

NIIRTA *news*

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NORTHERN IRELAND INDEPENDENT RETAIL TRADE ASSOCIATION

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Rates relief at last!

NIIRTA strongly welcomes Assembly statement by Dodds



NIIRTA Chief Executive Glyn Roberts explains some of the issues facing independent retailers to Department of Finance & Personnel Minister Nigel Dodds at the DUP's recent party conference

The Northern Ireland Independent Retail Trade Association has strongly welcomed the announcement in the Assembly on 15th December that Department of Finance & Personnel Minister Nigel Dodds is to establish a targeted small business rates relief scheme and the freezing of non-domestic rates in cash terms next year. NIIRTA also welcomed the reduction of electricity prices for business and urged further cuts in the near future.

Commenting, NIIRTA Chief Executive Glyn Roberts said: *"This has been a good day for both local businesses and the Assembly and we are delighted that much of Minister Dodds' statement reflects much of our core policy agenda. NIIRTA has been lobbying consistently on the need for the establishment of a small business rates relief scheme for the past five years and we are delighted that the Minister has listened to us.*

"This move brings Northern Ireland into line with the rest of the UK and is a scheme that we hope will give small retailers help with their rates bill, which will allow them to have more working capital to reinvest in their business. We will work with the DFP to ensure that the legislation for the Small Business Rates Relief scheme will be effective and deliver for local small retailers and businesses.

"The freezing in cash terms of non domestic rates will help those small retailers who are struggling with the current economic downturn and until the small business rates relief scheme is implemented in 2010," added Glyn.

HELPFUL FOR SMALL BUSINESSES

Responding to the 10-day target for public sector bodies to pay small businesses invoices Glyn continued: *"This will be very helpful for those small businesses who supply the public sector as a strong cash flow for small retailers is absolutely crucial to get them through this difficult time."* On the reduction of electricity prices, he said: *"It is about time that electricity costs started to come down for hard pressed small retailers who have seen increases of over 60 per cent in electricity bills in the last year. While this 10.8 per cent is welcome, we do need to see more radical reductions, as businesses in Northern Ireland are still paying 20 per cent more for energy than other parts of the UK.*

"It is good that we are at last starting to see real delivery by the Executive and this shows that devolution can make a difference to our local economy," concluded Glyn.



Lobbying hard on behalf of members

NIIRTA steps up engagement with the Northern Ireland Assembly

NIIRTA has proactively stepped up its lobbying activities in recent months by running events at local party conferences and meeting with the First and Deputy First Ministers to discuss the global downturn. NIIRTA, along with the NI Chamber of Commerce and ASITIS Consulting, has run fringe events at the DUP and UUP Party Conferences, both of which attracted a wide range of party MLAs and MPs and at which both party leaders Peter Robinson MP MLA and Sir Reg Empey MLA made addresses. NIIRTA is planning to run events at the other party conferences in the coming year.

Commenting on this activity, NIIRTA Chief Executive Glyn Roberts said: "NIIRTA is now increasing its engagement with the NI Assembly and all local political parties. Whether it be publishing draft PPS5, employment law, the credit crunch, energy costs or any other issue impacting upon our members, NIIRTA is at the forefront in lobbying on their behalf."

FIRST EVER POLICY MANIFESTO

"We have had a terrific response at the two party conference events we have run and hope to do the same with the others in the coming year ahead. I was also delighted

that the Leader of the Conservative Party, David Cameron MP, took the time to visit the NIIRTA Exhibition stand at the UUP Conference on 6th December.

"In early 2009 NIIRTA will be publishing its first ever policy manifesto, setting out our main policy objectives for the Northern Ireland Assembly. All in all, NIIRTA members can rest assured that, on the policy issues that affect them, we are leaving no stone unturned in trying to address them, whether it be with Local Councils, the Northern Ireland Assembly, the House of Commons or the European Parliament."



Ann McGregor, Chief Executive of the NI Chamber of Commerce, and Glyn Roberts, Chief Executive of NIIRTA in discussion with First Minister and DUP leader Peter Robinson at the DUP conference in Armagh.



First Minister and DUP leader Peter Robinson and Environment Minister Sammy Wilson are pictured with Glyn Roberts, Chief Executive of NIIRTA at the 2008 DUP Conference in Armagh.



Glyn Roberts, NIIRTA Chief Executive, addressing the NIIRTA/Chamber of Commerce Business Breakfast at the UUP Conference



Pictured at the business breakfast at the UUP Conference are Sir Reg Empey MLA, Minister for Employment and Learning; Eammon Calvin, of the NI Chamber of Commerce; Glyn Roberts, Chief Executive of NIIRTA; and Danny Kennedy MLA, UUP Deputy Leader



Publish PPS5 now!

On 4th November, the Northern Ireland Independent Retail Trade Association and the Association of Town Centre Management issued a joint call for the Department of Environment to publish PPS5, the long awaited Retail Planning Policy that promotes town centres as first choice for retail investment and restricts out-of-town development.

Commenting, NIIRTA Chief Executive Glyn Roberts said: *"We are delighted to join with our colleagues in the Association of Town Centre Management to promote sustainable investment in our town and city centres and call for the immediate publication of PPS5, which will provide a level playing field for local retailers. Our town and city centres can become the engine room in regenerating our local economy, which offers a dynamic mix of niche, independent and multiple retailers that can attract local consumers and tourists alike."*

Sharon Scott, Regional Chair of Association of Town Centre Management, which represents 23 of the largest town and city centres in Northern Ireland, also said: *"A robust Retail Planning Policy is crucial to the regeneration of our town and city centres, as has been demonstrated in England since the introduction of PPS6. In today's tough economic climate, it is vital that Northern Ireland's town and city centres are afforded the same protection and ability to compete effectively. A Draft PPS5 was drawn up in July 2006 and, despite persistent lobbying from NIIRTA, ATCM (NI) and others, we have seen nothing."*

UNANIMOUS BACKING OF ASSEMBLY

NIIRTA and ATCM's joint call follows on from the unanimous vote in favour of the publication of draft PPS5 by the Northern Ireland Assembly on 22nd September, during which MLAs from all parties supported the motion: 'That this Assembly notes with concern the impact that out-of-town retail centres can have on the viability of town centres and calls on the Minister of the Environment to publish and implement PPS5'.

This is the first time that the Northern Ireland Assembly has made such a call and follows the publication of NIIRTA's report



'Nightmare on Every Street' last year, which made a strong case for the immediate publication of PPS5.

Commenting on the Assembly's vote, Glyn Roberts, NIIRTA Chief Executive said: *"This 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 small traders and the multiples alike."*

A MAJOR STEP FORWARD

"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. It cannot come soon enough, as towns such as Omagh, Larne, Antrim, Ballyclare, Ballynahinch and Derry are all facing out-of-town applications by the multiples, all of which are contrary to both Draft PPS5 and, indeed, this vote in the Northern Ireland Assembly."

"We were greatly encouraged by the recent all-party support for the implementation of PPS5 in the Northern Ireland Assembly. The Minister now has the opportunity to deliver a real boost and economic life line to our town and city centres and we look forward to seeing its prompt publication and implementation," added Sharon Scott.



Crunch talks with Ministers

Robinson and McGuinness discuss economic challenges with business sector

The First and Deputy First Ministers, the Rt Hon Peter Robinson MP MLA and Martin McGuinness MP MLA met local business leaders on 21st October at Stormont to hear at first hand their assessment of the difficulties facing the private sector in the current economic climate and the impact of the credit crunch.

The meeting was one of a series, which has included senior local representatives of the main financial institutions, the Institute of Directors, the construction sector, the trade unions and the energy sector and regulator, as well as the social and voluntary sector, all aimed at getting different perspectives on the implications of the current economic slowdown.

Speaking at the meeting, Mr Robinson said: "Northern Ireland is not immune from the current global economic crisis and its effects. Rises in the cost of living have seen a reduction in spending and local businesses have begun to feel the knock-on effects.

"We have held discussions with local business leaders today in order to understand fully the nature and complexity of the problems they face. The Executive remains committed to developing the local economy and it is imperative that we look to find ways of assisting local business through this difficult period."

Mr McGuinness added: "Over the past number of weeks we have held a number of meetings with various sectors to build a full understanding of how all elements of



our society can work together to ease the effects of the current economic downturn. It is vital that a partnership approach is taken if we are to face down the challenges of instability and develop a competitive, prosperous economy."

ECONOMIC SUMMIT NEEDED

At the meeting NIIRTA and the other business organisations also outlined the need for an Economic Summit which brings together local Ministers, Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and all the economic

stakeholders to chart a way forward for Northern Ireland in the context of the global economic downturn.

Commenting afterwards, NIIRTA Chief Executive Glyn Roberts said that the needs of the independent retail sector were similar to many other businesses across Northern Ireland.

"We outlined the need for a full-scale economic summit, designed to bring about an action plan for business growth in Northern Ireland in the context of the global downturn and credit crunch. The Scottish First Minister and Secretary of State have convened such an event today and our Executive needs to likewise."

MEASURES TO STIMULATE GROWTH

"We need to see further investment in energy efficiency measures to help businesses save money, particularly investment in worthwhile organisations like the Carbon Trust, who have a proven record of delivering for business whilst clearly being under-funded.

"NIIRTA is calling upon the Executive to bring forward measures that seem to have been lost in the system, like PPS5 and PPS14," added Glyn. "We need to see investment in capital projects to help stimulate the construction industry, but most of all we need to know that our government is putting its own difficulties behind it and coming up with a workable plan to see our economy through."

Roberts Elected to Northern Ireland Assembly and Business Trust

NIIRTA Chief Executive Glyn Roberts has been elected to the Board of the Northern Ireland Assembly and Business Trust at its recent AGM.

The Trust was established in 2002 as an independent and self-financing educational charity which organises programmes for Assembly members and Business representatives which includes exchanges, seminars, visits and placements. NIABT has the support of all the main political parties in the Assembly and its Chairman is Sean

Neeson MLA with the Speaker of the Assembly William Hay MLA being its President.

Glyn Roberts said: "The Trust plays an important role in promoting a better understanding of business among MLAs and vice versa. As a member of the NIABT board I hope to promote a greater understanding of our local independent retail sector and would like to see local MLAs visiting our members' stores in the near future."



Glyn Roberts with William Hay MLA Speaker of the Assembly and Sean Neeson MLA, Chairman of the Northern Ireland Assembly Business Trust



NIIRTA reacts to Pre-Budget Report

NIIRTA has given its reaction to the Pre-Budget Report, which was presented by the Chancellor to the House of Commons on 24th November. The key points for NIIRTA members from the Chancellor's announcement are:

- Reduction in VAT from 17.5 per cent to 15 per cent
- Increase in fuel, alcohol and tobacco duty to offset reduction in VAT
- Freeze on increase in small business rate of corporation tax
- £1 billion Small Business Finance Scheme
- Increase in thresholds for empty property relief

Commenting, Glyn Roberts, NIIRTA Chief Executive, said: *"The Pre-Budget Report does make some positive proposals for restoring business and consumer confidence, as well as stimulating demand and getting people spending more. However, I would question how effective an impact the 2.5 per cent reduction in VAT will have on retailers in terms of increasing consumer spend. Most food products are already exempt from VAT and this minor decrease in the VAT rate will result in very small reductions in those products which are covered by VAT.*

"Some retailers are already running sales reducing products by upward of 20-30 per cent and a 2.5 per cent decrease in VAT would have little impact in seeing a real drop in prices that would encourage consumers to spend more.

SOME WELCOME RELIEF

"What is welcome is the freeze on small business corporation tax, the temporary Small Business Finance Scheme and the announcement that companies can spread the payment of all their business taxes over a more affordable timescale. We are however concerned about the long-term prospects of increased taxes. For example, the planned increase in National Insurance contributions from 2011 will place further pressure on wage bills. We would urge the Government not to impair the recovery of the economy by placing disproportionate burdens on retail businesses.

"We are also very concerned that the Chancellor has increased the tax take on alcohol and tobacco in almost all cases. For example this means that he has increased alcohol duty by 17 per cent this year. Every time the Government raises duty levels on alcohol and tobacco it pushes more people into the black market and fuels an unscrupulous multi-billion pound criminal network," added Glyn.

Plastic Bags

Agreement reached on plastic bags

NIIRTA has welcomed a British Retail Consortium's agreement with the UK Government that aims to halve the number of carrier bags given to shoppers in Northern Ireland from UK multiple supermarkets.

Glyn Roberts, NIIRTA Chief Executive, said: *"NIIRTA members have already been operating such a voluntary scheme for the past year, which has seen a reduction in some small shops of up to 75 per cent of*



carrier bag usage. The 'Do You Need A Bag?' scheme has focused on staff members asking that very question to customers in local shops and has already resulted in a reduction in local carbon emissions of over 36,000 tonnes and nearly 30 million bags not being sent to landfill sites across Northern Ireland.

Interest rate cut welcomed

The Northern Ireland Independent Retail Trade Association has welcomed the 0.5% drop in Interest Rates, but suggested that a 1% cut might have been a more sensible option by the Bank of England.

Glyn Roberts, NIIRTA Chief Executive said: *"While this drop is welcome we had hoped that the MPC would have been bolder and made a reduction of 1% which would have had more of an impact on Consumer Spending and stimulating demand"*

"The key question arising from this decision today is this - will the banks pass on this cut to their customers? Unless Mortgage holders see a real drop in their monthly payments then it is unlikely that they have an incentive to spend more"

SMALL BUSINESS SUPPORT

NIIRTA had previously welcomed the announcement by the Chancellor on 30th October that a European Investment Bank fund of £4bn will be available for banks to support small businesses during the economic downturn.

"This new fund is clearly welcome, as many local small businesses and retailers have not only seen a downturn because of the global economic crisis, but also have sky high electricity costs compared to the rest of the UK," commented Glyn.

"Given these difficulties and the fact that 98 per cent of all businesses in Northern Ireland are SMEs, more and more local businesses will rely on having a secure source of finance from their bank. The key factor is that this fund needs to filter down to help small businesses locally, as their stability is essential to limiting the impact of the global recession on the economy in Northern Ireland."

"Despite the UK multiples playing catch up with local independent retailers on this issue, this agreement does have to be welcomed as a step forward. Minister Sammy Wilson is right not to introduce a plastic bag tax and instead focus on the voluntary approach by changing the attitudes of local customers. Since the Republic of Ireland introduced such a levy, sales of rolls of bin bags have soared by over 800 per cent, which has not contributed to the overall reduction of the volume of plastic going to landfill or its carbon footprint."



Campaign proves a winner all round

The campaign of opposition to the proposed out-of-town Tesco Extra superstore at the Outlet Centre, Banbridge, has proved a winner all round. ASITIS Consulting, the public affairs and public relations firm who ran the campaign alongside NIIRTA, was named 'Silver Award Winner for best Public Affairs Campaign' at the recent CIPR PRide Awards 2008. This was the first year the award, intended to recognise a campaign that informed the public policy agenda or influenced the legislative process, had been presented. In their comments on the campaign, the judges said: "The creative approach, with a limited budget, worked well in this David and Goliath scenario. The campaign generated much local and regional press and broadcast



Barry Turley from ASITIA Consulting and Glyn Roberts, Chief Executive of NIIRTA, with their CIPR PRide Award

coverage and was successful in preserving the local retailers' livelihoods and hundreds of jobs, whilst the large multiples will now have to carefully consider making further applications for out of town developments."

NIIRTA Chief Executive Glyn Roberts was there to pick up the award on the night. Speaking afterwards, Glyn said: "This was to be the largest ever Tesco store on this island. It would have resulted in the closure of hundreds of local small retailers, losses of jobs and would have turned Banbridge Town Centre into a ghost town. We are ecstatic the efforts of local retailers who joined our campaign have been recognised by this award."

Barry Turley, ASITIS Consulting's Director of Public Affairs, added: "We were delighted to be the first recipient of this Public Affairs award. We worked hard to make sure retailers won an important victory at Banbridge. We look forward to similar success with NIIRTA in the future."

Concern for Antrim



NIIRTA has expressed concern about the ASDA application for a large out-of-town store at Junction One. "This proposed out-of-town store is in clear breach of draft PPS5 and will accelerate further the retail decline of Antrim town centre," stated NIIRTA Chief Executive Glyn Roberts.

"Antrim Town Centre has suffered greatly as a result of out-of-town development in recent years and needs a proper plan in place to attract new retailers back to the town. This proposed ASDA store will prevent any serious prospect of retail regeneration of Antrim town centre and will negatively impact on those independent retailers that are already struggling," he continued.

"ASDA claims that it will create many jobs with its proposed store, but the reality is that the independent research from the All Party Group on Small Shops, New Economics Foundation and the National Retail Planning Forum shows that such a store would result in a net loss of 270 jobs from local retailers and suppliers in Antrim.

"How can a net loss of jobs for Antrim and the prospect of its town centre being reduced to a retail ghost town help anyone in this time of financial uncertainty? We want to see sustained investment in Antrim, but not at the expense of its town centre, which this store would seriously threaten."

NIIRTAnews

Master plan for Downpatrick

Department for Social Development Minister, Margaret Ritchie MLA has approved funding for an evaluation of the regeneration potential of Downpatrick town centre. The investment of up to £100,000 to produce a master plan for the town centre will provide an economic analysis of the town's current role and performance.

It will also provide an analysis of development opportunities and land use, advice on appropriate transportation, access and parking changes for the town, as well as establishing strategic regeneration objectives, identifying key town centre sites and the most appropriate form, and timing, of development of those sites. Work is expected to start in February and finish by August 2009.

Making the announcement on 12th December, the Minister said: "The investment to facilitate an evaluation of the development opportunities within Downpatrick town centre will guide the future regeneration policies and proposals for this historic town. I want to use the results of the evaluation to encourage private sector development in the town centre and to provide attractive, shared spaces for residents and visitors and to support local trade and enterprise.

"This will be quite a challenge in the current difficult economic climate, but I am encouraged by the already existing level of private sector investment and the number of opportunities this masterplan will identify. I hope that these opportunities will be taken up in the coming years which will help transform this historic town."



Sausage supremos!



The Ulster Pork and Bacon Forum presented the seventh National Sausage Competition Awards on Wednesday 29th October at the Hilton Hotel in Templepatrick, at which NIIRTA sponsored the Independent Retail Butcher category, which continues to go from strength to strength.

Glyn Roberts, Chief Executive of NIIRTA, is pictured presenting their prizes to first placed Charlie Donnal of Long's in Londonderry; second placed Adrian Boyd of JD Hunter's, Markethill; and third placed Seamus O'Hanlon of McAnerney Brothers, Armagh. Looking on are Ulster Pork and Bacon Forum Chefs Sean Owens and Ciaran Kelly.

An opportunity lost?

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

Commenting, Glyn Roberts, NIIRTA Chief Executive, said: "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 the closure of local businesses and the loss of jobs. Given the recent rejection by the Environment Minister of the proposed Tesco site at the Outlet Centre in Banbridge, which was a mile out of town, we hope that Sammy Wilson will look at this application in the same light.

"We will certainly be seeking an opportunity to present to Omagh District Council, local MLAs and the developers to express our concern at these plans. Tesco and the developer should be looking at a town centre location within Omagh and we would urge them to look at alternatives which would be better suited," he concluded.

2009 Will Be Challenging Year For Retail Sector

As Mark & Spencer announces job losses, Woolworths closes its stores and with many other retailers going into administration, the Northern Ireland Independent Retail Trade Association has warned that 2009 will be a challenging time for all retailers in Northern Ireland and throughout the UK as a whole.

NIIRTA Chief Executive Glyn Roberts said: "It is greatly regretted that so many big name high street retailers are laying off staff or ceasing trading. This will be a serious blow to our local economy as a whole."

"Clearly the 2.5% reduction in VAT is not having the desired impact that the Government hoped it would have in boosting consumer confidence and encouraging greater spending."

"The Bank of England MPC must be bold and continue its programme of reducing interest rates cuts. Reducing the pressure on mortgage holders is a more sensible approach than small reductions in VAT to encourage consumer spending. Our local banks have absolutely no excuse in not passing the decrease on to their customers."

"For thousands of independent retailers in Northern Ireland, 2009 must be the year that draft PPS5 is published to promote sustainable town centre planning by the UK Multiples."

"We are seeing more and more unsustainable out of town development superstore plans by Tesco and ASDA which will result in the net loss of thousands of jobs and the closure of hundreds of small retailers in our town centres if DOE Planning give them the green light."

"In these difficult economic times our economy cannot afford such job losses as a result of an out of date planning system."



Rejuvenation for Newtownards Road



First Minister and MP for the area, Peter Robinson spoke at the launch of NRd2012

NIIRTA Chief Executive Glyn Roberts was a guest at the recent launch of Newtownards Road 2012 (NRd2012) – an exciting project developed by East Belfast Partnership (EBP) that NIIRTA wholeheartedly supports as part of its greater aim of advocating a sustainable future for local businesses and communities in towns and villages throughout Northern Ireland. The NRd2012 project will deliver a rejuvenated lower Newtownards Road for East Belfast and will attract new investment as well as maintaining the local heritage and community pride.

In the past, Newtownards Road was a thriving commercial area and typified East Belfast. Sadly however, the area has deteriorated rapidly since the 1960s owing to a number of factors, such as the decline of the ship-building, rope-making and linen industries; outward migration; changing shopping patterns and, of course, 'The Troubles'. The combination of these factors has led to a number of shops and businesses closing down, leaving many vacant units, derelict buildings and sites.

A KEY PRIORITY

The regeneration of the Newtownards Road was adopted as one of EBP's key priorities in its 2006-2012 regeneration strategy, following a recommendation from local



Pictured at the launch of NRd2012 at Stormont are Anne McMurray, Chair of East Belfast Partnership; Robin Newton MLA, DSD; Minister Margaret Ritchie; and James Brown, Chair of NRd2012.

businessman James Brown. NRd2012 aims to re-create the Newtownards Road as a distinctive, attractive, safe and sustainable place where people want to invest, live, work and relax.

The NRd2012 group includes key representatives from the voluntary, statutory, community and private sector. The group has produced a clear vision that sets out the major actions necessary to achieve its vision for the Newtownards Road with the ultimate aim of improving the lives of the local community. These actions include:

- Regeneration of vacant, derelict and under-used sites and buildings along the road
- Environmental Improvement Scheme

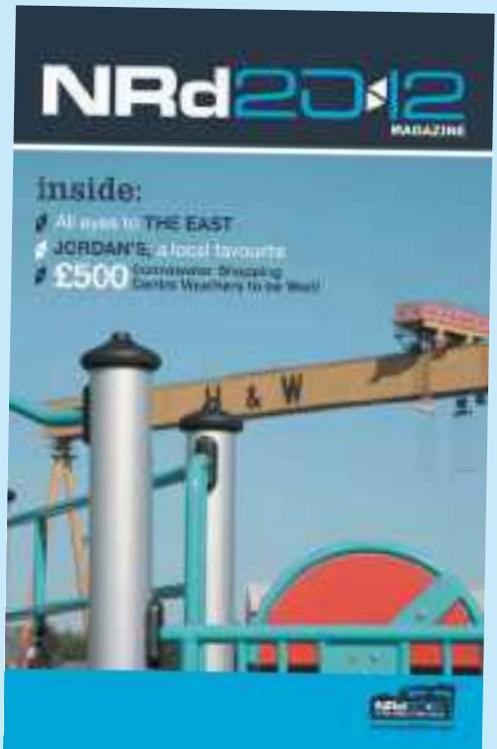
- Shop Frontage Enhancement Scheme
- Living over the Shops Scheme
- Road Protection Line Improvement Scheme.

SIGNIFICANT INVESTMENT

The project was aptly launched in the Long Gallery in Stormont on 24th September 2008 and was hosted by local Councillors and MLAs Robin Newton and Sir Reg Empey. The event was attended by a wide range of people, including local traders and residents, along with representatives from the statutory, community and private sectors. Speakers included Peter Robinson as MP for the area and the DSD Minister Margaret Ritchie, who announced significant investment of £1.4 million for an Environmental Improvement Scheme. This scheme will include improvements to the footpaths and roadways and it is anticipated that it will help create an attractive environment for residents, local businesses and passing commuters as well as acting as a catalyst to deliver the entire NRd2012 project.

Times are changing and a new opportunity is emerging for the Newtownards Road.

For further information on the project please visit www.nrd2012.com.





A smoking gun?

Tobacco display ban based on flawed evidence



NIIRTA has urged Health Minister Michael McGimpsey not to implement in Northern Ireland the UK Government's decision to force retail outlets to remove cigarette displays in England and Wales, as announced on 9th December, despite over 100 MPs signing an early day motion calling on the Government not to impose such a ban on retailers without sufficient evidence. The Scottish Government is also considering such a move.

NIIRTA estimates that the proposals to introduce tobacco display alterations would cost around £5,000 per store and up to £5 million for the local shop sector in Northern Ireland if they are implemented in Northern Ireland.

"This announcement makes a mockery of the UK Government's claim to be the friend of small and local businesses. It is our hope that Health Minister, Michael McGimpsey, will not go down a similar route with local shops in Northern Ireland and show his support for local small businesses," stated NIIRTA Chief Executive Glyn Roberts.

"Unlike their counterparts in the rest of the UK, most local shops in Northern Ireland are not allowed to sell alcohol of any kind and are already struggling with the global downturn and an out-of-date retail planning system. We estimate that this proposal would cost our members up to

£5,000 in alteration costs per shop and could result in a loss to our local economy of over £5 million. This is revenue we simply cannot afford to lose in the local economy at this time.

STRONG CONCERNS VOICED

"Our colleagues in the Association of Convenience Stores have expressed strong concerns over the evidence base used by the UK Government to support the ban. Experiences from the few countries and states which have introduced a ban provide no compelling evidence that a display ban leads to a reduction in smoking," continued Glyn.

"It is deeply frustrating that, whilst the UK Government is willing to treat dismissively robust evidence provided by experts here and abroad about the cost impact on retailers, it is willing to rely on inconclusive and flimsy evidence of the benefits of this measure. For example, evidence from Iceland, cited by the Secretary of State Alan Johnson in comment alongside this announcement, shows that a series of measures, including a ban on tobacco display, appeared to lead to a 10 per cent reduction in youth smoking.

"What was not made clear in this comment was that other measures introduced at the same time included working with parents and proxy purchasers

to tackle the supply of tobacco to young people. These measures are backed by NIIRTA as a more effective and less costly alternative to a display ban."

A STEP TOO FAR

"Instead of a ban on tobacco display, what is needed is properly resourced interventions based on education of young people; effective deterrents against those adults that knowingly introduce smoking to young people and properly resourced policing of the multi-billion pound black market that is subject to almost no regulation at all."

"NIIRTA's members are responsible retailers who have supported many changes to the law, such as the recent legal age change to 18 to buy tobacco products. However, if this ban was to be introduced in Northern Ireland, it would be simply a step too far for many small businesses," continued Glyn.

"Adults who choose to smoke should have the right to buy tobacco and retailers the right to display and sell what is, after all, a legal product. We welcome sensible proposals that will assist in preventing the sale of tobacco to children under the age of 18, but they should be fair, balanced, proportionate and, above all, evidence-based," concluded Glyn.



Associate Member Q&A

Kicking off a new series in NIIRTA News profiling Associate Members, Alistair Toal, General Manager at Graham's Bakery in Dromore, is our first guest ...

On the shelf

What does a typical working day involve for you?

I have just recently taken on the role of General Manager. My previous role within the company was focused primarily on sales and marketing and the new position obviously has a wider remit. My day usually starts with management meetings, where we look at how we're doing against targets, staff issues and anything we need to make happen to improve the business. I also spend time most days speaking to customers about orders, sales, product and promotions. My role is still very much sales-driven and it is important to connect with the customer on a regular basis. With the credit crunch and the increase in the cost of ingredients, so much of what I do is also about business efficiencies and making sure we can provide products with great value and no loss of quality.

What are the best and worst aspects of your job?

The best aspects of my job are the brand development projects and successfully growing sales. The difficult side to this job is trying to juggle so many different areas of work – from staff issues to production and marketing.

What inspires you to work?

The mortgage, my wife... but seriously, achieving results, seeing the business grow and developing our brands all motivate me. Seeing things working out the way you want them to is inspiration enough for me.

How is the independent retail sector important for your company?

It is extremely important to Graham's. Over our 50-year history Graham's success was and continues to be because of the independent retail sector. This is still the largest portion of our business and the independent sector will be critical to the future of the company.



What business achievement are you most proud of?

I am very proud that I have helped to develop a range of brands and that this has translated into a rapid growth in sales – 33 per cent growth in 2007 alone.

What would you say is the main skill needed for your job?

The main skill needed for this job is common sense, but vision, determination and the ability to lead people all help.

Whom in the grocery sector do you most admire and why?

I admire local companies that innovate and have a clear vision of where they want go. Two companies that spring to mind are Mash Direct and Finnebrogue Venison.

What food or drink do you hate and love most?

I dislike cheap, processed food that is full of preservatives. I like good honest, local food with provenance.

Do you have any hidden talents?

I'm not sure it could be called a talent, but I enjoy downhill Mountain Biking. This entails

me careering headlong down mountains on a bike and trying to get to the bottom in one piece, before doing it all over again.

Who or what makes you see red?

One thing that can make me see red is people who would have you believe they know something about a subject they don't and who come across as arrogant or sarcastic.

Why do you believe it is important for your company to be an associate member of NIIRTA?

I think it's important because of long-standing relationship between our company and the independent sector. Through NIIRTA we get to see what's going on in the industry and what the issues are. This helps us better understand our customers.

What next can retailers look forward to from your company?

2009 is going to be an exciting year for Graham's Bakery. We are revamping our products, based on what NIIRTA members have told us they want. That will entail more premium products and an extension of the Indulge in Graham's range.



Fire Compliance



Pictured are (l-r) Dave Thompson, FCSNI Director; Jonathon Reid, FCSNI Regional Manager; and William McDowell, FCSNI Director.

Save on your insurance

Major reforms to fire safety laws are having a major impact upon UK businesses. Workplace Fire Safety is now the legal responsibility of your business and not the Fire Brigade. A supermarket chain was recently fined £250,000 for contraventions under current fire safety legislation across its 41 stores, while a leading sports retailer was ordered to pay £23,550 in fines and costs after pleading guilty to breaches of fire safety legislation in its premises.

Explaining what this all means for retailers, Dave Thompson from Fire Compliance & Safety NI said: *"Fire Safety is one area that cannot be ignored and must be taken seriously. Seventy-seven per cent of businesses that have experienced a major fire never fully recover, so our job is to minimise the risk of fire within the workplace. The Workplace Fire Precautions Legislation places a duty on employers to carry out a Fire Risk Assessment of their workplace and to take appropriate action to minimise the fire hazards and the risks to life and property."*

Insurance discounts

This is where Fire Compliance & Safety NI's specialised Fire Risk Management System excels and is why insurers are offering a minimum of 10 per cent discount on insurance premiums to clients, as a leading insurance broker explained: *"The alliance with FCSNI was awarded in recognition of the quality of the Online Fire Risk Management System, which considerably lowers the fire risk. This enables us to offer FCSNI customers a 10 per cent premium reduction on commercial insurance premiums."*

Dave Thompson continued: *"This reduction in commercial insurance costs can actually offset the cost of the Fire Risk Assessment, which means the business is legally compliant and, most importantly, safe. I would like to offer a Free Fire Safety Health Check to all members of NIIRTA, whereby we will visit your premises, explain the relevant legislation and review the fire safety systems and procedures you have in place. Our aim is to provide businesses with a service that keeps them legally compliant, fully insured and, most importantly, safe. The service we provide is not only comprehensive and easy to use, but is an essential tool for every business owner."*

To take advantage of this offer call FCSNI on 028 9020 2446 or visit www.fcsni.com for further information.

www.niirta.com

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!

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

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.

To find out more about any of NIIRTA's services e-mail admin@niirta.com, visit us at Facebook or telephone 028 9022 0004

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