

Head shop baron now targets Costa del Sol



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MILLIONAIRE head shop baron James Bellamy is rapidly expanding his multinational empire and is now poised to unleash a chain of the controversial shops across the Costa Del Sol, just in time for the post-Leaving Certificate holiday rush.

Just a week after the Irish Mail on Sunday revealed Bellamy's plans to open a chain of Nirvana head shops in Bulgaria's Black Sea resorts, we can now reveal he is preparing to open a string of new shops close to Malaga in Benalmadena and Fuengirola, and in Alicante and Benidorm.

The new outlets – which will stock the same legal highs that caused dozens of Irish youths to be hospitalised – will take advantage of the thousands of young Irish and British holidaymakers who flock to the non-stop discos and nightclubs of the Spanish holiday resorts.

The first shop, which is expected to open tomorrow, is directly opposite Benalmadena's busy Sol y Mar '24-hour' square – a notorious clubber's paradise where several nightclubs stay open until dawn catering for masses of young revellers.

Nirvana shops open in Spain tomorrow – just in time for students celebrating Leaving Cert

Local clubs and pubs include Linekers, Disco Kiu, Coyotes – a table dancing club – and a place called the Liquid Bar, which offers drinks at two for the price of one all night. There is also a mini-casino in the square called Black and Red.

The shop is also just a five-minute walk from Benalmadena's pleasure port – one of the largest pleasure ports on the Costa del Sol – and will ply its toxic wares from a premises



MASTERMIND: Jim Bellamy, who is expanding his Nirvana chain of stores

sandwiched between a building society and a lingerie shop called Pretty Woman.

Currently under renovation, the sign outside the shop bears the traditional Bellamy logo – the word Nirvana in red, gold and green between two marijuana leaves. Neighbouring shopkeepers said the owners were Irish and that they expected it to open tomorrow. The MoS understands that the main manager of the shop has a northern Irish accent and has travelled to and from Dublin in recent days.

As of yet, there appears to be no company named Nirvana registered to Bellamy in Spain, although the venture is so new that papers may not yet have been processed and filed.

Inside the shop, a pile of unopened cardboard boxes await unpacking while the lettering on the window reads: 'Legal Highs, Incense, Bath Salts and Novelty Items.'

An invoice visible through the window confirms the link to Bellamy. The invoice from Bellamy's Irish company Harmony Products is addressed from a warehouse in Harold's Cross, south Dublin.

They get around the law by calling it 'incense'

Items on the invoice appear to include ashtrays and Rizla papers as well as 'dog pipes and wooden pipes'.

The warehouse in the invoice address is the one which the MoS revealed last month was being used to mix and package chemicals imported directly from China until the Government clamped down on many head shop substances in May.

But now that premises is lying idle following raids by gardai and the Irish Medicines Board (IMB).

An IMB prosecution against Bellamy, involving several charges and a possible jail sentence, is proceeding through the courts.

Drugs experts in Spain predict the Nirvana headshops will seek to exploit the same legal loopholes they have targeted so successfully in Ireland.

Headshops in Spain are known more commonly as 'smart' shops, as they are in the Netherlands.



HEADS UP: The Nirvana head shop in Benalmadena and, left, an invoice inside from Bellamy's firm

or use in Spain, however, is not illegal.

Francisco Arias, a spokesman for Socidrogalcohol, the Spanish Scientific Society of Studies on Alcohol, Alcoholism and other Drug Addictions, said: 'I imagine this shop is not going to sell outlawed drugs but will take advantage of legal loopholes and sell products that have not yet been legislated against and are not therefore prohibited by law.'

'Shops like these take advantage of the fact that there are new substances that are not classified as illegal.'

'They market their products with a warning they are not apt

'Will probably be able to stay one step ahead'

for human consumption but both buyers and sellers know they're psychoactive.

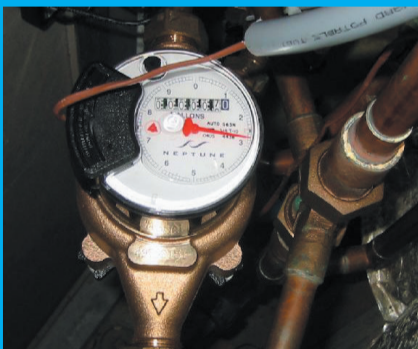
'I imagine these people will get, at the very least, a visit from the police when they open.'

'But as long as they're not selling outlawed products or breaching licensing laws and selling products deemed medicines, I think there will be very little the authorities can do.'

'The shopowners will probably be able to stay one step ahead and have a margin of time to sell substances before the law catches up with them by outlawing what they're selling.'

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