

# Councillors criticised over new license approval

Councillors have been accused of “driving a coach and horses” through a new policy – which is “not worth the paper it’s written on” after a shop will begin to sell alcohol despite fears raised by police and NHS Lothian.

The Licensing Board approved an application for Canongate Stores to sell alcohol in one of the capital’s new areas of ‘over-provision’.

In November, the board agreed to “create a rebuttable presumption against the grant of new premises licences, provisional premises licences and major variations to increase capacity of premises” in large areas of the capital, including the city centre.

The application by Thunraj Singh was approved, but management will not be allowed to sell beers, lagers or ciders of six per cent volume or stronger, following the concerns of police and health bosses.

Alistair Macdonald, representing Mr Singh, said: “It’s very sad that the Royal Mile, with all the tourists it attracts from all over the world, doesn’t have an off-license to sell miniature bottles of whisky as souvenirs to visitors.

“It’s a small shop aimed at tourists. It’s to add to the range because what tourists look for is miniatures.”



Cllr Steve Burgess

Cllr Steve Burgess called for the application to be turned down after Police Scotland and NHS Lothian objected to the proposals.

He said: "I think that evidence from the police and NHS gives grounds for us to refuse this application.

"I'm extremely concerned a coach and horses is being driven through the licensing board presumption against new licences in areas of over-provision of alcohol."

Conservative Cllr Joanna Mowat, who represents the city centre, added: "The miniatures that they will be selling are attractive precisely to the people we are trying to protect."

The board insists an area of over-provision does mean a blanket ban on new licence applications.



Cllr Norman Work

Cllr Norman Work, Licensing Board convener, said: "While the

areas of over-provision were recently extended to cover the Canongate, the policy permits licence applications to be granted where they do not undermine licensing objectives, and where premises will fill a gap in existing provision, as was considered to be the case in this instance.”

Following the decision, Cllr Burgess added: “After a very long period of public consultation and deliberation, my colleagues on the licensing board agreed to a presumption against any more licences to sell alcohol in certain parts of the city that have high levels of alcohol related crime and harm to health. After the approval of a new off-license and also a pub opening at 9am, both in the Canongate, this new policy is not worth the paper it’s written on.

“The new off-license was objected to by the police, NHS Lothian and even council licensing officers but a majority of the board and even convenor Cllr Work turned a deaf ear. This does not bode well for a board that is supposed to be helping protect public health and prevent crime and disorder.”

Ward Cllr Claire Miller has also criticised the decision. She said: “The Holyrood and Canongate area is a focal point for a great number of vulnerable people with alcohol addiction.

“During my work in the ward I see that it’s genuinely harmful for people who have complex health and social situations to provide more licensed premises and to begin selling alcohol even earlier in the morning. We are failing the most vulnerable people in our society, and the board must find the courage to turn down applications that will harm health and wellbeing.”



City Chambers Edinburgh