

Programme for Prosperity

NIIRTA's Economic Programme for Government



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▶ Introduction

"Growing the economy is our top priority. This is vital if we are to provide the wealth and resources required to build the peaceful, prosperous, fair and healthy society we all want to see."

Northern Ireland Executive Programme for Government 2008-2011

"Small shops are the lifeblood of local economies and provide a lifeline to local residents, their survival is vital. If we care about our communities, and the local, independent retailers that give them their character, then it's our responsibility to support them - not just by signing petitions and joining campaigns, but with our cash."

Rt. Hon David Cameron MP, Conservative Party Leader

"Local shops are frequently the hub of the neighbourhoods they serve, where people come together, where generations meet, they are often at the very core of a local identity, they turn a place into a destination."

Rt. Hon Nick Clegg MP, Liberal Democrat Leader



Glyn Roberts, NIIRTA Chief Executive, author of report

Northern Ireland's independent retail sector makes a huge contribution to the local economy. It is an immensely important part of the small business sector, providing not only jobs and investment, but a vital service to all in the community.

NIIRTA's 1200 members alone have annual turnover of approximately £3 billion and employ over 30,000 staff in Northern Ireland.

We have members in every village, town and city in Northern Ireland.

Therefore we have a vital role to play in rebalancing our economy from being public sector led to one where the private sector is in the driving seat.

In this document we will be setting out our 'Shopping List' - the key policy priorities we believe the Northern Ireland Executive should pursue to allow, not only the independent retail sector, but our whole economy, to be fit for purpose in the 21st century.

In common with the NI Executive Programme for Government, we outline what each government department should have as their main policy objectives.

NIIRTA has formed relationships with other business and consumer organisations throughout the UK and Ireland providing a unified voice, acting as a positive contributor in the public policy making process. NIIRTA aims for these relationships to strengthen in 2010 and beyond.

In 2008, NIIRTA published its report entitled 'Nightmare on Every Street' which highlighted the damage being done by out of town development. We were pleased with the overwhelmingly positive response it received and how it has contributed to the wider debate on the future of our town centres.

Although we have set out a comprehensive policy agenda for every department of the Northern Ireland Executive our top five priorities that we want to see addressed are:

- **Retail Planning Reform** - Publication of Draft PPS 5
- **Tobacco Display Ban** - Retailers given the same lead in time as the rest of the UK
- **Energy Costs** - Action to reduce costs and increase renewable options for retailers
- **Rates** - Increase in the qualifying criteria for the Small Business Rate Relief scheme
- **Business Crime** - Key Performance Indicators for business and retail crime.

Once again, we want this new document to provoke debate and discussion.

We look forward to your feedback.



Glyn Roberts

NIIRTA Chief Executive

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Follow us on:



▶ Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM)

"The Executive must demonstrate its commitment by identifying a Champion for the Economy... with the authority to ensure that the policies and work of all departments are clearly focused towards delivering our joint ambition of a dynamic and innovative economy."

Institute of Directors 1.7 Challenge 2008

The Context

OFMDFM has a key role in ensuring effective cross departmental policy co-ordination and the delivery of an agreed Programme for Government.

For a small region of just over 1.7million, there is a broad consensus that there are too many government departments which makes it harder to get effective policy co-ordination. For instance, we have three departments (DSD, DOE & DRD) that are responsible for planning, two for education (DE & DEL) and six (DETI, DFP, DEL, DRD, DARD & OFMDFM) which have economic roles to a larger or smaller degree.

As a business organisation trying to represent and lobby on behalf of our members we believe that the current system needs a radical overhaul and we need seven departments at most.

To address key policy areas the current departmental structure results in a cumbersome process which slows down decision making and makes it harder to tackle problems and generate effective policy solutions.

The current system is also hugely expensive to maintain and at a time when we face a global economic downturn and drastic public spending cuts - can it be justified?

The impact of new and existing regulation on retailers cannot be underestimated. The more time spent on form filling means less time for retailers to spend in their shops. NIIRTA continues to lobby to ensure that existing regulatory burdens are alleviated and new policy proposals do not place disproportionate or inappropriate burdens on convenience store operators.

Currently the UK government has set a target of reducing regulation by 25% by 2010 with all departments publishing 'simplification plans' to set out what they will do to reduce the burden of regulation.

The UK's commitment to reduce regulation has also been matched by the European Union which has set a target of a 25% reduction by 2012. This will be achieved through better impact assessments for new legislation, simplifying current legislation and re-drafting pending legislation to ensure that it is as easy to comply with as possible.

We believe that OFMDFM should follow this lead and be proactive in addressing the burden on business in Northern Ireland and set local targets to reduce regulation.



NIIRTA Policy Recommendations:

- OFMDFM to commission an **independent review of the current system of government departments**, examining options for a new, more streamlined, cost effective and policy responsive system of government for Northern Ireland. We believe such a review group would follow on from the work of the Review of Public Administration and be composed of leading members of the private, public and voluntary sectors. Such a review would work alongside the Assembly & Executive Review Committee in their ongoing work programme.
- Pending the outcome of the proposed review we would recommend that the OFMDFM designate Junior Ministers as having responsibility for **economic co-ordination** with an over-arching, cross departmental responsibility to ensure that all government departments are adopting economy friendly approach to policy making.
- The proposed economic co-ordination role should also have a key responsibility in ensuring that a **Cross Department Better Regulation programme is implemented** to reduce unnecessary red tape and regulation. NIIRTA would recommend that each government department has clear targets set each year to reduce bureaucracy.
- We also suggest that the proposed independent review gives serious consideration to a **single government department responsible for Planning, Town Centre Regeneration and Transport**.
- NIIRTA would also recommend that the First and Deputy First Ministers give a quarterly progress report on **how the economic and other key targets in the Programme for government are being implemented**.
- NIIRTA supports the **Economic Reform Group** report on the need to reduce the rate of corporation tax in Northern Ireland and urge OFMDFM to engage with the Treasury on its recommendations.
- OFMDFM should take the lead in working with Westminster and Executive departments in implementing the **Six Steps to a Sustainable Post Office Network** as outlined by the National Federation of Subpostmasters.

▶ Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI)

"Northern Ireland must seek to increase its overall stock of small and medium-sized businesses and retain and grow our existing world-class larger businesses as a major engine for future growth."

CBI NI Mandate for Prosperity 2007

"Twelve years after the Good Friday Agreement Northern Ireland remains the UK's poorest region. It has the lowest average wages and the lowest productivity. Despite having proportionately the smallest private sector, it has suffered the largest percentage loss of jobs of any region during the current recession. Its unemployment rate has risen to the third highest of any region, and a higher percentage of its working-age population are inactive than in any other region."

Economic Reform Group - The Case for A Reduced Rate of Corporation Tax in Northern Ireland 2010

The Context

DETI deserves considerable praise for bringing about the American Investment Conference in 2008 and its efforts to attract Foreign Direct Investment. However it now needs to ensure that it is doing more to help and support indigenous small businesses.

Recent hikes in electricity prices, along with the rapid increase of fuel costs are making it harder and harder for our members to run their businesses and to provide competitive prices to consumers. NIE infrastructure charges are simply too high and are varied without proper consultation and communication.

There is also a real danger that increasing energy costs will contribute towards consumers cutting back on their shopping spend, with a resulting negative impact on our local retail sector. Increase after increase in both fuel and energy costs is a major threat, not just to our local independent retail sector, but to our whole economy in Northern Ireland.

With Northern Ireland businesses paying electricity bills 30% higher than the rest of the UK, urgent action is needed to address this problem.

NIIRTA continues to work with the Carbon Trust in providing practical energy efficiency advice to our members.

The Northern Ireland Executive should not falter in its promotion and encouragement of entrepreneurship at every level of our economy. In times of recession, the innovation agenda must be accelerated if we want our economy fit for purpose when the recovery kicks in.

Some of the very best examples of innovation can in fact be found in our independent retail sector which contributes billions to our local economy and employs tens of thousands across Northern Ireland.



Given the competition small retailers face from the UK multiples, they have been at the forefront of innovation in terms of marketing, promoting local produce, customer service and many other areas which make them stand out from the crowd. This is all without any help from Invest Northern Ireland.

NIIRTA Policy Recommendations

- The development of the independent retail sector has had little or no focus from DETI, with Invest Northern Ireland having little or no role in regards to our sector. Therefore we would recommend that the Enterprise Minister sets up an immediate **Retail Policy Review** which could set short, medium and long term objectives for growing the sector and addressing the barriers to the growth of the sector.
- **Invest Northern Ireland** should examine ways to include retail on its list of core activities and how it could do more to help our indigenous retail sector.
- DETI should also set up an ad-hoc **Independent Retail Policy Forum** which could advise on all aspects of policy across departments and appoint a senior official responsible for Retail Policy within DETI.
- NIIRTA is concerned about the increased cost the introduction of **Climate Change Levy** on natural gas supplies will have on our members and urge DETI to seek a further extension of the exemption for natural gas supplies in Northern Ireland.
- We fully support the recommendations of the **Independent Review of Economic Policy** and welcome the response of the DETI Minister on its implementation.
- NIIRTA is already working with the Carbon Trust to highlight ways in which our members can increase their energy efficiency and reduce their electricity bills. However for many small retailers the cost to re-fit refrigeration units could be in excess of £100k. To help off-set such energy efficient investments, which are clearly good for reducing our carbon footprint, we would recommend that DETI work with DFP to give a **rates reduction for one year for those businesses that make such a change**.
- NIIRTA supports the further **extension of the natural gas network** in Northern Ireland. Many of our members currently have no choice with respect to their energy supply and the rollout of the natural gas network will provide choice and lower costs as a result.
- Though improving, there is still a need for **greater competition** in the NI energy market.
- There should be **more transparency** into how energy costs are arrived at, to allow better understanding and allow the ability to challenge.
- NIIRTA urges DETI to take a lead in implementing the **Green New Deal**.

▶ Departments of Education and Employment & Learning (DE & DEL)

"Improving basic skills in the current workforce must be the Executive's primary goal through delivery of targets on functional literacy and numeracy and Level 2 qualifications."
Sir David Varney, Review of Competitiveness in Northern Ireland 2008

"Small businesses need flexibility in order to grow and thrive but rigid employment legislation can make it very difficult for small business to deliver potential benefits."
FSB Employment Law Report October 2007

"The mismatch between education provision and the needs of the economy are reaching crisis levels."
CBI Response to the Draft Programme for Government December 2007

The Context

The skills deficit in Northern Ireland has been identified by both business leaders and government as a major cause for concern. This is often demonstrated as small retailers, at times, struggle to find staff with even the most basic skills.

According to research carried out by DELNI and presented in the **Skillsmart Retail survey**, 7% of retailers in Northern Ireland are reported to have skills gaps in their workforce. This means that approximately 600 retailers in Northern Ireland are reported to have staff with skills gaps.

As Skillsmart Retail say in their report **Skills Priorities for the Retail Sector (January 2010)**: *"A successful independent retailer of the future will be required to have a well developed strategy, a business plan, people management and customer handling skills. It is also a characteristic that managers and proprietors will need to have a range of practical skills around visual merchandising, facilities management and increasingly, website development."*

The most recent DETI Quarterly Economic Review revealed that 21.7% of the working age population in Northern Ireland have no qualifications compared to the UK average of 12.3%. As Sir David Varney said in his second report *"Northern Ireland will simply not be able to fulfil its full potential unless it is able to up-skill the stock of poorly qualified people already in the workforce."*

NIIRTA works with the sector skills group Skillsmart Retail to help guide a skills and development strategy for Northern Ireland and engages with the Department of Business, Retail and Financial Services at the University of Ulster on a regular basis.

We are also part of the Economy Working Group organised by DEL on the future of Higher Education policy for Northern Ireland.



In common with other business led organisations, NIIRTA wants to see an increased focus on ensuring that young people leave school with, at the very least, the basics in literacy and numeracy and the skills, attitudes and work ethic to make a positive contribution as employees in Northern Ireland's independent retail sector. We also want to make the independent retail sector a more attractive career option for young people, whether it be as part-time workers, full-time employees or, indeed, as the retailers and employers of the future.

As a sector, we welcome efforts to bridge the link between school and the world of work for young people and we already play a huge part in this through offering part-time employment and work experience opportunities. We want to see it made easier for small retailers to provide such opportunities for young people and, indeed, for retailers to be more actively involved in the running of schools in the communities they serve.

Independent retailers have major concerns about DEL's role in Employment Law policy, particularly with the recent changes in maternity and paternity leave.

Since 1997 over **thirty-six** 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 appears to forget that 98% of businesses in Northern Ireland are small and legislative changes in maternity leave, for example, have a disproportionately negative effect compared to larger businesses. If you are trying to run a small shop with four or five staff it clearly creates many problems. The government also seems to believe that all local businesses have HR departments to process these changes which is not the case at all.

The unintended result of this new legislation could be that more women face possible discrimination which is clearly unacceptable. As pointed out 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.

NIIRTA Policy Recommendations on DE & DEL

- NIIRTA strongly supports the targets for GCSE English and Maths set out in current DE's **Strategy for Raising Achievement in Literacy and Numeracy** and the focus in the new curriculum on ensuring that young people also develop the wider skills they need to do well in the world of work: skills including teamworking, communication and problem-solving.
- Urge greater funding by the Executive of the **Success through Skills** strategy.
- Support the implementation of the **Bain Review** and recommend that both DE and DEL redouble their efforts to implement the 14-19 strategy to ensure that young people have access to a broader range of courses that are relevant to the needs of the local economy and to prevent any student falling through the gap between school and further education.
- Support the target in the **Leitch Review** of 95% of adults to reach functional literacy and numeracy by 2020.
- NIIRTA wants to see any future **employment law have a proper impact assessment** on how it will affect our economy and our small employers in Northern Ireland. We want to see employment law which is both business friendly and family friendly which can be both fair to employee and employer alike and end the 'one size fits all' approach.
- We recommend that the Minister for Employment convene a **Ministerial Advisory Group on Employment Law** made up of business and trade bodies who represent small businesses and retailers who could advise on the likely impact any new employment law would have on the local economy and make recommendations.
- Maximise management and leadership programmes, such as the **Made Not Born programme**, to develop these essential skills.
- Encourage **GCSE Retail Studies** to be an option in more schools.
- A review of **Careers Advice** in relation to opportunities within the retail sector and a stronger focus within schools on careers education and on promoting entrepreneurship. NIIRTA is ready to play its part in helping schools link more effectively with the world of work and in helping pupils understand more fully the skills involved in running a small business and the importance of small retail businesses to Northern Ireland's economy.
- We also want to encourage NIIRTA members to become more actively involved in education through **servicing as school governors**, bringing their insights and expertise to help schools in their local communities meet the challenges associated with ensuring that young people receive the best possible education.

▶ Department of Social Development (DSD)

"It is the one Department that has the job of promoting vibrant, urban centres. We hope that the spin-off from that - town centres becoming places where communities will mix - will make a significant contribution to a wider, shared-future agenda. Although it may not be fully understood, people shopping in town centres, where previously they did not, contributes to a greater mix between different communities. That will include the increasing number of ethnic communities in the future. We see regeneration as contributing to all of that and having a strong economic dimension."
John McGrath, Deputy Secretary, Department of Social Development in evidence to NI Assembly

"We need a holistic approach based on integrated town centre strategy with business development, training, marketing and promotion as well as property development and environmental improvement component."
Association of Town Centre Managers NI Submission to NI Assembly Social Development Committee

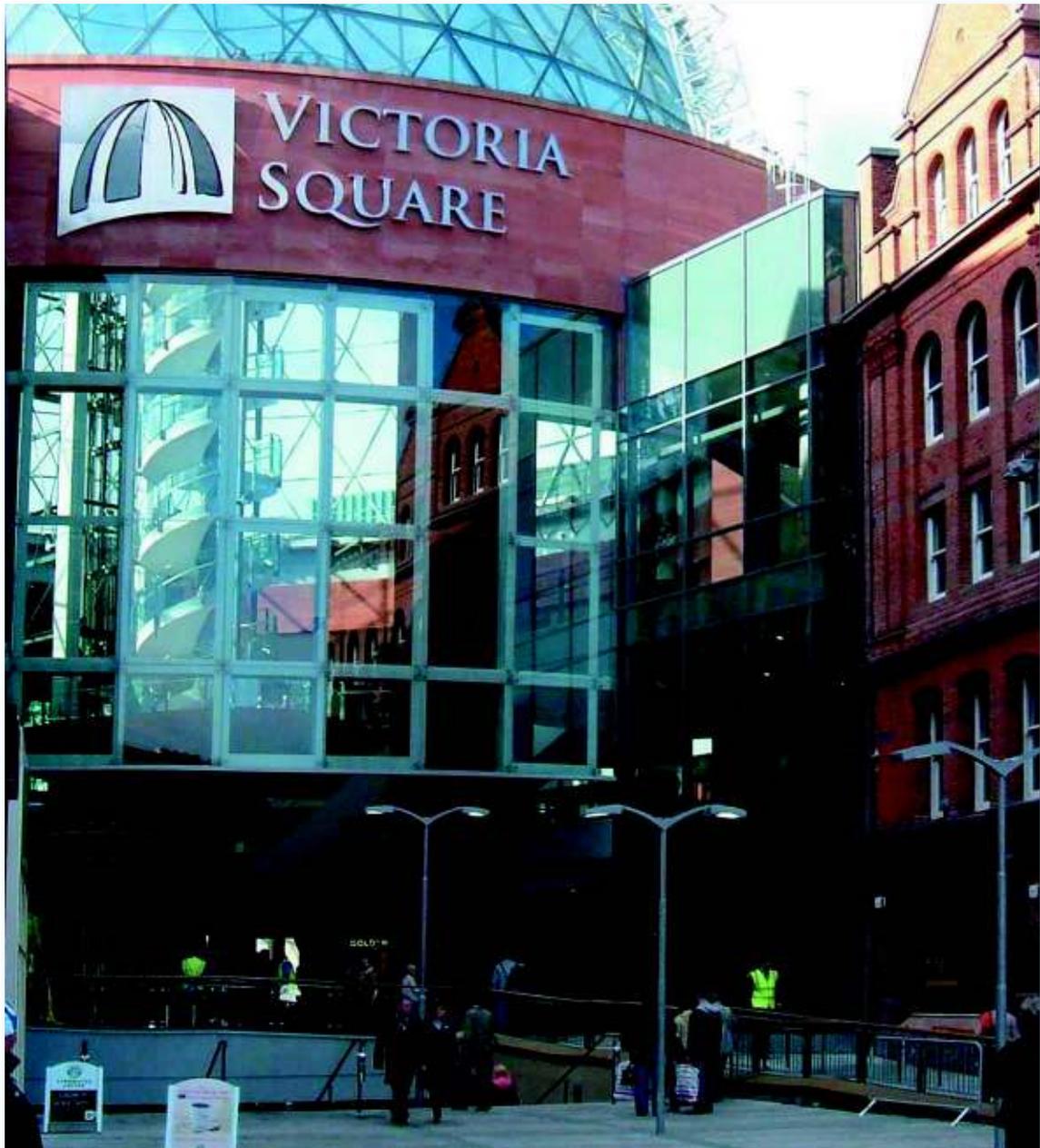
"Great High Streets - High Streets people appreciate and cherish - need to be planned carefully, managed properly and nurtured patiently. Sustained, focused, strategic management of our town centres should become the norm rather than the exception."
British Retail Consortium 21st Century High Streets 2009

The Context

The Department of Social Development has a key role in respect of urban regeneration and to promote prosperous, viable, vital and vibrant town and city centres. The Department uses different methods to achieve this objective including the promotion of public realm and shared space, comprehensive development schemes and retail options that are appropriate. NIIRTA has in two presentations to the Assembly Social Development Committee in the last year, re-emphasised that retail is an essential element that makes a town centre.

NIIRTA Policy Recommendations for DSD

- At present, **DSD is not a statutory consultee for Retail Planning**, even though its input into out-of-town retail developments is vital. We wish to see this immediately amended and it made a requirement for DOE planners to fully consult the Department on all future retail developments, to allow for a proper impact assessment of how they would impact on city, town and village centres.
- NIIRTA recommends that there is a **clear need for a relationship between the town centre strategy and development plans**, and that it should be set down in legislation. DSD must have a five-year action plan to prioritise needs and to integrate them with development plans and to assemble sites.
- NIIRTA supports our colleagues in the Association of Town Centre Management who recommend that the **DSD should establish a panel of advisors** to discuss on a regular basis, urban



regeneration and the prospects for our towns and cities. This panel might include economists, property market specialists, retailers and town centre managers.

- DSD must champion the need for greater priority to be given to the establishment of **Town Centre Partnerships**, such as we have in Ballymena and Belfast. In Ballymena, local retailers, councillors and departmental officials comprise a management board - all key players necessary to make a success of a town centre and tackle the many problems.
- DSD should consider the establishment of a **Town Centre Regeneration Agency** to champion our town centres, ensuring policy co-ordination by the NI Executive and to ensure investment and funding are made a higher priority.
- NIIRTA fully supports the Assembly's **Social Development Committee Report** on Town Centre Regeneration and urge the DSD Minister to implement its 17 policy recommendations.

▶ Department of the Environment

"Climate change affects the entire planet, and is by definition a global issue. However, locally we can make a difference through simple actions such as recycling the goods we purchase."

Edwin Poots MLA, Minister for the Environment

"It smacks of little more than sheer avarice and greed on behalf of the multiples that they plan to foist more supermarket shopping opportunities upon communities which are already more than well-served. It is of paramount importance that this is fully recognised and understood and that we do not see any more planning permission granted for these massive out-of-town shopping developments in areas which are already saturated and beginning to look like clone towns."

Donald McFetridge, Head of Retail Studies, University of Ulster

"In the UK 12,000 independent shops closed in 2009 alone. This is not just an economic tragedy but also a social one, as high streets lose their individual distinctiveness. Far too many high streets are characterised by empty, boarded up shops symbolising the wider decline of our economy. This only makes it harder for the shops and businesses that remain."

Nick Clegg MP, Leader of the Lib Dems, Liberal Democrat Policy Paper 2010

The Context

For NIIRTA and its members the DOE is a crucial department given its wide powers, in particular relating to planning. We have published in our document 'Nightmare on Every Street' our views on how we can protect our town centres against the ongoing problem of unsustainable out of town development.

DOE also has an important role in co-ordinating the Executive policy toward climate change, an area which the independent retail sector has a good track record in supporting.

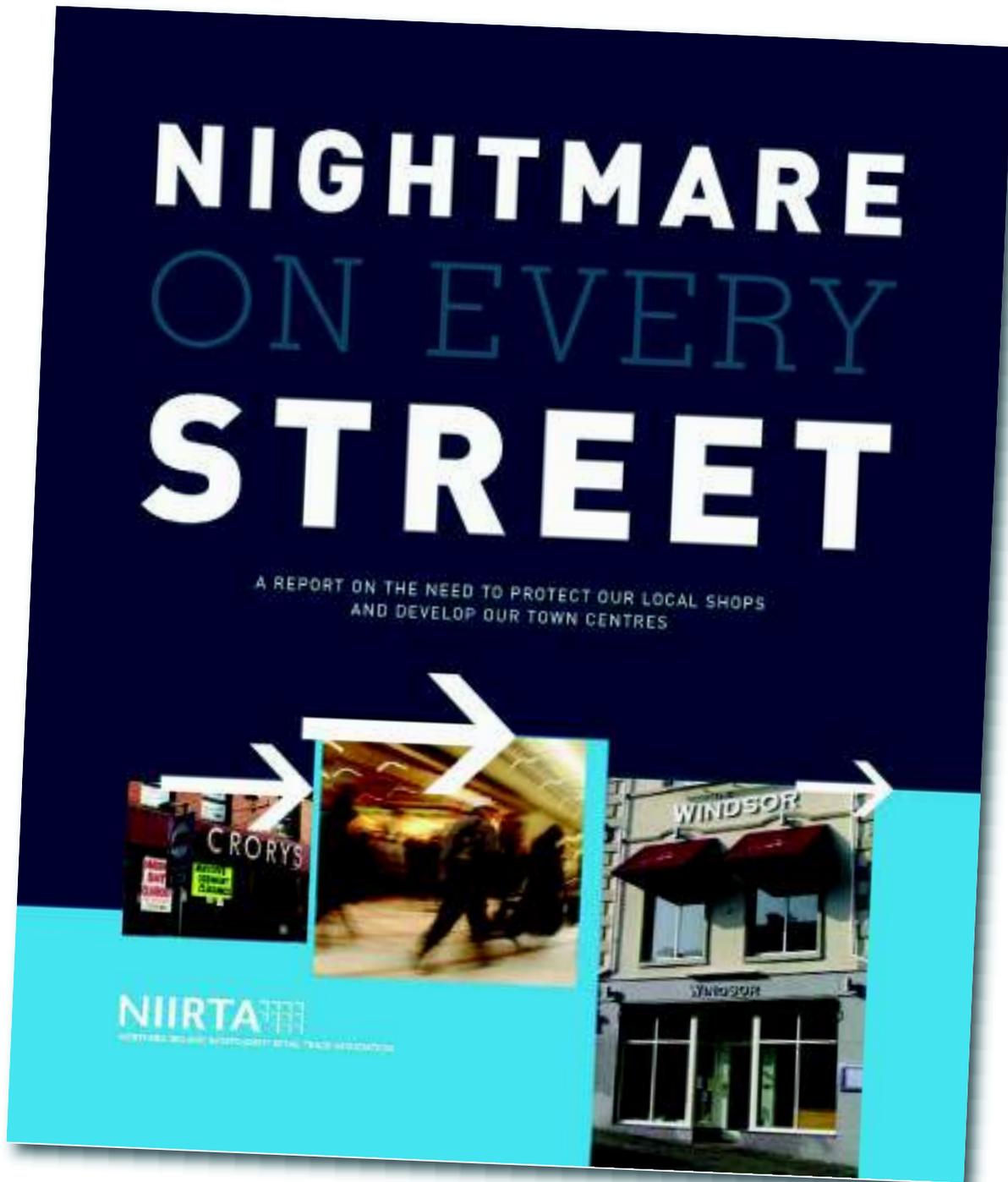
Sheffield University found that large superstores are the most energy inefficient buildings in the retail industrial sector (BBC, 2007). Therefore it can be argued that to help tackle climate change local government must revise the planning laws within Northern Ireland, as the damage caused from out of town retailing cannot be underestimated.

Friends of the Earth (2007) has highlighted that the average independent retail store is more likely to be visited on foot by its customers, therefore reducing car usage and in turn carbon emissions. As a result of this, it is important that government encourages consumers to use town centre shops as this will help to reduce car usage and promote environmental good practice.

NIIRTA Policy Recommendations for DOE

- Immediate publication of **Draft PPS 5** to support and protect our town centres.
- Introduction of a **cap on Class 1 Out of Town Retail Stores** to 10,000 sq ft on a similar basis to planning policy in the Republic of Ireland.

- Retail Planning Policy should remain with DOE and not devolved to the new 11 local councils.
- NIIRTA supports the **labelling of food miles** to highlight the contribution of local farmers and producers and to reduce carbon foot print.
- DOE should encourage all retailers in Northern Ireland to **cut down on packaging and plastic bags** to ensure an environmentally friendly retail landscape.



▶ Department for Regional Development

"I want to make public transport people's first choice, not last resort."

DRD Minister Conor Murphy MP MLA

"Businesses are dependent on the transport infrastructure for the movement of their goods and services, to enable their employees to get to and from work and for customers to reach the business."

FSB Local Government Manifesto 2009



The Context

Having an affordable, accessible and effective public transport system is essential not just for our town and city centres but also for our local economy as a whole. We also need to see further action to provide affordable car parking in our town centres and to review many of the urban clearways in Belfast's arterial routes.

Public transport forms an important part of the wider economic development strategy for Northern Ireland and is a key component in aiding the regeneration process of towns and cities.



It is essential that a modern public transport structure maximises efficiency and is responsive to customer needs, in both the rural and urban contexts. It is important that the community to which it serves, has a prominent role in shaping transport policies, and we are encouraged by the pro-active approach adopted by the relevant Ministers to date.

DRD Policy Recommendations

- NIIRTA urges DRD to give priority to **more bus lanes**, well designated bus stops with sufficient shelters, good travel information and clean and efficient services that run on time.
- NIIRTA welcomes the recent positive announcements from the DRD and DARD Ministers of two new rural transport schemes - the **Dial-a-Lift Service** and **Assisted Rural Transport Scheme**. Both these schemes will significantly address the needs of many rural dwellers, particularly elderly and disabled people, who do not have access to public transport services at present. We would urge that these schemes are maintained and enhanced.
- NIIRTA believes **there is a role for the private sector in transport services** in Northern Ireland. Such operators provide services in countries throughout the world efficiently, with the effect of improving customer service through competition.
- We would urge the Minister to consider **expanding the suspension of enforcement of car parking charges** from Belfast to other towns and cities in Northern Ireland during Christmas and other key holiday periods throughout the year. We urge similar flexibility in relation to suspending enforcement of urban clearways.
- The introduction of a first hour of free parking in town centres would encourage shoppers to use local businesses and support town centres.
- NIIRTA would urge the DRD to consider the promotion of a **'timed disc'** system for delivery and service vehicles to ensure access to businesses in areas with restricted parking.

▶ Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

"Good health is conducive to good performance. That is as true of organisations as it is of individual people."

IoD Health Policy Paper



The Context

NIIRTA food retail members provide an easy and accessible source of fresh fruit and vegetables to local communities for the vital 5-a-day which complements the role of community pharmacies in health promotion.

As community retailers our members have an important role to play in promoting public health and are keen to work with the DHSSPS on a more strategic basis to address these issues.

NIIRTA and the Ulster Chemists' Association have formed a new alliance to promote the public health agenda of the communities we serve.

DHPSSPS Policy Priorities

- Call upon the DHSS&PS to extend the **Change for Life Campaign**, which is promoting 5-a-day across England in local shops, to Northern Ireland.
- Urge the Department to give **local retailers the same lead in time as the rest of the UK (2013)** to make the required changes under the proposed Tobacco Display Ban.
- Encourage the Minister to **address the concerns of community pharmacies** in Northern Ireland relating to regulation, pressure on the supply chain and NHS funding reductions.

▶ Department of Finance and Personnel

"In the commercial sector, the key aspects relate to the enabling power for a Small Business Rate Relief scheme, which will also enhance rates relief for sub-post offices. It will ensure that between £8 million and £9 million of help can be provided to more than 16,000 smaller businesses each year."

Sammy Wilson MP Minister for Finance and Personnel on the Rates Amendment Bill

The Context

As a result of extensive lobbying the DFP has delivered the long awaited Small Business Rate Relief scheme which will come into place in April 2010. The new legislation is a start but needs to be extended over a staged period of time. The fact that the scheme will be automatically applied is particularly welcome.

Who is eligible?

Eligibility is based on the Net Annual Value (NAV) of the business property. The NAV is also known as the rateable value of a non domestic property.

There are two levels of Small Business Rate Relief:

1. Business properties with an NAV of £2,000 or less
2. Business properties with an NAV of more than £2,000 but not more than £5,000.

DFP Policy Priorities

- As with Scotland and Wales the NAV qualification must be extended on a yearly basis to include more and more small businesses and within five years reach a **NAV target of £12,000**.
- NIIRTA is already working with the Carbon Trust to highlight ways in which our members can be more energy efficient and reduce their electricity bills. However for many small retailers costs to re-fit their refrigeration could be in excess of £100k. To help off-set such energy efficient investments, which are clearly good for reducing our carbon footprint, we would recommend that DFP give a **rates reduction for one year for those businesses that make such a change**.
- Before considering future rises in the non-domestic rate, DFP should establish a **touch stone group** of representatives from the business sector in Northern Ireland to ensure adequate feedback.
- As out of town supermarkets enjoy a significant competitive advantage over town centre based retailers, **DFP should levy a substantial additional rates surcharge** on those stores. These additional rates should be ring fenced for funding Town Centre Regeneration projects.

► Policing and Justice

“Crime against retail is an attack on the whole community, leaving a deep scar for all to feel and see. Shop staff, managers and owners want to feel pride in their work but suffer from the daily blight of crime, much of which goes unreported and unpunished. Crime saps companies of funds; places pressure on prices, demoralises staff and can have devastating consequences on physical and emotional well-being.”

British Retail Consortium

The Context

Policing and Justice is a key concern for both large and small retailers in Northern Ireland. Whether it is ATM robberies or anti social behaviour, crime against businesses is having a negative impact on our economy.

Business crime, including retail, is still too often dismissed as a low-level or victimless crime. Indeed even in the recent Policing Green Paper, shop theft was given as an example of low level crime. This needs to be addressed quickly at a time of increasing crime. Local shops are often situated in the heart of housing estates or villages and an incident of theft or vandalism against that premises will have the same impact as a crime against an individual in the area.

Policing and Justice Policy Priorities

- **Specific Targets** for police response times to businesses crime.
- Prison cannot always be the solution when dealing with shop thieves. Police need a range of tools to enable them to deal with shop crime quickly and efficiently. **Fixed Penalty Notices (FPNs) are one of these tools.** However they are only an effective sanction if they are implemented in accordance to Home Office guidance which states that FPNs should only be issued:
 - to first time offenders
 - for thefts under £200
 - and if the goods are valued over £100 the victim/retailer’s consent is needed.
- NIIRTA recommends that clear leadership is taken on the issue of violence against shop staff, particularly in relation to asking for proof of age. Any action should include the more **rigorous enforcement of current laws relating to under-age sales** and young people attempting to buy.
- Police are obliged to **record where crime occurs in retail premises** and to include this in monthly criminal mapping.
- Police are given the powers to deal with **anti-social behaviour** and the causes of delinquent behaviour that may manifest in theft or vandalism to businesses.
- NIIRTA believes the development of the **Retail Crime Watch Initiative** will help with the crime against businesses issues and must be marketed effectively to retailers throughout Northern Ireland.
- The Justice Minister/Policing Board should set business and retail crime as a **Key Performance Indicator** for the PSNI.

▶ Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

"The arts drive cultural tourism, which is one of Northern Ireland's remaining growth areas and one of the key reasons why people visit the region, as was so well demonstrated by a recent Culture Night in Belfast, the arts also bring spirit and vibrancy to the night-time economy: vital components in the revitalisation of any town or city."

Arts Council of Northern Ireland



The Context

The arts sector is a key driver in the regeneration of the night-time economy of many towns and cities, as visitors spend in local businesses, cafés, shops, restaurants and hotels. For example the Braid Arts Centre in Ballymena has assisted in the rejuvenation of a neglected part of that town.

A social and economic impact study of the Grand Opera House found that every £1 of the Arts Council revenue subsidy resulted in over £5 being spent within the wider Northern Ireland economy. A similar study of the Ulster Orchestra showed that it generated a direct spend of over £3 million, equating to £1.90 for every £1 of revenue subsidy received. A very small amount of public subsidy for the arts goes a very long way.



The distinguished US economist, Professor Richard Florida, has observed that regions with high concentrations of high-tech workers, artists and musicians, tend to correlate directly with a higher level of economic development and competitiveness. In an increasingly competitive international marketplace, a rich creative environment can give a place the edge over other investor-friendly locations, because creative and enterprising people want to live and work where there are exciting and interesting things going on.

Policy Priorities for DCAL

- Continue to support **the arts infrastructure** as the night-time economy can be enhanced and extended with new venues e.g. the Braid Centre in Ballymena and the Grand Opera House, Belfast.
- Continue to support cultural tourism initiatives and events such as last year's **Culture Night** in the Cathedral Quarter of Belfast.
- The Culture Investment Programme has seen significant **extra funds spent on refurbishing and rebuilding arts venues** - these venues will require enhanced support. It is important that the Department continues with its support for new venues, for example, the MAC in Belfast which is in a mixed use scheme with a strong cultural element and will extend the hours available to the retail sector.
- The arts are key drivers in the regeneration of the night-time economy of towns and cities, with visitors spending much more in local businesses, cafés, shops, restaurants and hotels, than is spent on tickets. Therefore it is important that **DCAL makes a strong case for arts spending** and levers as much as possible to make sure that the arts sector is not only sustained but grows.
- The arts **drive cultural tourism**, one of Northern Ireland's remaining growth areas and one of the key reasons why people visit the region. DCAL should work towards maximising government support in this area.
- Support the **Derry/Londonderry Bid for 2013 City of Culture** which will be a boost for the local economy.

▶ Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

"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."

Ulster Farmers' Union President Graham Furey

"NIIRTA members pride themselves in their support to local farmers and suppliers in Northern Ireland. The vast majority of members retail locally sourced or locally produced food."

NIIRTA President Paul Stewart

"NIIRTA has shown its commitment to the local farming communities through its members' local sourcing policies. These will contribute to a more sustainable agri-food industry in the north of Ireland."

Michelle Gildernew MP MLA Minister for Agriculture & Rural Development

The Context

The independent food retail sector is a vital route to market for many farmers and producers and we would urge the Executive as a whole to ensure that they give every support to the sector.

The contribution that farming makes to the economy is very clear:

- 80,000 people employed in the Northern Ireland Agri-Food sector;
- 28,500 farms;
- Of the total Northern Ireland land area of 1.4 million hectares, approximately 80% is in agricultural use
- 70% of land is classified as "Less Favoured Area";
- The Agri-Food industry employs approximately 11% of the private sector workforce and annually generates £1.55 billion in external sales.

NIIRTA is committed to ensuring that local farmers get a fair deal for their produce and above all a fair price.

Policy Priorities for DARD

- NIIRTA fully supports the publication of the rural white paper and the need for a **rural champion**.
- We welcome the announcement that UK government will support the Competition Commission's recommendation to introduce a **Grocery Ombudsman**. NIIRTA believes that the creation of a regulator as defined by the Competition Commission is the proportionate response to protect consumer interests and will not impede the ability for retailers to continue to compete. We would



urge the Minister to stick closely to the parameters of the scheme developed by the Competition Commission, thereby ensuring that the regulator is efficient, independent and proactive.

- We support The Ulster Farmers' Union position on **the need to see clear and unambiguous Country of Origin Labelling (COOL)** and we are pleased this research has shown that this is an increasingly important issue for consumers.
- **Public Procurement of Local Produce.** In 2006/07 NI public sector procurement expenditure totalled some £1.9 billion which was spent throughout all government establishments including schools, hospitals etc. NIIRTA would like to see greater emphasis on the potential economic, health and environmental benefits which could be gained for NI if sourcing local produce was an objective of this policy. NI has the potential to be a regional leader in sustainable public procurement of local food.

Notes

NIIRTA

NORTHERN IRELAND INDEPENDENT
RETAIL TRADE ASSOCIATION

The Northern Ireland Independent Retail Trade Association is the representative organisation for the independent retail sector in Northern Ireland.

Although the Association was only formed in 2000 it already represents the interests of over 1,200 independent retail members throughout the Province. Our collective membership employs more than 30,000 staff and has an annual turnover of more than £3 billion to the Northern Ireland economy. Our member stores are generally owned and managed by local families rather than large multi-national companies with shareholders. These member stores are absolutely vital in providing local employment as well as a strong focal point within the local community.

Our members include wholesalers, independent retailers of all kinds, suppliers to the sector and affiliated traders' groups.

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