

'Bizarre' justice from Worksop magistrates

The theft: Choc bars and pop

The defence: I was hungry

The verdict: Off you go, then

A THIEF who was feeling peckish walked into a town centre shop and stole four Fudge bars and a bottle of Fanta.

Her defence when she appeared before Worksop magistrates was: "I was feeling hungry and didn't have any money."

So the magistrates told her she was free to go – and didn't even award any costs against her.

Yesterday police and town centre traders were left shaking their heads in disbelief at the verdict.

"We are working very hard to combat shoplifting and it is very disheartening when there is so little deterrent in terms of punishment," said a spokesman for Bassetlaw Town Centre Partnership Trust.

"Some of the shops are hit repeatedly by shoplifters."

"The cost of protecting shops makes it harder and harder to trade and be competitive."

"We need the courts to back us up." And police Local Area Commander Insp Craig Pitchford said: "This result is just demoralising for all those people working to stop shoplifting in Worksop town centre."

"This verdict only encourages other people to use a similar defence. If the magistrates will accept this as a defence it is simply not good enough."

At the hearing on Monday the court was told that sweet-toothed Jayne Hothersall walked into the Wilkinson's store in the Priory Centre and stole

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four Cadbury's Fudge bars and a bottle of Fanta.

Hothersall, 22, of Edinburgh Road, Worksop, took the confectionery on 29th September.

Staff at the Priory Centre shop spotted Hothersall leaving the store without paying, and detained her.

David Grant, defending said: "Unfortunately, on the day of this incident she was hungry and didn't have any money. It was no more or less than that."

Hothersall, who admitted stealing the items, was given a conditional discharge for 12 months. No order for costs was made.

A conditional discharge means that Hothersall will have to stay out of trouble for a year, otherwise she risks getting sentenced for the offence.

We asked shoppers in the town centre what they thought about the verdict, and one outraged office worker said: "It's absolutely ridiculous, completely bizarre."

"I have to go into shops and buy food for my lunch. This verdict says I'd be better off helping myself and telling them I did it because I was hungry and didn't have any money."

One trader, who didn't wish to be named, said: "This is the kind of sentence that gives a green light to all the thieves and lowlife in town who make our lives a misery."

As the Guardian went to press yesterday a spokesman for Worksop Magistrates' Court was unavailable for comment.

Wilkinson's refused to comment.



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