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Violence against retailers

# Triumph!



**As Tesco shelves its plans for Ballycastle, local independent retailers heave a sigh of relief. A battle is won but the war is not yet over!**

NIIRTA is delighted with the news that Tesco has withdrawn its plans to appeal the refusal of planning permission for a huge store on the outskirts of Ballycastle. The supermarket giant appears to have abandoned its plans for a 47,000 square foot out-of-town supermarket and petrol station at Leyland Heights and has withdrawn an appeal lodged with the Planning Appeals Commission (PAC).

The initial application had been rejected by planners for contravening PPS5, marking what is understood to be the first planning permission refusal for Tesco in Northern Ireland. The proposed store was outside the town's commercial core in an area zoned for housing and planners rightly believed that the scale of the proposal would lead to significant loss of investment in Ballycastle town centre and would not complement or meet any existing deficiency in the overall shopping provision.

### TOWN CENTRE SAVED

Bryan Gray, outgoing Chief Executive of NIIRTA, who led the opposition to the store's development, said that the decision has saved the vitality and character of the town centre. "This enormous store would have destroyed Ballycastle, but NIIRTA was able to help local people help themselves and oppose this application."

NIIRTA member Brian McLister, whose store is in Anne Street in Ballycastle's town centre, reiterated the importance of the decision for the town. He said: "This is a tourist town with a unique set of shops that people from all over Northern Ireland and beyond have been coming to for years. They would stop coming if the commercial centre had become a row of boarded up premises and charity shops. That's what would have happened if the Tesco store had been built."

### NOTE OF CAUTION

Striking a note of caution, however, Bryan Gray questioned the motives behind Tesco's withdrawal. "Frankly we don't know why the application was withdrawn," he said. "Tesco said it was because they were listening to the concerns of local people. I don't believe that for a second - my view is that they were advised they were going to lose the appeal."

"Our major concern is that Tesco will come back with a similar application for a different site and the reality is that the scale of the damage that would cause to the town

(Continued over)



(Continued from front)

centre would be huge. The planned store had a projected turnover of £16.6m per annum, yet the combined turnover of exiting retailers in Ballycastle is currently £12m. The existing town centre is already under threat. There are presently 12 empty units in the commercial centre and you have to remember that Ballycastle only has a population of 7,000 people. A store of that size would decimate the rest of the town."

### REALITY BITES

"There are countless examples of stores on the edge of towns across the UK leading to the decimation of town centres and serious erosion of the character and life of towns and villages," continued Bryan Gray. "A good example is the similar sized town of Fakenham, which saw a 64 per cent drop in trade, with the number of vacant shops increasing by 33 per cent following the opening of an out-of-centre Tesco.

"None of the traders in the town are against competition, but any new store must be located in the commercial core where it can bring trade to the town, rather than on an out-of-centre site which will take it away."

## Ministerial meeting

A delegation from NIIRTA recently met with Regional Development Minister Conor Murphy to discuss developments on PPS5 Rural Planning Policy. "The meeting was extremely productive and we left with the strong impression that our concerns have been listened to and that we will see the new policy early in 2008," said NIIRTA's outgoing Chief Executive Bryan Gray. "PPS5 effects all our members and is something we have been campaigning on for a long time. We look forward to seeing a new, robust policy in place shortly."



Pictured at the meeting are Des Stevens, NIIRTA Planning Consultant; Bryan Gray, outgoing Chief Executive of NIIRTA; Conor Murphy MP MLA, Minister for Regional Development; and Tom Uprichard, NIIRTA Chairman.

## Competition Commission's provisional findings

### NIIRTA has given a mixed response to the Competition Commission's (CC) Provisional Findings, which were published on 31 October.

Bryan Gray outgoing Chief Executive of NIIRTA said: "The Competition Commission's findings show clearly that in a number of local markets consumers are disadvantaged by the lack of competition. We welcome this conclusion as well as the fact that the Commission will now look to intervene to deliver greater fairness into the supply chain. This is a step forward, although we remain cautious about a number of aspects of the report."

"The convenience sector has argued from the outset that dominant players with buyer power can abuse their relationships with suppliers. Where this occurs the knock on effect is a reduction in opportunities for retail competitors and ultimately a lack of choice for consumers. We are strongly of



the view that the Supermarket Code of Practice is not working. It is too weak in its wording and it is not proactively enforced. The CC must look at this."

"We agree with the Commission that the planning system currently works in favour of the existing national level grocery retailers and that this stops small retailers investing or expanding. We are encouraged that the Commission's findings have dispelled the myth that supermarkets are being stopped from building new stores by the planning system," continued Bryan. "At a local level we remain perturbed by the absence of any new retail planning policy (PPS5) and will continue to lobby the local Assembly and the local Ministers to see this situation resolved."

"We will be consulting with members and responding in detail to the Commission's report, raising our specific concerns. We look forward to taking a full part in discussions on the remedies needed to address the competition problems in the market and we will argue for real change that will benefit consumers," he added.



## Wave goodbye ... say hello!

Two-thousand-and-eight has dawned with a new face at the helm of the NIIRTA. Chief Executive since the Association's formation eight years ago, Bryan Gray is leaving for sunnier climes and has been replaced by the former Head of Press and Parliamentary Affairs at the Federation of Small Businesses, Glyn Roberts.



*Outgoing NIIRTA Chief Executive Bryan Gray welcomes newly appointed Chief Executive Glyn Roberts to his new role.*

Commenting on his time in office, Bryan said: *"I am delighted with what we have achieved in the last eight years and have a lot of hope for the future of retail. I have seen a tremendous amount of change and, although I am sad to leave it all behind, it is the right time for me to do so."*

Bryan has been the driving force behind the independent retail trade sector's push for a robust PPS5 Retail Planning Policy, which it is hoped will finally be published this year. He has also led the organisation's lobbying and publicity activities on a wide range of issues, from environmental

concerns to liquor licensing.

New Chief Executive Glyn Roberts, who is currently touring Northern Ireland with Bryan meeting members, said of his new appointment: *"After nearly seven years with the FSB it was time to move on to a new challenge with NIIRTA. The independent retail sector plays a crucial role in Northern Ireland's economy, providing investment and employment in every section of local communities. It is my intention to ensure that NIIRTA's policy agenda continues to be heard loud and clear with decision makers at Stormont."*

Glyn is also Vice Chairman of the Northern Ireland Government Affairs Group, a member of the OFCOM Advisory Committee for Northern Ireland and is a council member of Northern Ireland Chest Heart and Stroke Association. He is a member of the Chartered Institute of Public Relations, National Union of Journalists and the Public Relations Institute of Ireland. Before joining NIIRTA he was for seven years the Head of Press and Parliamentary Affairs for the Federation of Small Businesses and has also worked for Weber Shandwick and the Ulster Cancer Foundation.



## Loyalty pays dividends...

**NIIRTA board member Russell Miller from Dromore recently ran a special loyalty scheme in his store which resulted in Dromore High School receiving £5,000 worth of computer equipment.**

The scheme ran from September when five thousand key rings with bar codes were issued to both shoppers and school children which, when presented at the till, accumulated points for the fund. Russell is pictured celebrating the success of the scheme with Dromore High School pupils Ryan Adair and Gemma Clark.



# PM aiming for bag ban

## Gordon Brown ignores his own advisors



Prime Minister Gordon Brown has said he would like to see a total ban on single-use plastic bags used in the UK, describing them as "the most visible symbol of environmental health".

While conceding that many retailers had already promised to reduce the 'environmental impact' of plastic bags by 25 per cent over the next year, Mr Brown said: "I believe we can go further. Indeed, I am convinced that we can eliminate single-use plastic bags altogether in favour of long-lasting and more sustainable alternatives."

More than 13 billion bags are issued every year to shoppers in the UK - about 220 per person. Billions find their way into landfill, although they constitute less than one per cent of domestic waste, which experts say makes them more efficient than other forms of packaging.

### COMMITTED TO WRAP INITIATIVE

Commenting, outgoing Bryan Gray Chief Executive of NIIRTA said: "NIIRTA is committed to encouraging retailers and their customers to reduce the amount of plastic bags they use. We signed up to the UK-wide industry ambition of reducing the environmental impact of plastic bags by 25 per cent by the end of 2008 and we are working alongside WRAP to pursue this objective."

"Under the WRAP initiative, retailers are already actively seeking to reduce the environmental impact of plastic bags in a number of ways, such as encouraging offering 'bag for life' alternatives"

"As promoted by NIIRTA, many retailers in Northern Ireland have also actively embraced the NEEDabag? Campaign run by 'Bag Lady' Shirley Lewis. Shirley's campaign encourages retailers to train all their staff to ask the simple question 'Do you need a bag?' with every transaction."

"Many members who have adopted the NEEDabag? campaign are reporting significant reductions in their plastic bag usage, of up to 75%. Not only is this helping to reduce the number of plastic bags ending up in landfill, it is also a significant cost saving to their business," added Bryan.



# Big hearted retailers

Retailers from across Northern Ireland joined Action Cancer recently to celebrate the first anniversary of the charity's Big Bus mobile screening unit at a special event at Stormont.

The 18 metre-long articulated unit is the first of its kind in Europe and was launched at the end of September 2006 to bring life-saving and supportive services to people's doorsteps. Over the past 12 months 4,500 people have used services onboard the Big Bus, including 2,870 women who have been screened for breast cancer.

The Big Bus is costing £1.5 million to operate over the first three years, with £612,000 of that figure being committed by NIIRTA members, who not only raise funds for the project on an ongoing basis, but also host Big Bus visits to their stores. So far, these retailers have raised over £350,000 towards the costs of the unit.



Pictured at the Big Bus celebrations are (l-r) Action Cancer Chief Executive Robin McRoberts with NIIRTA members Frank McPolin from Banbridge, David Heenan from Newcastle and Mary and Patsy from Ballymoney.

# NIIRTA Comment on Sainsbury Buy Out Of Curley's

Commenting on the announcement of the Sainsbury buy out of Curley's Supermarkets, the Northern Ireland Independent Retail Trade Association has described the decision as 'disappointing'.

NIIRTA Chief Executive Glyn Roberts said: "We understand the difficulties faced by the Kennedy family, who have served their community well for many years and

realise that it is a commercial decision made by them, it is nevertheless disappointing that one of our largest independent local retailers in Northern Ireland is being sold to one of the big multiples"

"Multiple Retailers in the rest of the UK have long adopted the practise of buying successful competitors out of the market place. We are concerned that more and more of our independent retail sector will

be lost in this way, removing local choice and diversity to consumers"

"A key challenge for the NI Executive is to do more much more to support local retailers and ensure that these local businesses can continue to contribute to the local economy and provide the vital service and investment to our community"



# Violence against retailers increases

## One-third of retailers experienced violent crime in 2007

One in three retailers has been the victim of violent crime over the past 12 months, according to the 2007 Retail Violence Survey, carried out by trade magazine, Independent Retail News. The extent of violence varied from region to region across the UK with Northern Ireland at the lower end of the scale, at 24.4 per cent, but is still a worrying trend.

### FACTS AND FIGURES

A very frightening one in eight respondents required hospital treatment – almost double the figure in the 2006 survey.

Drink and/or drugs seem to be common factors associated with the increase violent crime against retailers, with the report showing that 68 per cent of violent attacks were alcohol-related, up from 45 per cent in 2006, while drugs were said to be “often” the cause in 32 per cent of incidences of in-store violence, committed either by those under the influence or after the funds to feed their habit.

### POLICE RESPONSE

*“6-in-10 retailers said nothing happened when they reported incidents to the police. A very low 1.8 per cent of incidents reported had charges brought which resulted in conviction!”*



### DISTURBING AND SHOCKING

*“This survey makes for disturbing reading. The rise in intimidation, threatening behaviour and harassment, often fuelled by alcohol and drugs, is most alarming, since this behaviour is such a small step away from violence,”* said Bryan Gray, outgoing Chief Executive of NIIRTA

*“It is also concerning that many of those questioned said that no action was taken by police when reported. Verbal abuse and intimidation is a crime and should not be perceived otherwise,”* said Bryan. *“Shop theft is not a victimless crime and the abuse of retail staff should never be accepted as an occupational hazard.”*

*“As members will know, NIIRTA recently met with the Northern Ireland Policing Board (NIPB) to discuss the growing incidence of retail crime and the problems some of our members encounter in their dealings with police. We look forward to working more closely with the NIPB to develop a number of initiatives to help resolve these issues.”*

## ENERGY SCHEME TO CUT OPERATING COSTS AND HELP THE ENVIRONMENT

**Working with The Carbon Trust, NIIRTA are launching a programme to examine ways in which members can reduce energy usage in their premises.**

The Carbon Trust was set up set up by Government in response to the threat of climate change and helps business and the public sector to reduce carbon emissions.

An initial scoping study carried out for the NIIRTA by the Carbon Trust has identified the opportunity for savings of up to one third through the day to day management of premises, retrofitting energy saving equipment and by careful design when stores are re-fitted.

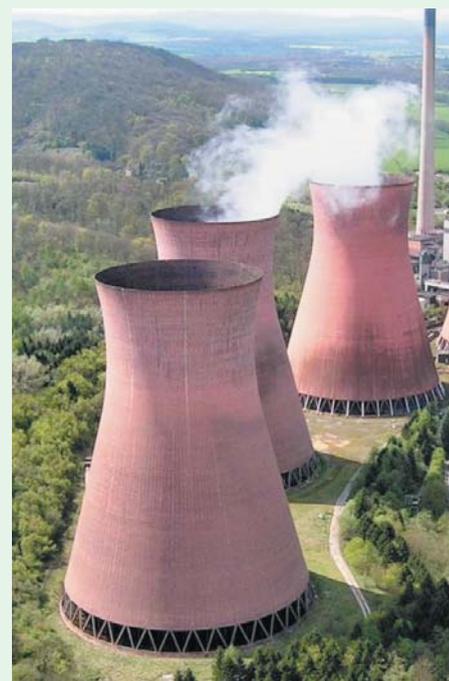
Commenting on the programme, NIIRTA Chief Executive Glyn Roberts said *“More effective management of energy will deliver reductions in operating costs*

*and carbon emissions for all of our members. We aim to explore the short term opportunities, whilst also looking to the longer term to take best advantage of the new energy technologies emerging in the marketplace”.*

In order to develop the aims of the programme, NIIRTA Members are encouraged to participate in a benchmarking exercise being carried out during February and March.

For the programme to be a success we need information on your store, and how much energy you consume. A dedicated website giving more details on how to participate will be online from mid-February.

Visit [www.niirta.com](http://www.niirta.com) and click on the relevant link to find out more. The success of the programme depends on the members’ co-operation.





# Consumer needs not being met

**NIIRTA has welcomed research which shows that a significant proportion of consumers are not being catered for in the current grocery market. The study highlights the need for the Competition Commission to further investigate the effect of market concentration on consumers.**

'Consumers' Shopping Wants and UK Grocery Retailing', produced by the British Brands Group, shows that more than a quarter of the population are disadvantaged by the decline in independent and specialist stores. This is made up of older people, wealthier shoppers, ethnic groups and single parents with dependent children. The research discovered that 4.4 million people in the identified four groups feel that there is not a good choice of different shops in their area.

Key factors for all consumer groups are

- accessibility (car versus no-car);
- location (rural versus urban);
- time (working versus non-working);
- budget (price versus value).

In the case of location many rural stores are dependant on the existence of a Post Office. The presence of the two is symbiotic and the collapse of one leads to the collapse of the other.



## KEY FINDINGS

Some key findings from the research include:

- Being close to home and ability to walk to the store are key reasons to use convenience stores. Although the majority of the population use cars to carry out their shopping, there was still 27 per cent of the population in households without the regular use of a car in the latest UK census. There were no cars in almost half of lone parent households with dependent children and in 69 per cent of single person households where the householder is over the state pension age.
- The majority in all consumer groups agree that continued supermarket growth would lead to the closure of local independent stores. The majority in each group agree this



would have a negative impact on friendly / personal service and would damage the local community.

- The research particularly highlights the importance of convenience stores in providing access to grocery shopping, especially for those who are unable to reach supermarkets. The groups surveyed also highlighted fears that the continued expansion of supermarkets would lead to the closure of independent shops and a reduction in choice.

## CC MUST ACT

Responding to the research NIIRTA's outgoing Chief Executive Bryan Gray said: "This is a crucial piece of research which challenges the view that supermarkets bring nothing but benefits for consumers. More than a quarter of the population are not having their needs met by the structure and competition of the current grocery market."

"This study warns the Commission and commentators against sweeping conclusions that treat consumers as a homogenous, car borne group. Rather, as this study shows, a large proportion rely on a much broader retail mix and where that is failing, their interests are undermined.

"Now is the time to act to ensure that the choice and diversity which these consumers need is available," added Bryan. "This research proves that the Competition Commission must take steps to ensure there is a healthy grocery market for all consumers."





# Driven out of business

## Petrol station numbers decline by over 40 per cent



**It's just over a decade since the multiples first arrived in Northern Ireland and, in that time, the number of petrol stations across the country has declined to just 555 sites open at the end of 2006 – a drop of more than 40 per cent in ten years - according to forecourt market specialists, Catalist.**

However, while 125 sites owned and operated by individual retailers and petrol companies closed in the five years to the end of 2006, during the same period the supermarkets increased the numbers of their filling stations from 18 to 26 – a whopping 44 per cent.

The cost of developing a petrol station running at around £1.5 million and, with fuel sales alone offering little or no profit, investing in this business is prohibitive for many, but not for the multiples! They are able to build bigger stations with greater storage capacity adjacent to their main line of business (supermarkets) and, with their buying power, are able to sell fuel cheaper than their independent competitors.

This unbalanced competitive advantage is making the once lucrative petrol station business increasingly untenable for many independents. Commenting, Bryan Gray, outgoing Chief executive of NIIRTA, said:

*"It's a preposterous situation – there are actually fewer petrol stations in Northern Ireland today than there were in 1910! The cut price fuel offered by the multiples is driving independents out of business at an alarming rate. By the time consumers realise that their 'cheap' petrol is not so cheap when they have to use a gallon just to get to the nearest petrol station it will be too late."*

*"For example, the only petrol station in Cushendall has closed and people have to drive to Carnlough or Cargan to fill up now. What happens if they close too? This is a serious situation, especially in rural areas, and people need to wake up to the reality of what the future might hold if more independent petrol stations close."*

[www.niirta.com](http://www.niirta.com)

## NIIRTA NEWS

Regular NIIRTA Benefits column

**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 me?

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!

**NIIRTA Website** – new and improved - visit [www.niirta.com](http://www.niirta.com)

**Public Affairs** – NIIRTA is the voice at Government level on all issues affecting your business

**Press cuttings** – just send a blank e-mail with "Press" in the title to [admin@niirta.com](mailto:admin@niirta.com)

**Weekly e-mail digest** – with planning latest – if you wish to receive details of planning applications send an e-mail to [admin@niirta.com](mailto:admin@niirta.com) with 'Planning' in the subject line.

**NIIRTA Database** – contact details for all members and associate members (let NIIRTA know if you DON'T want your details on the database)!

**NIIRTA Advice Hotline** – Available 9-5.30 – Monday to Friday – for specific advice on employment and other issues – take advantage of NIIRTA's expertise – at the end of the phone.

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

**Friends Provident Stakeholder Pension Scheme** – if you employ more than five people – we can advise you on Pension Packages – contact NIIRTA

**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).

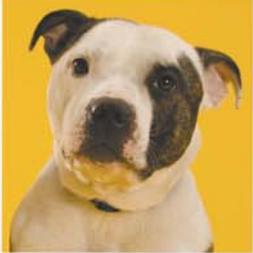
**Western Provident** – Private healthcare packages for members – contact NIIRTA

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

**Packaging Management** – The complex packaging requirements can be a burden to retailers – so NIIRTA has engaged the Packaging Management Group to assist members to achieve compliance and has negotiated a 20 per cent discount – contact PMG on 01985 218 688.

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

**To find out more about any of NIIRTA's services e-mail [admin@niirta.com](mailto:admin@niirta.com) or telephone 028 9022 0004.**



**Ouza**

# Help us raise **£500,000** to help homeless dogs



**Gina**



**Bex**



**Mae**

Launching on 1st January 2008, The Pedigree® Adoption Drive™ will be supported with a £4.5 million campaign, demonstrating Pedigree's commitment to raising money and awareness around the issue of homeless dogs in the UK.



For every Pedigree product sold Pedigree will donate money, aiming to raise up to £500,000 in the first three months.



The campaign will be communicated on-pack from 1st January 2008 until 31st March 2008 and will be supported with a package that includes in-store POS, TV, Press, PR & online.



**Honey**



**Patch**



Contact your Mars Petcare UK representative or your local wholesaler for more information.

## Sell More Help More

All dogs shown cared for at Battersea Dogs & Cats Home.



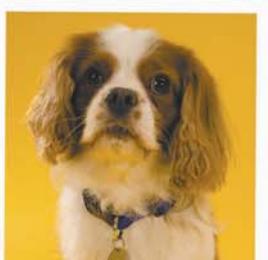
**wolfie**



**ISAAC**



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**Toddy**



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