

Tollcross Community Council proposals for changes to Edinburgh Licensing Board's Policy

At the meeting of the Tollcross Community Council on 29th November 2017 it was unanimously agreed that the following three changes / improvements should be proposed:

1. Area of serious special concern

The pointless designation of Tollcross as an area of serious special concern should be removed. It has not resulted in the refusal to grant any application for a new premises licence in Tollcross, not even the Caley Picture House despite its licensed capacity of 915 people.

Instead we propose that the existing area of overprovision be extended to the parts of the streets listed below where there is already a planning presumption against new public houses or entertainment venues in the areas of restriction (ref. pp 9, 10 of Edinburgh Local Plan Guidance for Business).

Lothian Road, Grindlay Street, Castle Terrace, Lady Lawson Street, Spittal Street, Bread street, Morrison Street, East Fountainbridge, Fountainbridge, Earl Grey Street, Lauriston Place, Brougham Street, Brougham Place, Home Street, West Tollcross, Lochrin Place, Gilmore Place, Tarvit Street, Leven Street, Valleyfield Street, Bruntsfield Place.

2. Audible music

The change to the amplified music clause arose from a campaign by musicians and others seeking to increase the availability of music venues in Edinburgh – the rationale being that many otherwise suitable venues were unavailable because of the unwillingness of licensees to put their licences at risk from complaints of audible amplified music.

Since the policy change was introduced virtually every application for a licence variation seems to include a request for the amplified music clause to be updated to the new “audible nuisance” wording and the Board seems happy to approve them all.

Already at least one such application in the Tollcross area has been approved by the Board despite our objection, despite the applicant's agent saying that they were not particularly concerned about the change to the music clause and despite the premises concerned already operating as a music venue with amplified music untroubled by the previous wording of the music policy.

In view of the loss of residential amenity arising from the inevitably more complicated complaint process when the audible nuisance test is to be applied, we propose that the previous wording – “amplified music from those premises to be inaudible in residential property” should be applied in the case of licensed premises in residential tenement blocks.

3. Public health

One of the 5 objectives identified in the Licensing Act is “protecting and improving public health”.

We know that Edinburgh, no less than Scotland, has a serious public health problem caused by the overconsumption of alcohol. Figures from NHS Health Scotland show that enough alcohol is sold for every adult in Scotland (that includes all those who don't drink at all) to drink over 20 units every week.

We know that the only two things that significantly affect levels of alcohol consumption are price and availability.

Price is now being addressed by the Scottish Government.

And availability? Well, more than 70% of alcohol sold in Scotland is bought from off-licences; so, that's where availability needs to be limited.

We propose that the Board should make the whole of Edinburgh an area of over-provision of a those off-licensed premises where alcohol is sold in the same shop as food and other normal household goods.

Such places lead to the normalisation of alcohol – from childhood on we're so used to seeing it sold alongside bread, milk etc, we've come to see it as just another item on our shopping list.

And such places also promote impulse buying of alcohol – we go in for one or two things on our way home and spot our favourite tipple with £1 off and there's another few alcohol units we wouldn't otherwise have consumed.