

Warning that West Lothian stores could go out of business due to teenage vandals

Teenage vandals could force more stores in the centre of a West Lothian town out of business, it was warned this week.

It comes after Kidzeco – a popular social enterprise selling baby clothes – was forced to close its doors in Bathgate over safety fears for its staff.

Vandals also made a community space on the second floor of the building unusable by breaking a hole in the roof space causing water damage.

Councillor Harry Cartmill told a meeting of Bathgate Local Area Committee. “It’s a dreadful thing to happen in Bathgate; for a shop to have to shut because of the behaviour of a minority within the town.”

“I fear that shop will never open again and it’s not opening because of the behaviours of certain people in this town.”

Councillor Cartmill asked PC Ross Walker: “Do you see it as societal breakdown, a lack of police numbers, a combination of those two or another factor?”

PC Walker said: “I was a community officer in Bathgate four of five years ago and it was a bit of an issue then. It’s a bit

off and on.”

“He said that community officers were working on reports around the incidents and trying to identify culprits. Crime prevention and safety measures are also being compiled.

Councillor Cartmill asked: “Are you engaging with the staff there. Is there a hope the shop will reopen? People are disgusted with this.”

PC Walker said: “Once recommendations are in place it’s up to the premises to implement. Hopefully the staff will feel comfortable to come back. We will continue to work with partners and engage with young people.”

Kidzeco founder Tracy Murdoch welcomed the support of the councillors. She told the Local Democracy Reporting Service: “We value the committee’s commitment to addressing the challenges faced by Kidzeco and other affected shops. While we eagerly anticipate the reopening of Kidzeco Bathgate, we recognise the importance of robust security measures.

“Ensuring the safety of our staff, customers, and the community remains our top priority. The situation and anti-social behaviour continue to be at the heart of our discussions, not only for Kidzeco but for the entire Bathgate community. We appreciate the collaborative efforts to strike a balance between safety precautions and supporting local businesses. The dedication from the Local Area Committee partners to finding solutions is commendable and we sincerely appreciate their tireless efforts.

Councillor Willie Boyle told the meeting that he feared Poundland would vacate its George Street premises after facing similar problems of teens damaging the flat roof of the building.

The store-once home to Woolworths- is one of the largest in the pedestrianised centre.

Councillor Boyle said: "I'm really disappointed at what's happening here and I'm not reassured by what I'm hearing. There's a serious issue from what I'm seeing and from what I'm being told. Kidzeco is the culmination of this.

"Poundland has had the same problem. If they could find suitable premises elsewhere they would move, they would vacate that building,

"The problem is that's a flat roof. There's been so much damage done to that flat roof its now a liability and rather than try and deal with that they are looking to try and remove themselves from that liability.

"That's serious because we could end up with that building sitting derelict with the town centre."

Councillor Boyle highlighted vandalism at industrial units in the town which suggested that some teens were getting away with random destruction.

"This is bad news for George Street. Some sort of concerted effort needs to be done. The police need to be a key driver in this."

PC Walker said since the Kidzeco damage was done a crime prevention survey was in the process of being carried out. He added: "Looking at Poundland I don't recall seeing any reports from there. This issue seems to be around Kidzeco."

He added: "We have identified a number of young people responsible for anti-social behaviour in the partnership centre, and the wider community and young people have been reported for vandalism."

"I think the wider ASB issues have settled a wee bit."

Last summer shop keepers petitioned the council after a group of street drinkers began disrupting trade in and around George Street and The Steelyard.

By Stuart Sommerville, Local Democracy Reporter