

Dear Cllr Mears,

**PETITION CALLING FOR AN URGENT REVIEW OF HOW SEAFRONT RENTS AND LICENSE FEES ARE AGREED**

We the undersigned, being traders of The Seafront Traders' Association, call on both you and the Council to review as a matter of extreme urgency the rents and patio license fees currently being asked for by the Council from the Seafront Traders of the city.

It is now an issue of grave concern to us; many of our clients; many of our suppliers; many of our staff; many of the other businesses in the immediately adjacent and surrounding areas; and to a number of Councillors, that the current Council policy of attempting to exert punitive rents and patio license fees from our businesses, creates a genuine risk of the seafront area suffering business closures and consequential economic decline.

**We call on both you and the Council to levy rents and patio licence fees that are commonly agreed to be fair to all parties because:**

- 1 These proposed rent increases make no allowances whatever for the current dire economic climate.
- 2 These proposed rent increases create huge pressure on traders as employers, at a time when the city's unemployment difficulties are inevitably likely to worsen.
- 3 These proposed rent increases fail to recognise the important contribution made by the Seafront Traders to the city's overall attractiveness as a popular tourist destination. It being commonly agreed that our businesses are key to making the seafront both attractive and financially sustainable.
- 4 These proposed rent increases fail to recognise that the Seafront Traders are a natural magnet for visitors to the city, and that these visitors subsequently also spend their visitor pounds elsewhere in the city economy, so we can genuinely claim to contribute to businesses throughout the city, with a consequential loss to the city if we are unable to continue this contribution.
- 5 The poor summer weather in the last couple of years has already seen trading conditions deteriorate and become more difficult and challenging for Seafront Traders. Consequently, for many the future is already uncertain. The punitive increases in rents and patio license fees will inevitably exacerbate this situation.
- 6 The risk of business closures along the seafront could see the return of empty, derelict, and blighted properties. The consequential decline in that local economy would undo years of careful strategic planning and Council support.
- 7 The independent nature of the businesses on the seafront creates the unique atmosphere



and tourist destination that is at the heart of the city's visitor offering. If these independent businesses were to be replaced by national or global chains, there is a risk to the ongoing attractiveness of the city as a destination. We do not believe the city would continue to prosper as a "Bluewater beside the sea".

8 The Council's current strategy to aggressively push for rent increases of up to 300%, in conjunction with above inflation patio license increases, plus the use of legal actions and outside consultants, will inevitably see business closures and a consequential negative affect on both the seafront and the city's long term economic future.

9 The costs incurred by many Seafront Traders in trying to negotiate these rent reviews, in conjunction with the costs of dealing with the legal manoeuvres employed by the Council, now prevents many traders from focussing on managing their businesses to their own, and the city's, true potential.

10 These proposed rent increases are now more than likely going to affect the ability of the current owners to sell their businesses as going concerns. Thus the effect becomes very long term as, was once the case, it becomes extremely difficult to attract the right sort of business owner to buy into and continue to contribute to, a vibrant and sustainable seafront economy. **We therefore call on both you and the Council to:**

1 Recognise that the long term viability of the seafront businesses contributes positively and directly to the entire economy of the city.

2 Agree that rent reviews should only consider the strict 'seafront value' of the unique properties under consideration, not other commercial properties off the seafront.


3 Agree that rent reviews should NOT take the premiums involved in business sales into account, as these relate to the brand, goodwill and equipment of a business - NOT the cost of rent of their premises.

4 Urgently review both the processes and tactics used in agreeing both rent and patio licence increases.

We would like it to be understood by both you and the Council that, whilst we would always wish to enjoy a strong and positive working relationship with yourselves, we are now encountering severe business difficulties as a consequence of your current policy, and that consequently we have our backs now very firmly against an economic wall. In these circumstances we shall proactively pursue a course of action to make our case heard and to contest further punitive rent and licence increases.

We look forward to your reply as a matter of urgency.  
Your sincerely,

The members of The Seafront Traders' Association



CAROL & POLLY X