How I use the Eton Avenue 'piazza'
3. How often do I use the Eton Avenue 'piazza'?
4. My postcode

The spreadsheet of the 234 online responses is attached with the email addresses and postcodes removed for reasons of data protection. Very few respondents lived outside of an NW3 postcode – a handful were in NW6, NW8 and NW2 and one in W9.

The manual answers are added separately.

The online data is analysed and included below.

Analysis of the Belsize Society Community Questionnaire

Question 1

Why I value the Eton Avenue 'piazza' and why I think it needs protecting

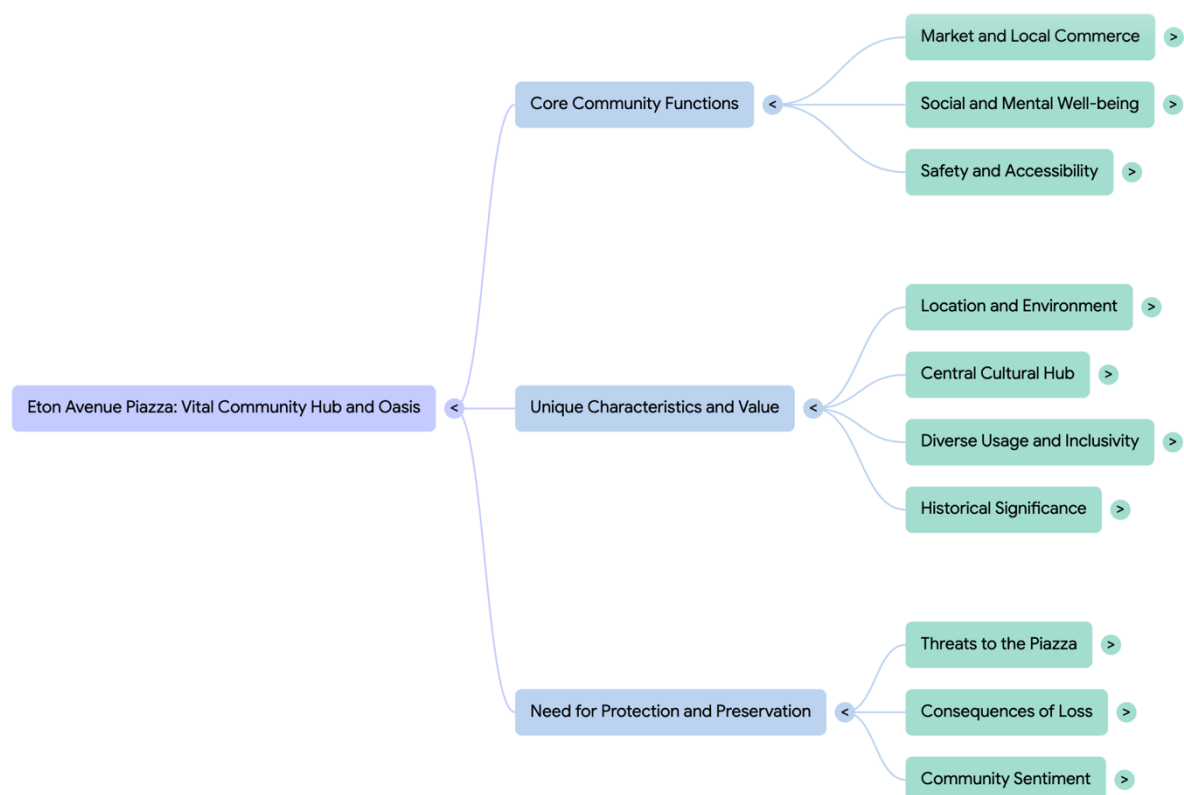
Brief Summary of the 234 responses

The responses comprise numerous comments advocating for the preservation of the Eton Avenue 'Piazza', emphasizing its role as a **vital community hub** and a cherished **pedestrian-only space**.

Recurring themes highlight the piazza's value as an **oasis of calm** and a **safe area for children**, contrasting sharply with the heavy traffic and noise of the nearby Finchley Road.

The area is highly valued for hosting a **weekly farmers' market** and **daily food stalls**, which support local businesses and foster **social connection** among residents, students, and theatre goers.

The comments frequently express concern that allowing vehicular traffic—likely for a new development—would destroy the unique character, safety, and **cultural significance** of this essential public amenity, stressing that it must be protected as an **Asset of Community Value**.



The Eton Avenue 'Piazza': An Evidence-Based Community Impact Report

1.0 Introduction: Defining the Piazza's Role in the Community

This report collates the community testimonials to provide an evidence-based analysis of the Eton Avenue 'piazza's' multifaceted value, demonstrating its important role in the social, economic, and cultural fabric of the neighbourhood.

The Eton Avenue 'Piazza', situated at the confluence of major transport, cultural, and civic landmarks, is more than a simple pedestrian thoroughfare. It functions as a vital community asset, a cherished public space that provides a rare "village feel" in a dense urban setting.

The findings presented herein are based exclusively in a qualitative analysis of firsthand accounts from a diverse cross-section of local residents, students, theatre goers, and market patrons. This approach ensures that the assessment of the piazza's value is directly informed by the lived experiences of the community it serves.

This report will explore the piazza's impact across four key themes. It begins by examining its function as a nexus for social cohesion and community identity. It then assesses its role as a pillar of the local micro-economy, followed by an analysis of its contributions to public well-being as an urban sanctuary. Finally, the report details its critical function as a node of public safety and accessibility.

This analysis will demonstrate that the Eton Avenue 'piazza' is an essential community space whose value cannot be easily replicated or replaced.

2.0 A Nexus for Social Cohesion and Community Identity

In dense urban environments, shared public spaces are of strategic importance for fostering social cohesion and a collective sense of place. The Eton Avenue 'piazza' serves as a critical "third space"—a neutral ground outside of home and work—that enables spontaneous interaction, strengthens social bonds, and helps forge a distinct community identity. Community testimonials overwhelmingly describe the piazza not as a transitional space, but as a destination that actively creates a "village in the city."

The piazza functions as a central meeting point and a catalyst for social connection in numerous ways. Testimonials reveal a consistent pattern of use that facilitates both planned and unplanned social encounters, bringing together a uniquely diverse cross-section of the community.

- **Spontaneous Encounters:** The open and accessible design of the piazza facilitates unplanned meetings among neighbours. Residents report they "often bump into friends there," describing it as a place where they see "'neighbours' there that I wouldn't run into anywhere else." These casual interactions are the bedrock of a connected community.

- **Planned Gatherings:** The space is consistently used as a convenient and welcoming location for pre-arranged meetings. It is described as a "convivial meeting spot" where people "meet friends for a quick coffee," gather before attending performances at the Hampstead Theatre, or arrange to "chat and spend time."
- **Intergenerational and Diverse Mixing:** The piazza is highlighted as a rare local space that successfully brings together a broad spectrum of the community, including "families, children, individuals and elderly" residents. It serves students from the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, theatre patrons, and local residents, fostering a greater "diversity in terms of socio-economics and age than most places in the area."
- **Forging Community Spirit:** Above all, testimonials offer a powerful declarative statement: "Community is made in the piazza." It is where a "genuine sense of community" is built, serving as a "hub for community spirit formation" and the undisputed "heart of the community."

The social capital cultivated in this space—built on trust, recognition, and shared experience—is intrinsically linked to the character of its economic life, creating a foundation for a more resilient and personable local economy.

3.0 Significance in the Local Micro-Economy

Vibrant public spaces are proven drivers of local economic activity, providing essential platforms for small enterprises and increasing the commercial viability of surrounding institutions. Increasing local commercial footfall is likely to increase local economic activity more generally.

Economic Activity	Community Testimony
Supporting Regional Farmers and Artisanal Producers	The weekly farmers' market is described as a "vital community asset" where residents can "buy nice produce and support farmers." Patrons value the opportunity to support small producers being "pushed out by large corporations."
Encouraging Small Food Businesses and Stallholders	Beyond the weekly market, the daily presence of "ethnically diverse food stalls" and coffee vendors is a core part of the local routine, providing "interesting" and "unusual fodder" cherished by students, residents, and commuters alike.
Providing an Alternative to Supermarkets	A significant number of residents express a strong preference for shopping at the piazza's markets, citing a desire to "shop locally" and avoid "soulless supermarkets," thereby supporting a more resilient local food system.
Driving Footfall to Cultural Institutions	The "buzzing" and "lively" atmosphere of the piazza is seen as a direct benefit to adjacent venues. Testimonials note that the Hampstead Theatre "would really suffer without people walking by," supporting the wider cultural quarter.

The economic activity in the piazza is relational, not merely transactional. Testimonials describe a market where "stall holders know the local people" and a "community that cares for each other." This transforms commerce into an act of community building. The piazza's versatile civic function is further demonstrated by its occasional hosting of a "health/vaccination bus," integrating public health services directly into the community hub. This unique blend of local, personal commerce and civic utility is a direct contributor to the well-being of residents.

4.0 An Urban Sanctuary for Mental and Physical Well-being

There is a growing recognition in urban planning that tranquil, green, and traffic-free spaces constitute essential public health infrastructure. Such areas offer necessary respite from the physiological and psychological stressors of city life. Community members consistently identify the Eton Avenue 'piazza' as a vital "oasis of calm" and a "haven" that provides profound benefits for mental and physical well-being.

The specific attributes of the piazza that contribute to resident well-being are frequently cited in the comments. These elements work in concert to create an environment that actively promotes health and reduces stress.

- **A Respite from Traffic and Noise** The piazza's primary value is its separation from the "mayhem," "heavy traffic," and "pollution" of the adjacent Finchley Road. Described as a "peaceful place with no traffic," it provides a "welcome relative tranquillity" and a "necessary break from the heavily trafficked roadways surrounding it."
- **A Space for Calm and De-stressing** Residents explicitly link the piazza to their mental health, noting that such spaces are crucial for their ability to cope with urban life. A registered blind person values its "quieter, less stressed atmosphere," which allows them to "'rest awhile'." For another resident with a disability, the ability to walk to the market is of "immeasurable value," describing the piazza as a "haven" that is essential for their mobility and quality of life.
- **Connection and Social Well-being** The social interactions facilitated by the piazza are directly tied to mental well-being. As one resident who works from home explains, "this social connection with my community is vital in maintaining my mental wellbeing." The space counters the isolation that can accompany urban life, fostering a sense of connection that is critical for mental health.
- **Beneficial Natural Elements** The physical environment of the piazza contributes significantly to its calming atmosphere. Testimonials highlight the value of its "shaded sidewalks," mature "trees," and "green" character, which create a pleasant micro-climate and a welcome connection to nature in a highly urbanized area.

This function as a sanctuary for public health is entirely dependent on its physical design as a safe and accessible space, protected from the dangers of vehicular traffic.

5.0 A Critical Node of Public Safety and Accessibility

Safe, well-connected, and pedestrian-focused zones are fundamental to effective urban planning. They ensure that key public services are accessible to all members of the community, particularly the most vulnerable, and create a sense of security, providing a secure environment for families, children, and those with mobility challenges.

Comments articulate the piazza's function as a safe, traffic-free connector, a role that residents view as indispensable.

1. **A Haven for Children and Families** The traffic-free nature of the space makes it a "great space for kids to play in safety." Parents value that children can "run and ride in the area freely without fear about traffic and cars," and that they can learn to ride bikes and scooters in a secure environment.
2. **Accessible for Vulnerable Residents** The piazza is specifically valued for its accessibility. One "disabled elderly resident" describes it as a "safe and easily navigable area." Similarly, parents note that alternative routes are "crowded and difficult to walk with a pram," making the piazza an essential path for caregivers with young children.
3. **A Strategic Pedestrian Link** As a central thoroughfare, the piazza provides a safe and pleasant pedestrian route connecting numerous key community amenities, including: the **Swiss Cottage tube station**, the **Hampstead Theatre**, the **Library**, the **Leisure/Sports Centre**, the **Health Centre**, and the **Royal Central School of Speech and Drama**.
4. **A Deliberate Barrier from Danger** The piazza is seen as more than just a convenient route; it is a physical and psychological buffer from danger. One parent describes it as an "eddy in a fast-moving river" of traffic, a place they explicitly tell their daughter to go if she "feels unsafe" due to its "safe neighbourly feel in an otherwise deeply impersonal area."
5. **A Safe Cycle Route** The piazza also functions as a "safe cycle route," providing a crucial link for cyclists navigating an area dominated by major, hazardous road junctions. This supports active travel and enhances the safety of non-motorized commuters.

The piazza's role in ensuring safe movement and access underpins all its other functions. By creating this secure environment, it enables the social, economic, and health benefits that make it such a profoundly valuable community asset.

6.0 Conclusion: An Irreplaceable Asset of Community Value

The extensive body of community testimony collated in this report presents a clear and compelling conclusion. The Eton Avenue 'Piazza' is not merely a public space; it is a rare and irreplaceable asset whose value is woven into the social, economic, and cultural fabric of the community. It functions as the "living heart of Swiss Cottage," creating a cherished "village in the city" that could not be replicated elsewhere.

It is:

- A **social hub** where community is actively made, fostering connection, inclusion, and a shared sense of identity.
- A **local economic driver** that encourages small businesses and supports a relational, sustainable micro-economy.
- An **urban sanctuary** that provides essential respite from city stressors, promoting mental and physical well-being.
- A **vital node of public safety** that ensures secure, accessible passage for all residents, especially children and the vulnerable.

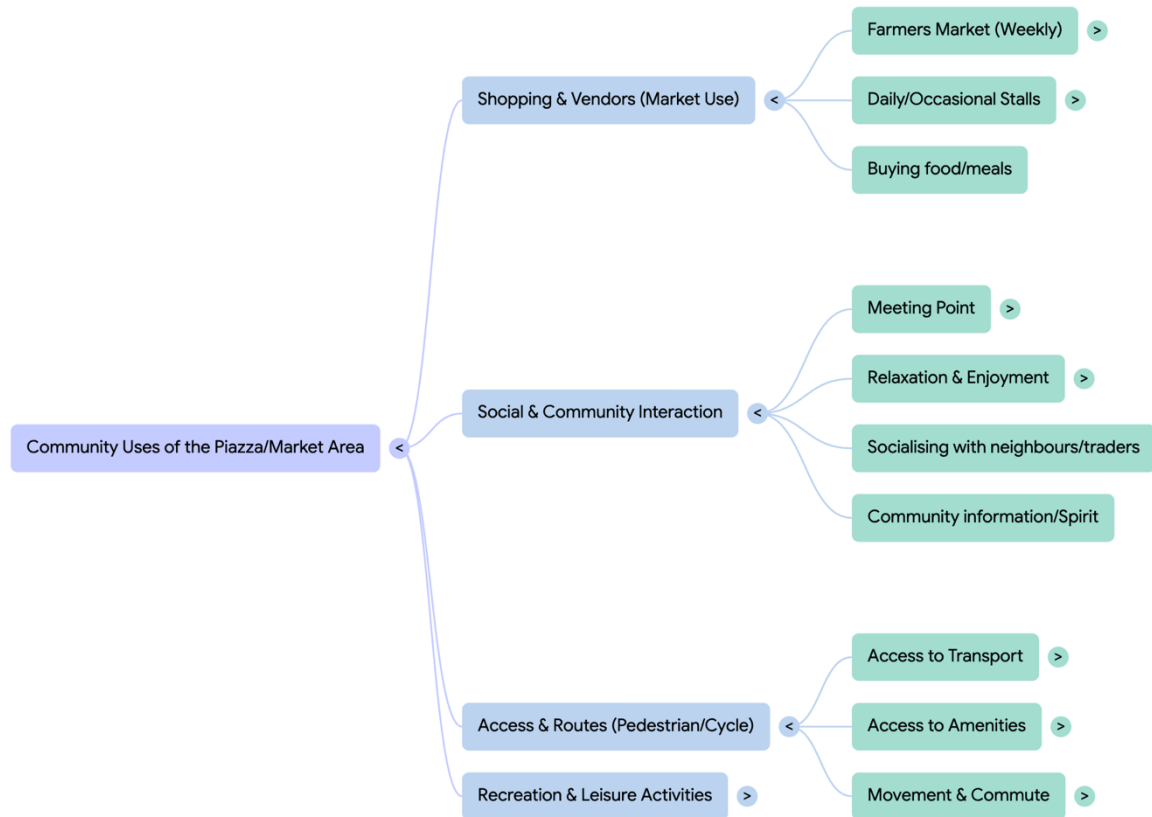
Based on the overwhelming evidence presented, the loss or fundamental alteration of the Eton Avenue Piazza's pedestrian-focused character would be an "act of social and cultural impoverishment." It would represent a profound and irreversible detriment to the neighbourhood's vitality, safety, and collective well-being. As the community itself has made clear, "Once spaces like this go, they don't come back."

Question 2

How I use the Eton Avenue 'piazza'

Brief Summary of 234 responses

The collated responses cite a large collection of testimonials detailing the **frequent and varied use of a public piazza**. Overwhelmingly, respondents describe using the space for **social activities** such as meeting friends for coffee and chatting and for **shopping, particularly at the weekly farmers' market**. Many also utilize the area as a **safe and traffic-free pedestrian and cycle route** to access local amenities like the theatre, tube station, library, and leisure centre. The recurring themes underscore the piazza's importance as a **vital community hub** for both recreation and essential access, often highlighting the benefit of a **calm environment** away from busy main roads.



Community Impact Assessment: The Value of the Eton Avenue ‘Piazza’ based on usage

1.0 Introduction

This report presents a community impact assessment of the Eton Avenue ‘Piazza’, analyzing a comprehensive collection of qualitative data from community testimonials to evaluate the space's multifaceted role in the daily life of local residents. The piazza, situated at a key local crossroads, functions as far more than a simple public square; it is an important component of the neighbourhood's social and economic infrastructure.

The primary objective of this assessment is to synthesize resident feedback on their use of the space to define the piazza's value across three core, interconnected domains: its function as a hub for local commerce, its role in fostering social cohesion, and its critical utility as a community corridor for safe passage and recreation. The comments provided by residents offer a useful perspective on how this space is integrated into their daily routines and overall well-being.

2.0 The Piazza as a Hub for Local Commerce and Economic Vitality

Public spaces are strategically important for fostering local economic activity, serving as platforms that connect consumers with local enterprises. Use of the Eton Avenue

‘Piazza’ exemplifies this principle, functioning not merely as a thoroughfare but as a dynamic marketplace that provides consistent support for small-scale vendors and anchors the commercial life of surrounding cultural institutions.

2.1 The Central Role of the Farmers' Market

The farmers' market is consistently cited as a cornerstone of the piazza's economic life and a cherished community institution. Testimonials reveal its significance extends beyond simple commerce, embedding it deeply into the weekly routines of residents. Its primary functions include:

- **Weekly Shopping Destination:** Residents describe the market as a regular destination for "weekly food shopping." Many testimonials emphasize the routine nature of their visits ("weekly," "every week") to purchase fresh, organic produce, bread, flowers, cheese, and other groceries directly from producers.
- **Support for Local Enterprise:** A recurring theme is the deliberate choice to "support local vendors" and farmers. This indicates a conscious effort by the community to invest in a local, sustainable food system and support small businesses, which are seen as integral to the neighbourhood's character.
- **A Community Tradition:** For many, particularly since 1999 the market has become an essential part of their weekly rhythm. Its long-standing presence has solidified its role as a reliable and familiar anchor for community life and local commerce.

2.2 The Piazza's Daily Commercial Ecosystem

Beyond the weekly farmers' market are the daily food stalls (‘Camden Swiss Cottage Market’). Testimonials frequently mention the presence of daily food stalls, coffee vendors, and a diverse menu of lunch options including "dumplings," "pancakes," "pastel de nata, gyoza, [and] falafel wraps." The specific mention of "Jason's coffee stall" highlights how individual vendors become familiar and valued parts of the daily experience, facilitating the informal social encounters that define the piazza's community role. This consistent commercial pulse ensures the piazza remains an active and economically productive space throughout the week.

2.3 A Social and Economic Gateway for Adjacent Cultural Institutions

The ‘piazza’ serves as a social gateway for patrons of the area's key cultural institutions, primarily the Hampstead Theatre and the Royal Central School of Speech & Drama. Residents describe it as a natural gathering point for pre- and post-show meetings, facilitating spending on coffee, snacks, and meals at the theatre's café and nearby stalls. This symbiotic relationship enhances the patron experience and supports the institutions' roles as vibrant cultural hubs, embedding them more deeply within the community's social life.

In summary, the piazza functions as a multi-layered economic asset, sustaining a regular market and supporting daily vendors while amplifying the cultural vibrancy of

neighbouring establishments. This economic vitality, however, is intrinsically linked to its equally important function as a centre for social interaction.

3.0 The Piazza as a Nexus for Social Cohesion and Community Life

In dense urban environments, "third places"—locations outside of home and work—are critical for building community bonds and fostering a sense of belonging. The Eton Avenue 'Piazza' clearly functions as the social heart of its neighbourhood, with its commercial offerings acting as the engine for a wide spectrum of both planned and spontaneous interactions essential for a healthy community fabric.

3.1 A Designated Community Meeting Point

The piazza is overwhelmingly described as a designated meeting point. Residents actively use the space as "a great meeting place" to connect with friends, colleagues, and family. Whether for a planned coffee from a local stall, an informal chat, or as a convenient rendezvous point for those arriving at the Swiss Cottage tube station, the piazza provides a welcoming and accessible outdoor venue for social connection.

3.2 Fostering Passive Social Engagement and Well-being

Beyond active meetings, the piazza is used as a space for passive social engagement and individual well-being. It is an urban oasis where residents can decompress and connect with their community in subtle but important ways.

- **A Place for Respite and Observation:** A common activity is simply sitting on the benches to "people watch," "process the day," or enjoy a "moment of calm" away from the noise and traffic of the main roads. This ability to pause and observe reinforces a sense of place and community.
- **An Arena for Spontaneous Encounters:** The open, pedestrian-focused design encourages spontaneous interactions. Testimonials highlight how residents "run into neighbours" and have unplanned conversations, an experience described as difficult on the "noisy, exhaust-congested high street."
- **A Welcoming and Inclusive Atmosphere:** The piazza is valued as a democratic space where one can feel welcome "without having to spend money." The sentiment that it is a "friendly square" where strangers say hello underscores its role in fostering a positive, open, and inclusive social environment.

3.3 A Safe, Multi-Generational Space

The traffic-free nature of the piazza is fundamental to its success as a multi-generational hub, fostering a high degree of community trust. This safety allows diverse age groups to coexist and interact harmoniously. Testimonials vividly illustrate this with specific examples, such as a "13 year old daughter" who waits there safely after dark to be picked up, or a son who uses the space "to talk to friends after Saturday youth theatre at Royal Central School." These accounts demonstrate a shared, secure environment where children, teenagers, and adults can socialize simultaneously.

The social benefits generated by the piazza are inextricably linked to its physical design as a safe and accessible corridor, which is essential for both community interaction and daily transit.

4.0 The Piazza as a Vital Corridor for Safe Passage and Recreation

Principles of "walkability," "active travel," and people-centric design are cornerstones of liveable and sustainable urbanism. In a dense area characterized by heavy traffic, the Eton Avenue Piazza provides important connectivity and recreational opportunities that directly contribute to residents' quality of life, health, and sense of security. One comment reveals the mixed use "I pass through here daily on the way to the gym and/or library near the green space, and frequently meet friends for morning coffee in the Theatre. I also shop in the market every Wednesday."

4.1 A Contrast in Urban Experience

Community testimonials draw a sharp contrast between the experience of using the piazza and navigating the surrounding roads. The piazza is consistently described as a sanctuary from the stress and hazards of the adjacent urban environment.

Feature	Eton Avenue Piazza	Adjacent Thoroughfares (e.g., Finchley Road)
User Experience	"Calm," "quiet," "relaxing," "pleasant oasis"	"Busy," "noisy," "constant traffic"
Safety and Security	"Safe," "traffic-free," "fully pedestrianised area"	"Dangerous traffic area"
Primary Users	Pedestrians, cyclists, children playing, disabled access	"Traffic/lorries," "busses"
Environmental Quality	"Green space," "tree canopy," "cleaner air area"	"Exhaust-congested"

4.2 A Key Transit Connector

The piazza functions as a vital, safe corridor connecting residents to a wide array of essential local amenities. Testimonials confirm that it provides a primary pedestrian and cycling route to key destinations, including the Swiss Cottage tube station, the local library, the leisure centre, the health centre, the Hampstead Theatre, the Royal Central School of Speech & Drama, and shops along Finchley Road. For many, this "fully pedestrianised area" is critical for ensuring safe access to public services and transport.

4.3 An Essential Recreational and Developmental Space

The traffic-free environment is explicitly valued as a recreational asset for families. Parents highlight the piazza as a unique local space where children can "run around," "practice cycling and scooting," and "roam free in a safe and traffic-free environment."

This function is especially important in a dense urban setting where safe, open-ended play spaces are scarce, contributing directly to childhood development and family well-being.

The piazza's functional importance as a safe connector and recreational haven is therefore not just a matter of convenience, but a fundamental component of the neighbourhood's habitableness.

5.0 Conclusion: An Integrated Assessment of Community Value

This assessment, based on the 234 community testimonials on their use of the space, demonstrates that the Eton Avenue Piazza's value is not derived from any single function but from the interplay of its commercial, social, and accessibility roles. It is a space where economic activity, community bonding, and safe passage are mutually reinforcing.

The integrated nature of the piazza's contribution is its defining characteristic. Its function as a safe, pedestrianized corridor is the foundational prerequisite upon which all other benefits are built. This sense of safety allows the commercial vibrancy of markets and food stalls to flourish, which in turn creates a reason for people to gather. This gathering fosters the spontaneous social interactions that build community cohesion. As one resident succinctly stated, it is "part of the weekly rhythm of life — not flashy, but essential."

Based on the overwhelming evidence of local community members' use of the space, the Eton Avenue 'Piazza' is not merely a local convenience but an indispensable community asset and piece of social infrastructure, fundamental to the neighbourhood's resilience, identity, and the quality of life of its residents.

Question 3

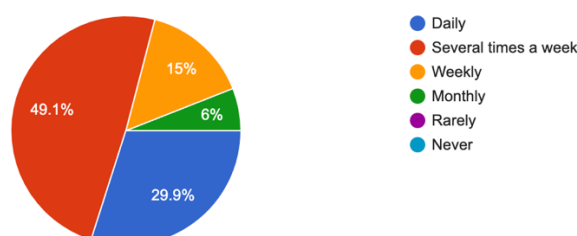
How often do I use the Eton Avenue 'piazza'?

The respondents were mostly frequent users of the space, 79% several times a week or daily.

How often do I use the Eton Avenue 'piazza'?

234 responses

 [Copy chart](#)



Manual responses to the Belsize Society Community Questionnaire

“It’s a historic asset. A place where people can gather. It is open to all. It is key to the quality of life or residents.” 4 times a week.

Student at Royal Central

Three times week

I love the student and community environment. The market turns it into a communal space for people. It’s so rare to have a peaceful space in a big city.

SE16

Student at Royal Central

Three times a week

I love the open space to congregate as people. I live locally on West Hampstead/Swiss Cottage borders. I am here every other day when I am at College.

Three times weekly

I love the market and I go to Hampstead Theatre. There are very few markets left like this. How will I manage when the development is built over there and here (the Piazza) is full of traffic.

NW1

Daily

I use it daily. I come to the market Wednesdays and other days. It’s a pedestrian area. It would be totally destroyed if cars go through.

NW3

1. For me, it’s almost Parisian with the leafy London Planes, the Theatre, the old pub and a metro stop. Every time I feel a moment of calm before navigating thro’ the bustle of the Finchley Road or heading down the tube. I love the mix of people; the polite guys in the tents, the soup kitchen, the students, the shoppers, kids on their bikes, and then at night, the elegant theatre crowds. All of these different mingle together as a community sharing in their own ways this haven of calm. I use the market weekly; the stalls certainly add to the Parisian ‘feel.’

Five times a week

NW3

LE14 - Trader

Weekly

It’s a clean, open space. It enables me to operate as a farmer here at the Swiss Cottage Farmer. I drive here every Wednesday all the way from Leicestershire. The market has food, fresh produce. And the aesthetics – nice trees among all these high rises. It’s hard

to find spaces like this in London these days. There are college students and theatre people and similar people coming here - they give it a nice community feel.

trader –

It's a nice area for the community to feel safe - pedestrianised. Nice stalls Tuesday to Saturday. There are not many spaces left in London where you can feel part of the community where so many residents come and do shopping.

Trader coffee stall

Weekly

I come here as it's a great place to earn my living. I really enjoy the Swiss Cottage market environment. It's a community - that is what it is all about.

NW10

Trader IOW Tomatoes

Weekly

I have worked here for over ten years. I remember when it started fifteen years ago, when it was at Sainsbury's car park: it died a death. Here, people walk up and down. It's perfect: street food. It's a lovely spot for a market. Some of the other market places are nowhere near as nice.

1. I value the Eton Avenue Piazza because it functions as the heart of our neighbourhood with the market and food vendors and this is why it needs protecting.

2. I am a member at the Hampstead Theatre and I make a weekly visit to the market. The market is a very valuable part of our community. It's where we run into friends and catch up on 'news'. Also, I enjoy meeting friends in the piazza during performance intervals.

3. I use the 'Piazza' at least twice a week.

4. I live locally.

1. This is a wonderful spot that brings community together at a time when community is failing and being valued less and less

2. I use the piazza daily for meeting friends to have artisanal lunches and teas without the expense of frequenting a restaurant.

3. Daily

4. NW3

1. New development risks loss of amenity thro' vehicular traffic for residents and goods vehicles

2. I use it for Hampstead Theatre, Farmers' Market, walk to Waitrose etc

3. weekly

4. NW8

Some typical statements from the survey

It is a unique place of community bonding, people from different origins and walks of life talking to each other and exchanging experiences. It is one of the places ensuring that the mental health of the community is preserved, as you can always sit there and talk to complete strangers while eating a meal sold at the stands representing different cuisines and cultural influences that make this a living, breathing space fighting the loneliness of living in a big challenging city. It is outrageous that an idea of destroying it in the name of delivery and service traffic has been born in someone's mind so as a necessary human connection is sacrificed for something that can be managed in a different way.

Important for building/maintaining community and human interaction, farmers market is important for encouraging healthy habits

The piazza is an invaluable meeting space that beautifully complements the nearby redesigned green space. With its daily stalls and its wonderful Farmers Market on Wednesdays, the Piazza is what a piazza should be: a space where the residents, the students, and those passing by can meet, rest, enjoy a bite and some great coffee! I look forward to the completion of plan to install seating areas and new lighting so that the piazza remains fully pedestrian. Thanks

The piazza is a meeting point for loads of children who travel to school together and use the Swiss Cottage leisure centre. It provides a traffic-free place during busy mornings and afternoons when children travel to and from school.

This is an extremely valuable space for many people: students, market traders and shoppers, children who use it for play and access to schools, as well as users of the Hampstead Theatre and other local amenities. Many people meet and sit there, as it's one of the few traffic-free spaces immediately near Swiss Cottage.

It's the social hub of Swiss Cottage and a vibrant place for local businesses to thrive and people to meet friends. It's also a very busy pedestrian area with lots of people walking with children and pets to and from schools, shops and places of work. It should be preserved for the local people and not become a busy roadway for traffic which would be highly dangerous for the many users.

This is a great space which has managed over the years to maintain a careful balance between different uses - as a market, as a place for people to stop and relax, as a safe route for pedestrians and for cyclists. It wasn't always like this - it has in the past ended up being used as a car park, it has had problems with cyclists whizzing through too quickly. This shows that the equilibrium is a careful one that needs to be looked after. It would be a terrible shame if motor vehicles, or larger volumes of bikes and e-bikes started trying to use it.

The piazza offers a vibrant neighbourhood oasis in between the diverse areas of Belsize Park, Swiss Cottage etc. It offers a welcome refuge for residents, commuters, people

using the nearby leisure centre, families on the school run etc. It also offers a great opportunity to buy farmers' produce, flowers, fresh food etc. It is an essential community hub and was even visited by King Charles.

It's a meeting hub of social need and interaction shared by many who would otherwise have no where to go

My daughter is learning to ride her scooter on the Piazza

It's a social space where people regularly meet, sit and talk with the food they have just bought. People see the same faces and make friends with the stall owners and their customers. In a world of home delivery and social media the market is a massive asset to the community

It brings the community together. It provides a space for people to meet. The market is wonderful and services the local community. Children, students, elderly all travel through here

It's an oasis which makes people stop and strengthens community interaction. People spill out from the theatre and students from Central school and mingle creating a cultural vibe which enriches the area. I love the market stalls and the weekly Framers Market. It's a gem that needs protecting.

I have lived in Eton Avenue for forty years, and even earlier, as a child in the early 1960s, I went to school here. I remember when, in 1964, the western end of Eton Avenue was closed off to traffic as the Swiss Cottage junction was turned into the one-way gyratory. From then on, the street felt calmer, and even before Camden formally pedestrianised it in 2003, it was already a pleasant and safe place to walk.

When the market moved here in 2003, it transformed the area. Together with the new Hampstead Theatre, the expanded Central School of Speech and Drama, the new sports centre, and the newly landscaped open space, this square became a vibrant hub. The farmers' market and other stalls brought life, community, and connection, making it the true heart of Swiss Cottage.

Now, because of a disability, I am less able to travel far, and the ability to walk to the market for my provisions is of immeasurable value to me. I treasure the chance to sit with friends in the Theatre café, rest on the stone seats outside, and cross the square safely without the fear of traffic.

For me, and for so many others, this space is a haven. It is an oasis of calm, play, and community spirit—set apart from the noise and rush of the gyratory just a few steps away. It is not just another piece of pavement or roadway: it is the very soul of Swiss Cottage, where people gather, trade, create, and belong.

Protecting it as an Asset of Community Value will ensure it continues to serve not just as a market square, but as the living heart of Swiss Cottage.

it is an important part of our communal life, peaceful, friendly and happy