SECTION C – Argument and persuasive language

Background information
A new cafe called Calmer Coffee, which is part of a chain, has opened in a small group of shops on High Street in the suburb of Benmore Village.
A review of the new cafe, written and illustrated by Jonty Jenkins, appeared in the local newspaper’s food and social life section.
Tasteless Beans

It was a week after Benmore Village’s Night Noodle Market on High Street, when I found myself in front of a new cafe that has opened in our quiet, leafy suburb. High Street is typical of many main streets in our suburbs. Our small group of shops has always been the heart of the community, with two thriving cafes, a fashion boutique and Ken’s butcher shop, which has been there for over 65 years. Ask yourself: how often do you just wander down to ‘the Village’ or meet friends in High Street? Cafes have come and gone in the 20 years I’ve lived here and, in my section of the newspaper, I’ve reviewed most of them. I have always been warm in my praise for the successful cafes – The Beanies Full Moon Cafe comes to mind – and I have been honest in my criticism of those that offer a service that is not suited to this fine neighbourhood.

The new cafe, Calmer Coffee, boasts that it ‘has beans’. I’m afraid such a boast also foretells the three-week-old cafe’s future. As I enter, my feelings of doubt are confirmed. Both the decor and the sign declaring ‘Steps to Good Customer Service’ appear to be taken from the head office marketing manual. Although the cafe has only been open for three weeks, already a framed photo of Jessica, the ‘Employee of the Month’, is on the wall. If I go next door to Flo’s Patisserie, I am greeted by name and served at my table by the always enthusiastic Marcel, who offers me lattes, short blacks or cappuccinos. At Calmer Coffee, I am almost ignored when I approach the counter. A tablet-holding youth with his hair in a ponytail looks up from his screen when it is my turn to order. Even though he recites from memory an impressive list of frappés, soy milk, almond milk and chocolate sprinkles, already I can see he is tired of it all. And I’m confused!

From the graffiti-style logo and branding to the noise level, the cafe’s atmosphere is an attack on all your senses. Coffee beans assault you from the moment you walk in the door. The decor does nothing to create an atmosphere that is in harmony with that of our street. The 45-seat space is devoted to highlighting the wonders of the bean. An unpleasant graffiti-style image of coffee beans is like a stain on the wall behind the counter. On the counter are plastic-packaged coffee-bean-shaped biscuits. They look stale, dry and uninviting. This new cafe is as lukewarm as its poorly made frappé latte.

The poor quality of the coffee does not seem to bother the twenty-somethings who are sitting around in the booths and on the benches. They sit staring at their devices, with free wi-fi and milky monstrosities, and are plugged into headphones blasting music. The bored employees don’t smile, don’t rush and don’t stop to chat with me as they clear tables. I cannot see Jessica anywhere. Maybe it’s her day off?
There is no table service. For another cup of coffee, I have to get up from my booth and line up again to order. Is this the service we have come to expect from our shopping strip? This time I order a ‘mooooost excellent soy mochaccino grande latte poured with extra froth’. As a commentator who has specialised in food and in the social life of Benmore Village for over 20 years, I have become used to menus with names of dishes that are difficult to pronounce, but Calmer Coffee has me studdering. I can just see the look of horror on the face of Ken, the butcher, if he tried to order a coffee here.

Calmer Coffee is another example of an ever-creeping shift towards cafes that belong to chains and that are more about looking trendy than fitting into the communities they invade. Benmore Village’s High Street, with its vibrant streetscape and two cosy, comfortable cafes, won’t support this intruder for long. Those of us who live within walking distance of High Street would all agree that we are not Calmer Coffee’s target customers.