

FOBRA COMMENTS ON THE COUNCIL'S A-BOARD POLICY PROPOSALS

FoBRA welcomes the Council's proposals to license A-boards. The proliferation of these boards has become a serious nuisance in the central area of Bath, where streets and pavements are generally quite narrow. The problems are:

- No control over location. Premises owners generally site their boards for maximum visibility, well out on the pavement, or even some distance away on the main street, where their business is in a side street.
- No consideration for other users. Almost by definition A-boards are placed on busy streets. The pavements of Bath become very congested at certain times of the week and year, and this creates a particular problem for people with disabilities, eg those with visual impairment, a walking stick, wheelchair or mobility vehicle, and for parents with prams and buggies. The indiscriminate placement of A-boards creates a safety hazard for these users.
- No standardisation of size. The Council does have a code on A-boards, which is blatantly ignored by some of the newest and largest businesses in Bath.
- No standardisation of appearance. It is perhaps understandable that premises owners want their board to 'stand out'. But an enormous effort is being made to standardise street furniture under the Public Realm & Movement Programme, and this valuable work will be undermined if a free-for-all continues on A-boards.
- No meaningful enforcement of the current rules. It would be better for the Council not to introduce new rules unless it intends to introduce and maintain a practical system of enforcement.

FoBRA proposals

FoBRA would like to suggest the following regime:

Annual permit. The system for licensing tables and chairs on the highway works reasonably well with a paid-for annual permit, which enables modifications to be made from time to time in response to business developments or problems on the street. It is essential that the right to an A-board is time-limited, so that problems can be addressed, or renewal withheld. We aren't suggesting a procedure with hearings, but we do think a register of A-boards could be kept, so that third parties can check the arrangements online. Obviously, the annual fee should at least cover the cost of administration and enforcement.

Maximum size. We agree with the Council's proposed maximum of 1.2m high x 0.5m wide. It would be better still to specify that this is the **only permitted size**, to promote uniformity.

Location. In all cases this should be tight up against the premises at the rear of the footway.

Clearance. There is no justification for a narrower clearance than 2 metres, which is about the minimum to permit people with buggies or wheelchairs to pass. The planning department generally requires a free clearance when granting planning permission for tables and chairs on the pavement.

Pedestrian areas. We disagree with the Council's proposed case-by-case approach in pedestrianised areas. These tend to be places with very heavy footfall, and the same rules should apply there as in streets with traffic.

Design. Any A board design should be fully compatible with the new Public Realm and Movement strategy and there should be one uniform design that can be obtained from 2 or 3 designated suppliers so that the conservation area is not blighted with different designs as at present.

Penalties and enforcement. It is essential to publicise a simple and clear system, similar to fixed penalty notices for motoring offences. This could include one initial written warning and thereafter fines of £100 per transgression. The key to this is enforcement action on the streets. We propose that residents' representatives should assist with enforcement, in the spirit of the Big Society, by attaching sticky warning notices to offending A-boards and reporting them to the Council, whose role could then be largely office-based.

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