

Protests drive Ahava out of Covent Garden

BY ROBYN ROSEN

► THE UK branch of Israeli cosmetics store, Ahava, is moving from its central London shop after years of pro-Palestinian demonstrations.

Protesters claim that the products sold in the store are manufactured in a factory in Israeli settlement, Mitzpe Shalom in the West Bank but are “misleadingly” labelled as produced in Israel.

The owner of the shop, currently in Monkmoor Street, Covent Garden, is looking for other sites after owners of neighbouring stores complained to the landlord following protests.

Supporters claim it has been “chased out” of its location by regular “noisy and intimidating” demonstrations.

A spokeswoman for Shaftesbury PLC, which owns the property as well as several others in the Seven Dials area, said: “When Ahava’s lease expires in September, we will not offer them a new one.”

Pro-Palestinian protesters have been demonstrating fortnightly outside the

shop, which opened in April 2007, for more than two years. A counter group of pro-Israeli supporters also demonstrate outside.

Police were drafted in to control the protests and set up a meeting last October between the protesters and other shop managers.

Last week, four demonstrators stood trial for aggravated trespass after they chained themselves to a concrete block inside the store last year.

Colin George, manager of clothes shop The Loft, next door to Ahava, said: “I’m pleased Ahava is leaving. It’s brought the street down. I’ve complained to the landlords, as has everyone here. Everyone would like them to leave. I wish they had left two years ago.

“Protesters are just going to follow them around, wherever they go. Maybe they should be an online business instead.”

Ahava UK’s accounts up until the end of 2009 show a total loss of more than £250,000, despite receiving more than £300,000 from its Israeli parent com-

pany, with no repayment plan.

Odelia Haroush, director of the UK branch of Ahava, Dead Sea Laboratories UK, said: “We are now in the process of looking for another location.”

She said that she was looking in several places, including sites in north-west London.

“Shaftesbury PLC own most of Covent Garden and some of the other properties in our street belong to them,” she said. “Other retailers are very upset with what’s going on and Shaftesbury PLC doesn’t want to inflame the situation.

“It’s very important to the Israeli company to have a presence in the UK. It’s not just about making money. It has a big cosmetic market and we want to be a player.”

Richard Millett, who attends the counter-demonstrations, said: “Maybe the neighbours could have had a more positive role and spoken to the protesters, rather than take it out on Ahava.

“It’s sad that this country will allow a lawfully trading shop to be chased out because of the politics of people who