



Experts in Business

Proposed Advertising Board Ban

FSB briefing to the City of Edinburgh Council

Federation of Small Businesses Scotland

April 2018

Overview

FSB is Scotland's leading business organisation. As experts in business, we offer our members a wide range of vital business services including advice, financial expertise, support and a powerful voice in government. Our mission is to help smaller businesses achieve their ambitions. These micro and small businesses comprise the majority of all enterprises in Scotland (98%), employ around one million people and contribute £68bn to the economy.

Summary

How has FSB engaged with members on the proposed advertising board ban?

FSB has encouraged our Edinburgh members to participate in the City of Edinburgh Council's consultation on advertising boards (A boards) in the city and to contribute their views on the Council's proposals.

We have been contacted by a number of members who have expressed their views on the proposed A board ban and we have also discussed the proposal with RNIB Scotland to better understand the wider perspective.

What have businesses told us?

It is clear that many local businesses are sympathetic to the goal of decluttering Edinburgh's streets in order to help make the city a more attractive and accessible place to live, to visit, and to run a business. The nature of street clutter is varied and includes street furniture, moveable waste and recycling bins, irresponsibly and illegally parked vehicles, as well as commercial related activities such as on-street eating and drinking areas, merchandise and advertising boards. Any serious attempt to reduce street clutter must seek to address as wide a range as possible of these potential obstructions. In addition, if part of the purpose of reducing street clutter is to lower the potential for injury to pedestrians, then solutions must also take account of other hazards such as defects to pavements and roadways. Local businesses feel strongly that the Council's approach to the issue of street clutter must be holistic and must not focus on just a single aspect of the problem.



A photograph of the pavement area outside an FSB member's premises in the Leith Walk area

"I am against unnecessary A boards on the street as I agree that streets are too cluttered... I do however, feel that some businesses do need and benefit from an A board – namely those situated off the main road, or upstairs, where there is no opportunity to show clearly that the business is there or what the business offers." – FSB Member

"The use of A boards should not inconvenience free movement by pedestrians but should be proportionate to pavement width. Therefore a blanket ban would have a detrimental effect but some compromise on maximum size would seem reasonable." – FSB Member

"One of the few ways we can advertise our products and services to passers by, is via our small A-board... We always ensure that our signage is placed with our guests' (and potential guests') ease, safety and accessibility in mind." – FSB Member

A boards represent a business investment. They are bought to draw attention to a business and its goods or services and can serve a variety of distinct purposes. For example, to attract potential customers to a business that passers-by might not otherwise be aware of, such as a business located on an upper floor of a building, in a basement location or off-street in a close or side-street; or the A board may be used to advertise an 'offer of the day' or seasonal highlights. Consequently the importance of an A board to a business will vary depending upon the nature of the business and its location. For example, a retail business in a basement location will be far more highly dependent upon its A board to attract customers than would a business with a large street frontage. As a result, A boards tend to be far more valued by small business than by large chains, though both make use of them. Indeed more than one small business has told us that if A boards are banned altogether, it may be a catalyst for the demise of some businesses.

"[A] ban could prove a significant blow to many struggling small businesses throughout Edinburgh." – FSB Member

"This will have a detrimental effect on small shops, cafes and galleries." – FSB Member

"The ban on A-boards would I am sure be the final nail in many small business's coffin." – FSB Member

"It is tough as hell having a business in a basement - customers can't find you, don't notice you and don't look down at your shop when they are walking along the road.

My A-board brings me ALL the footfall that I get. Customers constantly tell me they only noticed us because they saw our sign.” – FSB Member

Important as the reduction in street clutter is, many businesses find it hard to understand why the Council has prioritised a ban on A boards, particularly when such action could threaten the livelihoods of some local businesses. In addition, it is a source of frustration for responsible businesses faced with a new burden when there are unscrupulous businesses operating with scant regard to existing rules. Other businesses feel that this is an unfair burden at a time when they may also be facing further sources of business disruption, such as the proposed extension of the tram line to Newhaven.

“When rules are put in place, it is essential that they are then enforced.” – FSB Member

What should the Council do?

The Council must take full account of the views of the city’s small businesses when taking a decision that will directly affect them. Many businesses understand that action to improve Edinburgh’s streetscape is both necessary and desirable and, of course, businesses must play a role in that. Businesses have also told us that they are aware of the hazard that A boards can present to blind and partially sighted people and do their best to mitigate this risk.

Irresponsible use of A boards can add to street clutter and constitute a hazard, but responsible use of these boards provides a vital service to the businesses that use them, with obstruction being kept to a minimum.

Many of RNIB Scotland’s concerns about A boards relate to the fact that the boards are, by their nature, mobile and thus can constitute a hazard due to being placed in different positions from day to day or through being blown to a different position by the wind. Consistent and secure positioning of A boards should allay some of these concerns.

The Council must therefore take practical decisions that meet the needs of all parties concerned.

FSB Recommendations

The City of Edinburgh Council must:

- **Engage with local businesses to understand why they use advertising boards in order to ensure that any change in policy takes account of business needs**
- **Conduct an audit of advertising boards in the city**
- **Produce clear guidance for business use of advertising boards throughout the city**
- **Ensure fair and consistent enforcement of guidance regarding the use of advertising boards across all businesses in the city**

The FSB and its members are willing to continue to engage with the City of Edinburgh Council to help find a solution that works for business, for residents and visitors, and for the Council.

Further Information

For further information please contact Garry Clark, Development Manager – East of Scotland, at garry.clark@fsb.org.uk



Experts in Business

The FSB is Scotland's largest direct-membership organisation. It campaigns for a better social, political and economic environment in which to work and do business. With a strong grassroots structure and dedicated Scottish staff to deal with Scottish institutions, media and politicians, the FSB makes its members' voices heard at the heart of the decision-making process. It is therefore recognised as one of Scotland's most influential business organisations. The FSB also provides a suite of services to help our members reduce the cost and risk of doing good business – from legal and tax protection to business banking.

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