

Community debates LED sign

By Sarah Sobanski

Some Maynooth business owners want Hastings Highlands council to turn off its LED promotions sign at night.

Ro Munich, owner of the Arlington Hotel, attended council July 19 to ask it to turn off the sign outside of the municipal offices from 10 p.m. to 7 a.m. He said he spoke on behalf of other business owners as well but didn't name them.

'We're not talking about a sign that has only 60 watts of power,' said Munich, holding up a digital tablet with flashing colours to give an example of a low watt version of the sign. 'I don't know how many of you that have seen the traffic [on Maynooth's main street at night]. There isn't a lot. There's also no pedestrian traffic in those hours. So I don't see the advantage of having that sign on, or what eyeballs it's trying to attract during those hours.'

Munich said business owners hadn't been consulted before the sign was installed and asked after the contract surrounding the installation of the sign.

'It's also affected my business,' said the hotel owner. 'People have been roused facing the sign. They've asked not to come back [to those rooms], because basically it's a strobe light that shines into the windows that face that sign.'

The sign is operated by Hospice North Hastings which owns a sister sign in Bancroft. The signs mirror each other in both municipalities. According to Hospice, the signs offer free advertising of community events and not-for-profit groups, feature emergency information such as washout details when they occur, promote municipal and community centre scheduling and sell sign sponsorships and special announcements such as birthday wishes to help fundraising efforts for the care organization.

'I noticed that the majority of the advertising by far attracts people to Bancroft? It advertises by three to one? The only signage that pertains to Maynooth are the signs that advertise events at the library,' Councillor Alex Walder responded during Munich's delegation. He brought forward a notice of motion to deal with the sign disturbance.

'If there's free advertising that is being supported by its placement and the electrical bills and whatnot, then I think that equity should be addressed,' said Munich.

Hospice North Hastings released a statement following media coverage of the sign dispute. It revealed that Hospice first learned people were concerned about the sign in Maynooth when it was 'attacked' on social media about it in April.

'This attention on social media was shocking because no one had tried to engage with us by email, telephone or by visiting our office. The complaints were delivered by a third party on behalf of a Maynooth business,' stated the release. 'We appreciate that the Hastings Highlands council has been asked to make changes to the sign but the ongoing comments, accusations and allegations are just plain hurtful. And while we have continued to focus on our work, our mandate and supporting those in need, we continue to be disheartened by the attention this is attracting.'

The release also said Hospice's agreement with Hastings Highlands was to operate the sign 24/7, but it would wait for direction from council and its staff on the matter.