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Banbridge traders triumph as Environment Minister rejects Tesco Extra

NIIRTA and Banbridge Traders' Association have strongly welcomed the decision of the Environment Minister Sammy Wilson MLA to reject the application for a 130,000 square foot Tesco Extra store at the out-of-town site in Bridgewater Park, which is a mile from the town centre.

Banbridge traders and NIIRTA had fought a year-long campaign against the Tesco application, which proposed the largest ever supermarket in Ireland, successfully convincing DOE, the local Council and MLAs that the proposed out of town store would cripple Banbridge Town Centre and result in dozens of local small traders closing and the loss of hundreds of jobs.

Expressing his relief at the news, Joe Quail, spokesperson for Banbridge Traders' Association and NIIRTA member said: "This is terrific news and will be warmly welcomed not just by local traders in Banbridge but throughout the local community, many of whom objected to the proposed new store. If this application had been successful then our town would have been ruined, with the loss of hundreds of jobs and the closure of many local independent retailers in the town centre, who would have been unable to compete with such a vast store.

"We already have a large Tesco store in the town, which can more than accommodate those who wish to shop there. Traders in Banbridge want to work with our Council and the NI Executive to ensure that our town can grow and prosper in the future." Indeed, local traders have previously supported plans for the existing Tesco store to be redeveloped from its current 35,000 square foot into a 60,000 square foot hypermarket.

MINISTER DESERVES CREDIT

Glyn Roberts, NIIRTA Chief Executive, who assisted local NIIRTA members and Banbridge traders in their campaign, also commented: "This is a victory for common sense and the Minister for Environment deserves considerable credit for supporting local retailers in Banbridge by rejecting the Tesco application. Our campaign was an uphill struggle, as the Tesco application was initially supported by the local council and we are delighted that our lobbying has been successful. Now that we have this result, we should look forward and work with Tesco to make Banbridge town even better.

"While this is a great result for our members in Banbridge, we still have a long road ahead of us. The multiples still have applications pending in Crumlin, Ballyclare and Larne, which could cause significant damage to independent retailers in those towns. The DOE Minister should immediately publish PPS5, which would effectively promote town centre investment first rather than unsustainable out-of-town development by the multiples."



The fight continues

1,000 Crumlin residents sign petition against Tesco application

Opposition to the proposed 46,000 square foot Tesco at the edge of Crumlin is gathering pace, with a concerted campaign being led by traders in the village, including meetings with local politicians to put forward their case. Last month, they revealed that over a thousand people had signed a petition opposing Tesco's planning application.

Commenting, Gerard McAdorey, spokesperson for the local traders in Crumlin and NIIRTA member said: "This petition confirms what many of us knew already - that a significant number of the local community in Crumlin are opposed to this Tesco application and the damage that it will do to local shops, local jobs and the whole character of the village. Tesco should listen to the concerns of the local community and withdraw its application. We will be bringing this petition to Antrim Borough Council and our local MLAs urging them to support local traders and the views of over a thousand local people.

"It is frankly unbelievable that Tesco would even consider an application for such a huge store on the outskirts of our village, which could lead to the ruin of Crumlin," continued Gerard. "We are deeply concerned that the proposed store could remove business from local traders who have been in the village for many years. We also have major concerns that the traffic that this store would attract would have a severe impact on the environment and community in such a rural village.

HUGE IMPACT ON VIABILITY

"Tesco's own annual report showed average turnover figures of £1,144 per square foot net sales area," added Gerard. "Even taking these average figures, the proposed store would generate a turnover in excess of £32 million. This will have a huge impact on the vitality and viability of Crumlin town centre and the town's existing retail offer, which only has a combined annual turnover of £11 million. We estimate that if this store is granted planning permission, then in the next five years we will see upwards of four hundred jobs lost in Crumlin from local retailers and local suppliers."

Glyn Roberts, NIIRTA Chief Executive who helped launch the petition and has addressed meetings organised by the Crumlin traders, also commented: "Once again we are seeing another small town facing retail and environmental devastation as a result of another application by a multiple supermarket. A 46,000 square foot Tesco store for such a small village is simply unacceptable. NIIRTA, on behalf of its members and local traders, has formally objected to the store in writing to the Planning Service.

TRANSPORT ASSESSMENT FLAWED

"Indeed Planning Service has not even sought a Retail Impact Assessment in order to assess the impact of the application on the town. The Transport Assessment (TA) in support of the planning application is fundamentally flawed and has been culled from other proposed stores, such as Ballycastle. The proposed development



Pictured with Glyn Roberts, NIIRTA Chief Executive (second from left), are local Crumlin traders Martin McCann, Cormac Green, Gerard McAdorey and Shauna Berry from a local butcher shop in the town

would, if permitted, prejudice the safety and convenience of road users since it would cause an increase in traffic movements and exceed the capacity of the adjacent mini-roundabouts at the Main Street/Mill Road junction and the Main Street/Glenavy Road junction, which are already heavily congested.

"The petition organised by the local traders shows the depth of concern in the Crumlin community toward this application and we would urge that DOE Planning reject the proposal and ensure that local businesses and jobs are saved. I hope all locally elected representatives in Crumlin will get behind their local traders and call for this application to be scrapped," stated Glyn.

"There is no doubt that serious opposition is growing to this application among the local traders and we will give our 100 per cent support to them in their campaign. The recent Banbridge decision it has energised local traders in Crumlin to step up their campaign, given the potential economic and environmental damage that such a huge store would do to a village the size of Crumlin," concluded Glyn.

NIIRTA Annual General Meeting

The eighth Annual General Meeting of the Northern Ireland Independent Retail Trade Association will take place on Thursday 23rd October 2008 in NIIRTA's offices at: 261 – 263 Ormeau Road, Belfast at 12.00 noon.

Light refreshments will be provided after the meeting

The business of the Annual General Meeting will be as follows:

- Chairman's introduction and welcome
- Chief Executive's Report
- Presentation of Annual Accounts
- Level of Membership Fees 2008/09
- Appointment of Auditors
- Any other business

If you plan to be there, please let us know in advance -
Tel: (028) 9022 0004 Fax: (028) 9022 0005
Email: admin@niirta.com



NIIRTA reserves judgement on new John Lewis proposals

NIIRTA has given an initial reaction to the unveiling of the latest John Lewis application on 28th August. Commenting, Glyn Roberts, NIIRTA Chief Executive, said: "NIIRTA has not yet seen the full application by the developers and will take time to study it in full and consult with our members in Lisburn and the Chamber of Commerce before making any judgement.

"As we have previously stated, our objections were not to the John Lewis application as a standalone development at Sprucefield. What concerned us and our members about the previous planning application were the thirty additional retail units which would have gone alongside the proposed John Lewis store, to include a major multiple supermarket.

"Retailers in Lisburn City Centre and in the surrounding areas are already struggling to compete with the major Sainsbury and Mark & Spencer stores at Sprucefield and a third major grocery retailer would be the last straw for them. However, we understand that the developer has now

ruled this out and reduced the overall number of additional retail units. If true, this has to be welcomed, as they have listened to the concerns of Lisburn traders.

"In an ideal world we would have liked to see John Lewis locate in a town centre, as this would generate much needed footfall for our members but we will examine the new proposal with a genuinely open minded approach."

"We now want to see urgent three way talks between Lisburn City Council, local traders and the developers to discuss these proposals further. NIIRTA's top priority is that local independent traders in Lisburn City Centre, who, after all, are the backbone of the local economy, are not disadvantaged in any way by this new development and can continue to attract shoppers from across Northern Ireland."

"We understand that the developer has also suggested a full public enquiry into the application and we look forward to giving our views," concluded Glyn.

A drain on business

Commenting on the continuing speculation that domestic water charges are likely to be deferred for a further year, NIIRTA has urged the NI Executive to examine ways to help retailers with their water bills in light of the latest hike in electricity costs.

Glyn Roberts, NIIRTA Chief Executive said: "We would welcome the deferring of non-domestic Water Rates for a further year to help hard-pressed consumers who are already paying high energy bills and are cutting back on their grocery bills and shopping less. "Retailers are already paying water charges and have to absorb hikes in the electricity bills of up to 34 per cent, which is making it harder and harder to remain competitive. We would therefore ask Ministers to consider ways in which they could alleviate this burden on small retailers and businesses by reducing their water bills for a year."

MEP meets Ballyclare traders



Ballyclare independent retailer and NIIRTA member, Nial McConkey explains traders concerns about the proposed new Tesco store to Jim Nicholson MEP and Glyn Roberts, NIIRTA Chief Executive

Local traders in Ballyclare are also working hard together to oppose the proposed Tesco application for an out-of-town store on the old FG Wilson site on the Hillhead Road. NIIRTA, of course, is working closely with the Ballyclare Traders in campaigning against the Tesco application and, as part of this, organised a visit by Jim Nicholson MEP to the town on Friday 5th September to speak with traders and hear their views.

Among those who met the MEP was NIIRTA member and spokesperson for Ballyclare Traders Nial McConkey, who said:

"At our meeting with Mr Nicholson we expressed our complete opposition to the proposed application for the Tesco store, which will draw trade away from the town centre, resulting in Ballyclare becoming a retail ghost town. Many people throughout the local community are asking why such a store is even needed, as a new ASDA store has opened in our town centre in last few months.

"The proposed area in which Tesco is hoping to build is already badly congested and a new store could well gridlock entrances to the town completely," continued Nial. "Local traders are not afraid of genuine competition, but when Tesco seeks to locate out-of-town with free car parking, there is no way that any independent retailer could possibly compete. Mr Nicholson saw at first hand how congested the town was on Friday and we believe that, if approved, the Tesco development would only increase that problem."

Also commenting, Glyn Roberts, NIIRTA Chief Executive, added: "We appreciate the support of Jim Nicholson and extend an open invite to any political representative to visit Ballyclare and to meet with the traders. As Newtownabbey Borough Council has already heard from Tesco we would call upon Councillors to urgently facilitate a presentation from the traders in Ballyclare to hear their concerns about this application."



Shedding light on energy costs

Benchmarking exercise reveals extent of energy usage in convenience sector



Working with The Carbon Trust, NIIRTA has completed a benchmarking exercise to determine the level of energy usage in a range of typical convenience stores. The latest project follows on from an initial scoping study undertaken last year and is part of an ongoing programme to examine ways in which NIIRTA members can reduce energy usage in their premises.

The Association hopes to gain further funding from the Carbon Trust to develop knowledge and awareness of this ever-increasing cost for business, including the development of best practice for the sector. An improved awareness of energy and cost management techniques will deliver meaningful savings for NIIRTA members, particularly if this can be disseminated throughout the Association.

Over 100 stores took part in the survey, which provided valuable information on the level and costs of energy in the sector. The energy consumption of the typical range of premises operated by NIIRTA members is relatively significant and the study has provided further insight into the level and characteristics of energy use in the sector.

The study has reinforced the opportunity for the reduction in energy usage by increasing knowledge and awareness of energy matters and the more effective management of existing premises. On a number of the sites surveyed, it is estimated that a 10 per cent reduction in energy consumed could be achieved simply by the efficient management of the

premises outside of opening hours. Additional savings are achievable by adopting a high level of control and awareness when the premises are in operation.

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

The survey focused on the two main types of premises operated by NIIRTA members - convenience stores and convenience stores with a petrol forecourt. A summary of the findings is given below and all figures are expressed in terms of the retail floor area of premises.

Convenience Stores

- In the survey, the specific energy consumption of convenience stores ranged from 279 to 1,581 kilowatt hours (kWh) per square metre per annum (26 to 147 kWh per square foot pa).
- The median energy consumption for convenience stores was 700 kWh per square metre per annum, which effectively is the benchmark for the 'average' store (this is equivalent to 65 kWh per square foot per annum).
- 50 per cent of sites surveyed fell within the 550 - 900 kWh per square metre per annum band (51 – 84 kWh per square foot per annum).
- Stores with an energy consumption in the range 550 – 700 kWh per square metre per annum may be judged as 'good' in terms of energy performance (51-65 kWh per square foot pa) and anything below this may be judged as 'excellent'.

Convenience Stores with Petrol Forecourt

- In the survey, the specific energy consumption of convenience stores with petrol forecourts ranged from 448 to 2,785 kilowatt hours (kWh) per square metre per annum (42 to 259 kWh per square foot pa).
- The median energy consumption, for convenience stores with petrol forecourts, was 1,500 kWh per square metre per annum, which effectively is the benchmark for the 'average' store. (This is equivalent to 140 kWh per square foot per annum).

- 50 per cent of sites surveyed fell within the 1,200 - 1,800 kWh per square metre per annum band (110 – 167 kWh per square foot pa).
 - Energy consumption in the range 1,200 – 1,500 kWh per square metre per annum may be judged as 'good' in terms of energy performance (110 - 140 kWh per square foot pa) and anything below this may be judged as 'excellent'.
- However, due to the individual nature of premises in the sector and the varying nature of the activities and equipment on-site, care is required when utilising these benchmarks.

A VALUABLE INSIGHT

The survey revealed that there is a threshold of store size at which the intensity of installed electrical equipment markedly increases. This is particularly noticeable with the number of refrigerated display cabinets installed for chilled goods.

On small sites (below 700 square feet) the range of goods on offer is limited, particularly in chilled food products. With a higher proportion of dry goods on sale, the 'good' performance benchmark derived above of 550-700 kWh/m²/pa may be excessive for these store types. It is suggested that a figure of 300 – 450 kWh/m²/pa may be more appropriate for these smaller stores.

Commenting on the benchmarking project, NIIRTA Chief Executive Glyn Roberts said: "These energy benchmarks provide a valuable insight into the level of usage in the sector. To a certain extent every member's premises is individual and a reflection of the community in which it operates, of the level of turnover of the business and the added value products sold in the store, such as hot food sales.

"However, this is not to say that there are not opportunities for energy reduction and improved management control, or indeed, the design and efficiency of services and equipment. We hope that this ongoing project provides a solid foundation for energy reduction in the medium and long term, at a time when energy electricity and fuel costs are soaring."



Electricity price hike a shock

NIIRTA has expressed shock at NIE's latest rise in electricity costs of between 25-34 per cent on business and warned that it will have dire consequences for the Northern Ireland Economy.

NIIRTA Chief Executive Glyn Roberts said: "While NIIRTA expected some rise in electricity prices we are simply staggered at the huge hike of 25-34 per cent that our members will be paying. Businesses in Northern Ireland are already paying 21 per cent higher electricity costs than our counterparts in the rest of the UK which makes it very hard for us to remain competitive.

"Out of all the sectors of the economy in Northern Ireland, we are likely to be hit hardest by these rises. On one hand, independent retailers will have to try and remain competitive by absorbing this hike of, on average, 30 per cent and on the other, with consumers facing 33 per cent in electricity and 20 per cent gas price increases, there is the very real prospect that they will be cutting back further on their grocery shopping. This increase is double whammy for thousands of independent retailers in Northern Ireland.

"We are seeking an urgent meeting with the Economy Minister to discuss this appalling situation further and will be urging her to set up an Executive Taskforce to come up with solutions to this crisis facing our local economy," continued Glyn. "NIIRTA will be urging rates relief for those businesses investing in energy efficiency measures and supports the calls for a Fair Fuel Stabiliser scheme to be set up by the Treasury whereby, if a barrel of oil goes up, the UK Government would then reduce fuel duty by the same amount and vice versa. Ministers in Northern Ireland and in Whitehall must act now on this issue."

An opportunity to get it right!

After attending the public meeting organised by Pat Doherty MP on 'Opportunity Omagh' outline planning application, NIIRTA has welcomed some aspects of the project, but expressed concern at the proposed large food superstore store being located in a major out-of-town location.

John Wallace, Omagh Trader and NIIRTA member, commented: "NIIRTA and its members in Omagh have concerns about the large multiple food store, which we understand to be Tesco, that is included in this planning application and is clearly in an out-of-town location, over a mile from Omagh town centre. While there are some positive aspects of the Opportunity Omagh Project, the retail aspects are a direct threat to Omagh Town Centre.

"As pointed out in NIIRTA's report 'Nightmare on Every Street', out-of-town locations by the multiples not only cause damage to the local economy and jobs, but destroy the character of town and city centres, which is bad for the community and our environment as a whole. Local

Traders in Omagh are not afraid of genuine competition, but when Tesco seeks to locate out-of-town with free car parking, there is no way that any independent retailer could possibly compete."

Glyn Roberts, NIIRTA Chief Executive who also attended the meeting, added: "NIIRTA is not anti-multiple, but we are anti out-of-town development and we believe that the Opportunity Omagh application could create an alternative town centre and result in closure of local businesses and the loss of jobs. Hopefully, given the recent rejection by the Environment Minister of the proposed Tesco site in the Outlet Centre in Banbridge, which was a mile out of town, we hope that Sammy Wilson will look this application in the same light.

"We will be seeking an opportunity to present to Omagh District Council, local MLAs and the developers to express our concern at these plans. We would also urge Tesco and the developer to look at alternatives within Omagh town centre which would be better suited."

Raising employment law concerns



NIIRTA Chief Executive Glyn Roberts is pictured with Minister for Employment and Learning Sir Reg Empey MLA at the recent Northern Ireland Government Affairs Group meeting. "This was a good opportunity for NIIRTA to raise concerns about the increasing burden of employment legislation on NIIRTA members," said Glyn. "NIIRTA wants to see any future employment law have a proper impact analysis on how it will affect our economy and our small retailers in Northern Ireland. We want to see employment law which is both business friendly and family friendly and that can be both fair to employee and employer alike."



Tory Minister visits Banbridge

Following the successful campaign to have the Tesco application for a new out-of-town superstore at Bridgewater Park rejected, NIIRTA hosted a visit by the Conservative Party's Northern Ireland spokesman, Owen Patterson, to Banbridge on 24th July.



Owen Paterson MP, Shadow Secretary of State for Northern Ireland is pictured with NIIRTA Chief Executive Glyn Roberts and Rosin McAleenan, Chair of Banbridge Traders' Association, during the walkabout in Banbridge Town Centre

Mr Paterson met with local retailers and received a briefing from NIIRTA Chief Executive Glyn Roberts about the impact that the proposed Tesco store would have had on the local Banbridge economy.

Commenting on the visit, the first time NIIRTA had met with a representative from the Conservative Party, Glyn said: "We were delighted to bring Owen Patterson to Banbridge so that he could see for himself how a flourishing retail environment was threatened by the proposed 130,000 square feet out of town development. He was very well aware about both our campaign and also about the issue in general and we agreed to continue to inform him of other campaigns to resist out-of-town developments across Northern Ireland. We

highlighted how NIIRTA is not anti-multiple – instead, we are anti out-of-town retail development, as it removes the capacity for local retailers to compete on a level playing field.

"This visit was particularly useful given the fact that the Conservative Party is currently examining its policies relating to out-of-town retail developments and there will be further opportunities for local Northern Ireland retailers to feed their experiences directly into the policy development process," added Glyn. "We also plan to meet with a senior Tory party group to relate our experiences here in the coming months and NIIRTA will continue to work with all parties to highlight the need to protect Northern Ireland's town and

village centres and underline how important local retailers are to the local economy."

CONSERVATIVES PROMOTE TOWN CENTRES

Owen Patterson's visit to Banbridge was well-timed, following hot on the heels of the publishing on 10th July of the Conservative Party Commission's final report on Small Shops in the High Street, which looks at the challenges facing independent retailers on our high streets and the implications for communities.

Writing in his foreword to the report, Commission Chairman Brian Binley MP said: "Our town and city centres lie at the heart of our communities and are as vital to their health as the heart is to the body. Yet over



the last thirty years or so, the centres of many of our communities have suffered a gradual but persistent decline. Ring roads have isolated them, parking charges have depleted them, out-of-town development detracted from them and poor planning undermined them.

“Whilst many of the individual factors in themselves might not seem to cause major harm, their combined effect over many years can be to put once-active and robust community hubs into seemingly interminable decline. The most obvious symptom of this decline is the near disappearance of the independent small retailer from our high streets. They provide diversity, charm, interest and a level of personal service that is becoming all too rare in today’s town centre and their loss is keenly felt by many. The boarded-up shop fronts, the graffiti and the absence of visitors all pay sad testimony to the decay of so many of our towns. However, the trend is not irreversible.

“This document outlines a strategy for restoring the ability of local communities to act collectively to rebuild the health of their community hubs. It suggests a new framework together with possible options which are by no means prescriptive and through which new local ventures can be mobilised to support a new wave of

community revitalisation, be it in satellite areas around big cities, in smaller cities, towns or in the village high street. With people in local communities acting together to revitalise our high streets, we believe we will create a renewed sense of wellbeing, which will impact upon the health of the nation as a whole. We recommend it to the Conservative Party as a positive framework for new policy strategies.”

AN IMPORTANT CONTRIBUTION

Commenting on the report, NIIRTA’s Chief Executive Glyn Roberts said: *“This is an important contribution to the ongoing debate about the future of high streets and the independent shops that are so important to them. People care about the local shop and want to ensure it is a part of the future in the communities where they live.*

“The report rightly identifies the risks associated with weak controls on retail development out-of-town. Inappropriate and unsustainable out-of-town retail development is the single biggest threat to the high street. Planning authorities have to be empowered to make the decisions that are in the long term interest of the local economy and to be able to do so even when faced with highly resourced and determined retail developers.”



Adrian Marley (left) from The Patrisse had the opportunity to talk to Owen Paterson MP (right), Shadow Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, and NIIRTA Chief Executive Glyn Roberts



Owen Paterson MP, Shadow Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, is pictured with Banbridge Traders’ Association members Roisin McAleenan (Chairperson), Michael Donaghy, Joe Quail (spokesperson) and NIIRTA Chief Executive Glyn Roberts

Assembly votes for PPS5

NIIRTA has strongly welcomed the unanimous vote in favour of the publication and implementation of draft PPS5 by the Northern Ireland Assembly on 22nd September. The vote followed a debate in the Assembly on a motion that *“noted with concern the impact that out-of-town retail centres can have on the viability of town centres”*. Draft PPS5 would put greater emphasis on town centre locations for multiple supermarkets rather than unsustainable out-of-town development.

This is the first time that the Northern Ireland Assembly has made such a call and follows the publication of the NIIRTA Report ‘Nightmare on Every Street’ earlier this year, which made a strong case for the immediate publication of PPS5.

Commenting, Glyn Roberts, NIIRTA Chief Executive said: *“This vote is clearly good news for thousands of independent retailers and small businesses who want to see investment in our town centres rather than out-of-town development by the multiples. PPS5 is about creating a level playing field so that town centres can be a key element in economic growth for both small traders and the multiples. For nearly ten years NIIRTA has been lobbying for the publication of PPS5 and this vote is a*



major step forward in our campaign. The Environment Minister gave commitments and, legal challenges aside, says he wants to publish PPS5 as soon as possible.”



Smokescreen?

Proposed tobacco regulations fail to tackle illegal trade

The Government's ongoing policy consultation on tobacco regulation has been extended by local Health Minister Michael McGimpsey to include Northern Ireland and is seeking views on a range of issues, including the need for further controls on advertising at point of sale, such as banning the display of tobacco products in shops.

The news came on 30th June as the Minister announced that the age of sale for tobacco products would rise from 16 to 18 on 1st September with the aim of reducing the level of smoking amongst children and young people in Northern Ireland.

With regard to the increase in age of sale, NIIRTA has expressed concern that more needs to be done to publicise the law change. Glyn Roberts, NIIRTA Chief Executive said: *"As NIIRTA promotes responsible retailing we fully support the change in the law and hope that it makes a real contribution to reducing the levels of young people from smoking in Northern Ireland. However there needs to be much more work undertaken by the Department of Health to publicise the changes in the law both to retailers and the general public."*

We are concerned to hear from our members that many of their customers are completely unaware that it is illegal to sell tobacco to anyone under 18. Given that retailers can face substantial fines if they are found to be in breach of the law, it is surprising that we have seen very little in the way of either serious advertising or major publicity."

MISSING AN OPPORTUNITY

Moving forward, the issues the Government is seeking views on in its tobacco control consultation include tackling illicit trade in tobacco, a ban or restrictions on display of tobacco products in shops, banning or restricting use of vending machines, requiring tobacco be sold in plain packaging and banning packets of ten

"We are very concerned that, whilst the Department of Health has positioned this as a wide ranging review, its focus on two measures, which are limited and specific, risks missing the opportunity to bring in measures that will make a real difference," commented Glyn Roberts. *"NIIRTA believes that top of the list should be a new law making it illegal for an adult to buy tobacco on behalf of an under 18. A retailer who makes a mistake and sells tobacco to an underage person faces severe sanctions - the adult that knowingly facilitates children smoking faces no sanction. That is a crazy situation. If the Government fails to tackle this they will be ignoring the single most likely way in which underage people get hold of tobacco."*

"We also want to see the Government take action against the street vendors and black marketers who make millions of pounds every week selling smuggled and counterfeit products on our streets. As it stands, this crime is not tackled effectively enough and we need tougher penalties and a proper enforcement budget. Both



of these measures would be far more effective in tackling youth smoking than a display ban."

SIGNIFICANT AND DAMAGING COSTS

"Taking tobacco off display would come with considerable operational and equipment costs that need to be taken into proper account," continued Glyn. *"Indeed, it is estimated that the new equipment required to safely remove tobacco from customers' view could cost a single convenience store £1,850, but this could rise to as much as £4,985 depending on the detailed requirements in any regulation. If you consider the cost of upheaval and loss of trade during any changeover the actual cost may be much more. We would expect the Government to present a clear case that these measures were necessary before placing yet another significant burden on thousands of retailers across the country. Any new regulations imposed on business should be proportionate and effectively targeted."*

NIIRTA also believes the Department of Health needs to produce evidence that would suggest a display ban is effective in reducing smoking rates among young people. Evidence collated from other countries, including Iceland and Canadian states, is not conclusive and in some cases even shows an increase in the smoking rates among young people.

"What we have found is that changing tobacco displays will bring significant and damaging costs to convenience stores. As the picture becomes clearer about what the likely harm to business will be, we have still not seen the convincing evidence that a ban would have the desired effect on underage smoking. If the costs are high and the benefits not clear then the Government should not press ahead," concluded Glyn.



Town centre investment crucial

Addressing a Retail Seminar hosted by Douglas Wallace at the Waterfront Hall in June, NIIRTA Chief Executive Glyn Roberts urged investment by the NI Executive into local town and city centres and for restrictions on out-of-town development.

"Increasingly, out-of-town developments are disproportionately large. They do not just affect our members, who are exclusively grocery retailers - they affect every retail outlet on the high street as they sell electrical goods, clothes, music, books, and so on. No high-street retailer escapes the damage that is done by out-of-town centres. Even insurance brokers are affected," stated Glyn.

"Despite the misconceptions, NIIRTA is not anti-multiple, but we are anti out-of-town development by them, as it creates alternative town centres," he continued. *"Out-of-town locations by the multiples cause damage not just to the local economy and jobs, but destroy the character of town and city centres, which is bad for the community and our environment. In England, where they have had a similar policy to the Northern Ireland Executive, it has resulted in 42 per cent of small towns and villages no longer having a shop of any kind. We have a choice - do we want town centres full of shoppers and vitality, or do we want a huge, one-stop grey box on the outskirts of town, surrounded by a huge car park?"*

SUPERSTORE SATURATION REACHED

"The National Retail Planning Forum carried out definitive research into the impact of the opening of 93 superstores in England and Wales. It came to the conclusion that every superstore that opens results in a net loss of 276 jobs within a 15-kilometre radius. Those jobs are lost in local retailing outlets. Moreover, out-of-town shopping centres are largely staffed by part-time workers", continued Glyn.

"We have reached superstore saturation here and the continuation of current trends will lead to the development of food deserts in Northern Ireland. The department must, with great urgency publish a final and robust PPS5 and, until it does, there should be a moratorium on all out-of-town



Town centres play a vital role in the economic activity of Northern Ireland in terms of jobs and wealth creation, not to mention community cohesion

developments. The Northern Ireland Executive cannot on one hand claim to support local small businesses whilst allowing the current weak and out of date planning policy to remain with the devastation it causes to the community, environment and the economy. Essentially, PPS5 would provide a level playing field by encouraging the development of town centres rather than unsustainable out-of-town development.

"It is crucial that we not only invest in town centres, but also to ensure that we have a strong network of town centre managers," added Glyn. *"We are gradually seeing a reduction from around 23 to 16 town centre managers with either the removal of funding or councils replacing them with economic development officers.*

A HOLISTIC APPROACH NEEDED

We also need to see a greater priority given to the establishment of town centre partnerships, such as we have in Ballymena and several other towns throughout Northern Ireland. In Ballymena local retailers, councillors as well as DSD and DRD officials are represented on their board. This concept – and, indeed, the recognition that town centres play a vital role in the economic activity of Northern

Ireland in terms of jobs and wealth creation, not to mention community cohesion - has been overlooked by the lack of joined-up government.

"Historically, Northern Ireland has failed to recognise the value of its core town centres and we have seen a lack of co-ordinated action by the statutory bodies, such as the Departments of Enterprise, Social Development, Environment and Regional Development. We need a holistic approach based on integrated town centre strategy, including business development, training, marketing and promotion, as well as property development and environmental improvement components.

"The Northern Ireland Executive should consider the establishment of a town centre regeneration agency to champion our town centres, ensuring policy co-ordination by the Executive and to ensure investment and funding are made a higher priority," stated Glyn.

"Given the crucial importance of the independent retail sector in being the major economic driver in our town centres, we need to see the publication of a robust PPS5. While PPS5 remains unpublished it effectively ties one hand behind the back of DSD's efforts to regenerate our town centres," he concluded.



Employment law update

NIIRTA has expressed concern that the new changes announced on 28th July by the Employment and Learning Minister in relation to Maternity Leave could hurt the local economy and may well result in an increase in discrimination against women. NIIRTA Chief Executive, Glyn Roberts said: *"Since 1997 over three dozen new Acts of Parliament in relation to Employment Law have been passed, adding to the administrative burden of small businesses and retailers in Northern Ireland. The Government seems to forget that 98 per cent of all business is small in Northern Ireland and these changes in maternity leave are fine if you have a work force of 400, but if you are trying to run a small shop with four or five staff it clearly creates many problems. It also seems to believe that all local businesses have HR departments to process these changes, which is not the case at all.*

"As pointed out recently by Nicola Brewer, Chief Executive of the Equality Commission in the UK, these changes could well result in women of child-bearing age facing barriers when they apply for jobs. The unintended result of this new legislation could be that more women face possible discrimination, which is clearly unacceptable," continued Glyn.

"NIIRTA wants to see any future employment law have a proper impact analysis on how it will affect our economy and our small employers in Northern Ireland. We want to see employment law that is both business-friendly and family-friendly and which can be fair to employee and employer alike."

FLEXIBLE WORKING CONSULTATION

The Government will explore ways to make dealing with flexible working requests easier for businesses as part of a consultation published on 26th August, which follows on from the announcement that it would extend the right to request flexible working to parents with children who are 16 and under. Previously, only parents of children up to age six or disabled children up to age 18 had the right to request flexible working.

Commenting, Employment Relations Minister, Pat McFadden, said the consultation would seek views from business and suggest ways to reduce paperwork involved with flexible working requests. *"The right to request flexible working has worked well because it helps employees to balance their home and work lives, but at the same time gives employers the right to say no where there are legitimate business concerns. Parenting requirements don't end as children get older. We think it is right to extend this successful scheme and help parents of older children access the flexibility they need."*

The consultation will consider ways to raise awareness of the right to request flexible working among employees and to boost knowledge of the range of free tools available to make dealing with requests quicker and simpler for businesses.

BusinessLink.gov.uk has online forms that employers can use to deal with flexible working requests. It also provides guidance that can help save time, money and stress and avoid businesses paying for professional external advice.

RIGHT TO OVERTIME CONTINUES

Following negotiations at the EU Employment Council on 10th June, the UK, among other Member States, negotiated an opt-out clause to be reinstated into the Working Hours Directive.

The deal has secured the right for UK workers to

choose to work longer than 48 hours a week, although a working hours cap has been set at between 60 and 65 hours per week, down from the previous 78 hours. Workers in the UK will not be able to sign waivers exempting them from the Working Time Directive during their first month of employment and cannot be penalised by their employers if they subsequently decline to do so.

The ministers also agreed that, seven years after the new law comes into force, the European Commission would write a report on the use of the opt-out. After the ministers evaluate the report, the Commission could potentially propose to scrap the opt-out altogether.

Parliament's consent is still needed in order to proceed with the agreement reached by EU Ministers. If the vote scheduled for the end of this year fails, the deal will go back to the drawing board.

During the negotiations the UK also accepted the Agency Workers Directive, which means that, following a 12-week qualifying period, agency workers are to be given equal treatment to permanent employees, thus qualifying for holiday and sick pay. The qualification period has increased from initial discussions that would have given temporary employees these rights after six weeks.





Building stronger links

NIIRTA and UFU presidents meet to discuss common agenda



Pictured (l-r) are NIIRTA President Paul Stewart, UFU President Graham Furey, Kate Cairns, UFU Policy Officer, and Glyn Roberts, NIIRTA CEO

Ulster Farmers' Union President Graham Furey and Food Chain Policy Officer Kate Cairns met with NIIRTA President Paul Stewart and Chief Executive Glyn Roberts at the NIIRTA office on Ormeau Road on 19th August to discuss ways in which the two organisations can work together to increase support to local suppliers and rural businesses.

Speaking afterwards, UFU President Graham Furey said: *"This has been a very constructive meeting. Local farmers have a very good working relationship with independent retailers across Northern Ireland. Local farms and local independent retailers both tend to be family run businesses. They are central to many of our rural communities across Northern Ireland and we look forward to building even stronger linkages between farmers and their local independent retailer. We have explored areas of opportunity such as the potential for more emphasis on seasonal produce from Northern Ireland and the benefits of retailing fresh and genuinely local produce."*

COMMITTED TO LOCAL FOOD

NIIRTA President Paul Stewart also commented: *"NIIRTA members pride themselves in their support of local farmers and suppliers in Northern Ireland. Our members retail nearly 100 per cent local meat and poultry and are committed to increasing the amount of all locally sourced food in our stores. We look forward to broadening our relationship with the UFU and recognise that both organisations have a clear common agenda in seeing all rural businesses – from farmer to retailer - get a fair deal from the NI Executive."*

Glyn Roberts, NIIRTA Chief Executive, added: *"We are also looking at greater policy co-ordination with the UFU, particularly with the current DARD consultation on the Rural White Paper and for the need for a Rural Champion in Northern Ireland. NIIRTA is also currently drafting the first ever policy manifesto on behalf of the independent retail sector and is keen to get input from the UFU on many key policy areas."*

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NIIRTA

Benefits of Membership

Do you have a News Story? Contact NIIRTA with the details and we'll cover it if we can!

What is NIIRTA?

It's not just a lobbying body – it's a trade association with an excellent range of services and benefits available to members.

What can NIIRTA do for you?

NIIRTA can provide retailers with advice on a whole range of issues – from rates reductions and car parking to crime prevention and legislation information.

Here's a list of what's on offer from NIIRTA.....

NIIRTA News – a regular update on issues affecting you!

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Press cuttings – just send a blank e-mail with "Press" in the title to admin@niirta.com

Weekly e-mail digest – with latest planning news – if you wish to receive details of planning applications send an e-mail to admin@niirta.com with 'Planning' in the subject line

NIIRTA Advice Helpline – Available 9.00-5.00 – Monday to Friday – for specific advice on employment and other issues.

BUPA Healthcare – available to all members and staff – Tel: 0800 328 3654

Willis Insurance – Property insurance at competitive rates – Contact NIIRTA or Ian McClure at Willis Insurance – 028 9089 5068 and mobile 07961 453303

HCMA – a sickness and injury scheme similar to BUPA – contact NIIRTA for details or telephone 01423 866985 (and quote NIIRTA).

Vehicle Leasing – Fleet Financial are offering members vehicle leasing with 18 per cent discount – contact Fleet Financial or NIIRTA

XACT – Health & Safety/Food Management System available at competitive rates – 'No Obligation' audit facility available to NIIRTA members. Contact Xact on 0845 665 3006.

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