



PRESS RELEASE

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THE LONELINESS OF THE LONG DISTANCE SHOPPER

When a local shop can be a lifesaver

Being lonely in old age will propel you to the grave more quickly than smoking, a senior Downing Street adviser has said. David Halpern, the director of Number 10's Behavioral Insight Team, has suggested that a majority of the UK's over-75s consider themselves lonely "all or most of the time" and that an elderly person's social network is a more powerful predictor of whether they will be alive in 10 years' time than almost any other factor, certainly more important than whether or not they smoke.

For a lot of elderly people, their local shop is a key part of their social infrastructure. Every corner shop, be it rural or urban, will have its regular elderly customers, some of whom will visit several times a day. For many, the walk to their local shop is their only reason to go out of their front door each day and their only chance to speak to another human being. If they do not appear one day, the shopkeeper will be the one who checks to see if they are OK. For some elderly people, they are only able to remain in their own home because they have access to a local shop.

This is clearly a valuable role for society but it is very difficult to put a monetary value on it. And this is the problem. The big supermarkets may publicise their high profile financial support for community projects but in fact local shops contribute far more of worth to their neighbourhoods.

Recent support for Asda's store expansion plans from the Prime Minister just do not square with a localism agenda or the need to support elderly people. When retail sales are flat at best in real terms, new supermarket developments can only succeed by taking trade from existing businesses, including local convenience stores. The government needs to recognise the vital social role of these local shops and fully reflect it in national policies.

Notes for editors:

The Rural Shops Alliance (RSA) is the national voice for about 7,500 rural retailers. We campaign on their behalf and also help these shops to become more competitive with practical advice and support, to the benefit of thousands of rural communities. Many 'blue chip' suppliers and county councils sponsor and partner the work of the RSA. Our direct contact with rural shops and with these organisations means that we keep in close touch with emerging issues and concerns in our fast changing business sector.

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