

A Real Stushie at Real Foods



Real Food's new look is dividing public opinion. Image: Alexandra Wingate

Scotland's largest organic food retailer has launched an online petition protesting Edinburgh City Council's demands that they remove their shop front signs.

Real Foods on Broughton Street, which prides itself as Edinburgh's first natural food shop, has been served two Enforcement Notices by the Council, ordering the removal of all signs including the one displaying the store's opening times.

The consequence of ignoring such demands within the 28 day period for compliance could be criminal prosecution and substantial fines of up to £20,000.

Real Foods has recently undergone a facelift with five new permanent signs displaying the store's name eight times on a bright green background. It mirrors the same branding that has been applied to its sister store on Brougham Street in Tollcross.

It is seen by the Council as a significant change from its previous frontage, captured by Google Street View in 2009 with only one much smaller sign in subtler colours.

The council claim that the new look, which includes bright green night lighting, does not meet with planning requirements and is detrimental to the historic nature of the building that Real Foods operates from.

Because the shop is an 'A' Listed Building, signs, lights and colours of paint are restricted in an attempt to preserve the historic interest of both the building itself and the

surrounding area.

Yet Real Food's online petition is drumming up a large amount of public support, with nearly 1,200 signatures at present. Real Food's PR & Events Manager, Ben Raffles, described the backing as "overwhelming to say the least", and has set a new target of 1,500 signatures after the original of 1,000 was surpassed.

The accompanying information which urges members of the public to sign the petition in order to "save Real Foods", explains:- "In the increasingly bleak economic landscape, small independent local shops are constantly under threat.

"Removing our signs can only increase that threat to Real Foods, its 50 local employees and its many local suppliers, some of which are charities providing meaningful employment to people with special needs."

The site also provides links for concerned customers to write to their MP, MSP and local Councillors.

While the information does not appear to state that the new signs do not comply with planning regulations, it does ask: "Why do we now have to remove all our signs?"

Deputy Lord Provost, Councillor Rob Munn, said:- "It would be akin to the City Council putting up a neon sign on the front of the City Chambers."

"I fully understand why Planning are taking that course of action as they would with any shop in the city that puts up signage without planning permission."

"We have a duty as a city to look after the historic nature of the city, and we'd be failing in our duty if we didn't look at that."

Real Foods declined to comment on the issue of planning permission, citing the ongoing appeal that they have lodged

with Scottish Ministers in response to the enforcements. They did, however, stress the importance of Real Foods as an independent shop in the local area, saying that the enforcements “may weaken the community around Broughton Street”.

They continued:- “We feel that our current shop front is a credit to Broughton Street and adds to the ambience of the area.”

Local opinion on the matter appears to be divided.

Frances Farrow, 63, who lives in the Broughton area, said:- “This could be the thin edge of the wedge and if they get away with this, other people will put bigger signs up so making Edinburgh a neon sign capital. Where does it stop?”

Shweta Naik, 51, has been a Broughton resident for 20 years, and said:- “There are other signs on this street that are much more offensive, like the Daily Record and Mail ones.”

A local resident and shopkeeper who asked to remain anonymous said-“Real Foods are so well known I don’t see why returning to their old signs would be detrimental to their business at all. They’re making a fuss over a building they know full well has a certain listed status.”

Laura Clifford, 29 is a Broughton Street business owner and she commented:- “These days it’s really difficult to get people through the door. There’s a new Tesco just around the corner and plans for a Greggs, so local businesses have to compete in the best way they can.”