

# Rural Retailer

The Journal of the Rural Shops Alliance



## Price Increases Just 'a Blip' or a Massive Challenge?

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RuralShopsAlliance

The logo for Rural Shops Alliance features the text 'RuralShopsAlliance' in a green, sans-serif font. Below the text is a graphic consisting of two wavy, horizontal lines, one blue and one green, that overlap and curve upwards at their ends.

## Your contacts...

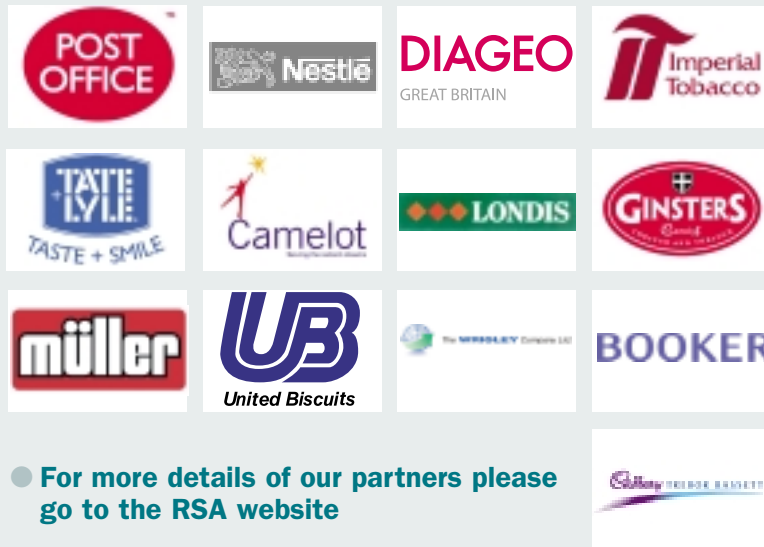
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## Our partners...

The RSA Partners' Programme consists of major blue-chip suppliers and retail services suppliers. The aim of the programme is to build long-term relationships, to the benefit of all rural shops.



- **For more details of our partners please go to the RSA website**

### RuralRetailer

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## Ken Parsons, RSA chief executive, asks...

# Just a Blip or a Massive Challenge?

*The last twenty years or so have been good to the average British shopper. As their wages have gone up, their grocery bill has become a smaller and smaller part of their spending. But this year may – just may – be the start of a new trend.*

I hesitate to be too definite because somehow things have a habit of changing in the ways you least expect but this time there are a lot of factors all pointing in the same direction, towards a period of economic austerity. Consumers are facing the pinch of rising petrol prices, worrying about house prices and the cost of mortgages, whilst the strong Euro means most holidays will cost more. Some people are putting off buying new cars or household goods. They are not replacing their clothes quite so often and they are eating at home more often, rather than visiting restaurants.

And then there are the higher agricultural prices worldwide. Grain farmers are as happy as farmers ever are, but the cost of feed is hitting other sectors hard. Inevitably price increases like this have to be passed onto the final consumer, however much the government and the supermarkets huff and puff. Already as I visit shops I see signs of changing shopping habits. It looks as though Aldi and the other discounters are currently doing very well indeed. Edge-of-town independent c-stores are seeing customers prepared to travel further to supermarkets if their prices are lower. Some out-of-town farm shops are finding their less affluent customers are not driving to them so often. More suppliers are

now refusing to deliver to remote shops because of their rising diesel costs.

In rural areas there are two opposite pulls for shoppers. They will be attracted to what they see as the cheaper prices in urban supermarkets, but at the same time they are increasingly aware of the price of fuel, making them want to shop locally. Rural shopkeepers need to help them take the right route out of this dilemma!

This year retailers do need to keep their fingers firmly on the pulse. This is a time to make sure every foot of shelving is delivering profit, that you are really emphasising your local produce, that your opening hours are right, that your special offers are as good as you can make them, that you run any customer credit accounts more tightly. Stock more ranges of readymeals and wine for those eating at home more and emphasise the cream cakes and biscuits for people wanting to give themselves a cheap treat. Perhaps even put up a sign pointing out how much the petrol costs to drive to your nearest town. And whatever happens, do watch customers closely for any emerging trends and be ready to respond quickly. The real failure would be to ignore what is going on and do nothing.



RSA chief executive, Kenneth Parsons

### THE COST OF A LABOURER'S SWEAT

At the time of the Napoleonic Wars in the early 1800s, the yield from an acre of wheat was worth the wages for a farm worker for about a year. Today it would pay a typical worker for about a week. Perhaps the rise in food prices has some way to go yet?

# The Sustainable Communities Act

## A Message from Nick Hurd M.P.

*“Across Britain, we are losing our sense of community. Part of the problem is that the old hubs of the community - the bank branch, the post office and of course the rural shop - are disappearing and we seem powerless to stop it. There is a big social cost attached to this trend, which now we cannot ignore. However there is now hope in the form of a quiet new law called the Sustainable Communities Act. It was my privilege to take this law through Parliament as a Private Members Bill, with strong cross party support and the backing of a broad coalition of ninety national organisations, including the Rural Shops Alliance. Its whole basis is that local communities should have more influence over the decisions that shape their future. It requires Government to ask Local Authorities this October to come forward with new ideas for promoting more sustainable communities, which will become part of a new national action plan. Local Authorities who take part will be required to consult their communities effectively. For the first time we will be able to see every £ of taxpayers money spent in our area and have the right to argue for changes to be made in how that budget is spent. It will give Local Authorities and the communities they serve real power to assert local priorities. This is a chance to get a proper hearing for rural communities who want to preserve their way of life, including their shops. It is time to think about what changes are required*

Please read on – this is not the usual boring stuff on government! Last year something quite extraordinary happened.

Not only did a private members bill gather all-party support and actually become law – rare in itself – but it is an Act that could dramatically change the way government works in this country, with great consequences for village shopkeepers.

Nick Hurd MP led the fight to get this bill passed:

*and start lobbying your local Authority to make sure that they respond to this opportunity. For more information on the Act, please look at my website www.nickhurd.com .“*

## The Sustainable Communities Act – what it says

The Act gives the Government a legal duty to ‘assist local authorities in promoting the sustainability of local communities’. Councils will be invited to suggest to central Government how it can do this. Your local council must set up a ‘panel of representatives of local people’. These must be drawn from all sections of the community – not just the usual suspects – to help this process.

The intention is to put local councils in the driving seat. Government **must** publish local spending reports, detailing all public money spent in the local area. Councils can then argue for the transfer of specific monies and their related functions from central to local control.

The Act defines promoting the sustainability of local communities to include 4 broad strands - economic, social, environmental and increased community participation. Thus it is clear that the Act can be used to help support local services such as shops, pubs and post offices.

**The government has a legal duty to co-operate with local authorities and try to reach agreement on what**

**action it will take on the suggestions put forward.**

## How to make the Act work for you

### Step 1. Ensure your council ‘opts in’.

Councils are ‘invited’ to submit suggestions to central government – they are not *required* to do so. So lobby your councillors to ensure that your council seizes this opportunity and does ‘opt in’.

### Step 2. Decide on the real issues for your community.

Check that your ideas are covered by the Act, although this gives you wide scope for ideas. Issues such as saving pubs, post offices, shops etc are clearly included. Provided your idea is covered by one of the four strands listed above, you can use the Act to promote it.

### Step 3. Drum up support in your community.

The more people and organisations support the idea, the more likely it is to influence the local panels. And talk to other communities: if the same idea is put forward by many communities it is more likely to be short listed for action and it will also be more difficult for the Government to reject it.

### Step 4. Lobby your local panel

for your issue to be put forward to the Government. Your council must allow local people easy access to the local panels. You yourself could try to become a member of the local panel or put somebody else forward. Get other people and organisations to support you. Ask your council for

details of how to do this.

## Timescales

**October 2008:** government invites councils to ‘opt in’ to the process.

**October 2008 to October 2009 (expected – exact dates not announced):** councils set up local panels and agree with local people on the ideas that they will submit to central Government.

**April 2009:** Central Government must publish accounts of all public money spent in the local areas. Councils can then argue for the transfer of specific monies and related functions to them.

## The RSA View

This Act could become one of the most helpful pieces of legislation for a very long time or it could turn out to be a damp squib.

It intends to set up a new bottom-up process so that the policies will be driven by the grassroots, not by civil servants in Whitehall.

It will only work if people insist on its effective operation. At the RSA we will be 100% behind the implementation of this Act so that it benefits rural shops. We will try to let you know what is happening and help to make this a great success. But the real work will be within individual communities. All village shopkeepers need to get involved – this is potential dynamite, but we must make sure the fuse does not go out!



Nick Hurd M.P.

## ONE WAY TO BOOST FOOTFALL

Hugh Jenkins, the well-known columnist, told a recent conference about how the mayor of Carmel in California, one Clint Eastwood, set about improving community spirit. He banned local postal deliveries. This forced residents to talk to each other as they collected their mail from the town post office. We wonder whether the Post Office Network Change team have thought of that one?

# Is Your Shop Window a Costly Waste of Space?

Did you read the article in the Spring Edition of the *Rural Retailer* on how important our shop windows are to showcasing our businesses?

I did, and I began to wonder how I could use our shop window more effectively. I was fed up after 20 years of only being able to put 'dummy' goods on show as the heat from the sun always ruined any 'real' stock, and I really needed the extra space to bring in new lines.

One of my customers suggested I explore the possibility of using window film. I had no idea what he meant, so I decided to 'google' it.

Well, hundreds of Internet sites came up and I was completely overwhelmed by the vast amount of companies offering so many different types of window films to help solve a variety of problems.

Shop Locally – that's a regular RSA theme, so I decided to seek advice from one of the companies who were based just down the road from my bakery.

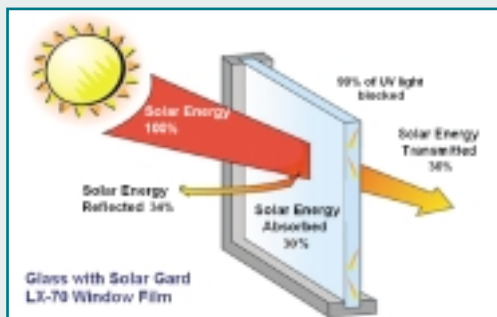
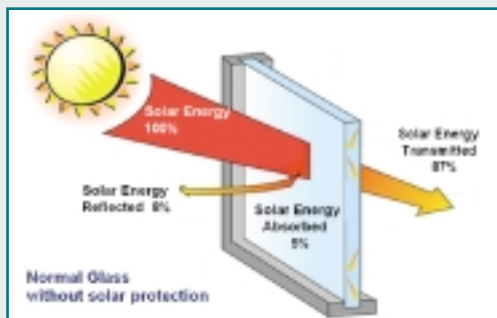
Richard Millinchip from Bekaert Speciality Films was so patient and helpful in answering all the many questions which I know every retailer would have when they have to justify the expense of any new improvement.

## What is window film?

It is a build up of transparent layers of high-quality polyester film containing special adhesives, UV inhibitors and in the case of solar protection films; a layer with metal particles guarantees the colour stability and degree of reflection of the total solar energy. This is a very simplified breakdown, and the actual process of 'sputtering' is detailed on their web site.

## How does it work?

The metals that are embedded in the polyester layers reflect the solar energy. The diagrams below may help.



## Doesn't tinted film have the same effect?

A wide variety of tinted and reflective films are available to reduce glare, heat and U.V. light from entering through glass. There are two problems. These films are typically dark and make it difficult or even impossible to see through the glass. And even tinted film lets in 70% of the heat from the sun's rays.

## How is Bekaert's Film different to all the rest?

The new LX-70 window film developed by Bekaert is completely unique to the market as it is acceptable to ALL types of glass and does not reduce optical clarity of the window display in any way; it is virtually undetectable. A clear coating applied to the window can reduce heat gain by up to 50% and block up to 99% of damaging UV light.

## What other advantages does this film have for the shop owner?

- It can help improve energy consumption
- It can provide more comfortable working and serving conditions.
- It offers better protection against glass breakage and helps protect customers and staff from the dangers of flying fragments if glass does shatter
- It can help 'slow down' and deter any burglar who tries to smash shop window, as the film 'holds' the glass pieces together.

## Is it easy to fit and clean?

Installation is fairly painless and most shop windows of approximately 6 sq metres would be completed in 2 hours maximum. If an approved installer applies the film, then the product has a 10-year manufacturer's warranty. Cleaning is also fairly easy using only a soft, damp cloth.

## TO BUY OR NOT TO BUY?

From a personal aspect – I can honestly say that the window film does actually work. I had the new LX-70 film fitted at Easter, and for the

first time in over 20 years I was able to stock the huge Chocolate Easter Eggs in my window – this was truly the ultimate test as far as I was concerned, as on other occasions we have had to clear up a sticky, gooey mess. So far, it has done exactly as the advertising blurb says. I now have been able to put real cans of beer and real bottles of champagne and wine in my window without any fizzing accidents!

As to the cost, well I think it is justified, at about £260 for my shop. Not only do I get to show case our business effectively, but on the basis that it will last a minimum of 10 years, where else would I get such extra valuable selling space for a mere £26 per year!

## SPECIAL OFFER

Bekaert have teamed up with the Rural Shops Alliance to offer a special 10% discount to shop members. They have some 300 Approved installers across the UK who can provide samples and demonstrations of the window film. Bekaert offer a free no obligation demonstration, glass survey and quote.

- To find out more call: 01905 640400 or e-mail; [uksales@bekaert.com](mailto:uksales@bekaert.com)
- To qualify for the discount you MUST quote 'RSA'.



The Ombersley Bakery

# Going Dark or Going Black Market?

By government standards, Post Office Ltd's financial losses are tiny but they have insisted on going through political hell to "solve the problem", having not seen the full implications of what they were imposing.

Government proposals often seem to have these unintended consequences.

This could be about to happen with tobacco displays, where a small idea will have big consequences if implemented. The Department of Health are consulting on a proposal to ban the open display of tobacco. Displays are deemed to make the product seem "normal". Apart from the inconvenient fact that no other product has packs with "smoking kills" across them, which does make tobacco stand out a tad, there is no real evidence that this "going dark" process will reduce tobacco sales.

In going for this easy target, the Government is missing the elephant in the room – the big point. The huge issue with respect to tobacco is the proportion of smuggled and counterfeit products on sale up and down the country. The figures are horrific. It is estimated that 2/3 of rolling tobacco smoked is non-UK

duty paid, whilst over a quarter of cigarettes fall into this category. This is a hard problem to solve. The loss of tax revenue is staggering. But in addition, the huge size of this illegal market negates many of the good initiatives to control tobacco consumption. The chap selling counterfeit cigarettes from his van in a pub car park does not demand proof of age from his customers!

And here's the issue. By taking tobacco off open display in legitimate stockists, you immediately remove a key difference between them and the black market operators. A tobacco gantry behind the counter is there to be seen by the police, trading standards officers and honest customers. Products hidden away could be legitimate, smuggled or counterfeit – all come out from under the counter.

## The Arguments

### Open Display "normalises" the product

Possibly has some validity – but the result may work either way. Young smokers starting off will have probably had considerable discouragement from school and other adult figures, but still smoke. Driving it underground may actually make smoking more attractive, forbidden fruit, a rebellion.

### Open display triggers smokers to buy

It is very rare to see a customer triggered to buy tobacco by seeing the display. It must happen - the tobacco companies paying for these gantries are not stupid – but the effect is very small. Smokers go into shops to buy cigarettes and see other things whilst there, not the other way around.

### Open display makes it harder to give up

Compared with the physical craving from nicotine addiction, a display in a shop is a minor factor at best.

### Proportionality

Government proposals have to show benefits outweighing the costs incurred. Taking tobacco off display would need a lot of new counters with the right internal fittings and a high level of security – metal-lined and bolted to the floor.

Not cheap. In a busy shop, having staff bending down many times a day may demand more space between the backwall and the counter and hence a rearrangement of fittings. It sounds a trivial point, but it is not. There are real costs involved for an unproved benefit.

### Stopping young people smoking

Convenience stores and village shops are not the "coolest" places to be seen in if you are a teenager. Constantly bombarded with sophisticated 24/7 images from advertising, computer games, DVDs and the rest, you are very media

savvy. It seems pretty unlikely that a static tobacco gantry in a deeply uncool neighbourhood shop is going to persuade you to smoke.

Research confirms that it is your friends and peers that have the most influence. You are more likely to smoke if your parents do. Research suggests that all the money spent on anti smoking initiatives in schools has virtually no impact.

Young smokers are also much more likely than other teenagers to use illegal drugs, get drunk on alcohol, to skip school and to be involved in crime. Solving the social problems that make it more likely that young people will start smoking is desperately difficult, but that is the real issue.

## RSA's view

**"Going dark" is another well-intentioned government initiative. It is easy for them to implement but hard for retailers. It would add disproportionately to retail costs. There is no evidence that it would help to stop young people from starting to smoke.**

**It does nothing to address the massive illegal market for tobacco in this country. And crucially, by reducing the perceived difference between counterfeit or smuggled and the legitimate product, it could actually make the whole tobacco problem a lot worse. As unintended consequences go, that is a big one.**

At the RSA we can represent the views of rural retailers far better if you let us know what you are thinking. We will shortly be putting forward our submissions on two government consultations. Please log on to our website and follow the links to take part in these very short surveys – they really will only take a few minutes to get your views heard. Thank you for your help.

**SCORES ON THE DOORS**  
How do you want to display the results of Environmental Health inspections?

**NATIONAL MINIMUM WAGE**  
Where should it be fixed next year?

**Web site:**  
[www.rural-shops-alliance.co.uk](http://www.rural-shops-alliance.co.uk)



## What You tell Us - Tobacco...

### The possible impact of a ban on the open display of tobacco

*"I don't think it will affect it that much, as (when) people come in for tobacco they know what type etc they want; it won't matter if they are displayed or not. They don't normally come in for grocery and then say "Oh while I am here I will have 20 cigarettes" they generally come in for the tobacco and pick up extras whilst they are here".*

*Hampshire, large village, c-store*

*"As we know 95% of our customers it would have little effect. Strangers would probably just ask if we sell cigarettes as they did when we refitted and didn't have them on display for a couple of weeks".*

*Oxfordshire village shop*

*"It will probably drive many customers to use the black market".*

*Oxfordshire c-store*

*"I think many small outlets would just stop*

*stocking cigarettes and because of this, (customers) would perceive we would not stock any either. Loss of trade again. Straw and camel's back springs to mind".*

*Remote, Herefordshire rural retailer*

*"Yet another knock - need I say more? It has been difficult enough as it is with the change of law to 18, the verbal abuse you face is awful.*

*It would not affect those who want to buy tobacco, but it would make a big difference to us in the cost to create under counter storage".*

*Worcestershire edge-of-town shop*

*"For those who want cigarettes they will ask for them, those who are smokers and would impulse buy, probably won't ask. For us, the cost of creating new storage against what is a very low margin product would have a very negative effect".*

*Herefordshire rural c-store*

## An Easy Way into Hot Food... GINSTERS REAL MEALS



**By John Thomson, Commercial Manager, Ginsters**

The hot food market in savoury pastry is valued at £630m and currently growing at +4%. Ginsters recently moved into the hot food market, which is predominately a frozen sector, by launching a fresh chilled range of Savouries, Paninis and Real Meals. The Real Meals, launched in March 2008 are true innovation, a fresh convenient meal with real honest food values. They can be eaten at home, in the office or on the move, anywhere there is a microwave. It is therefore a relatively inexpensive way for retailers to move into a growing sector in convenience.

## Londis Retailer of the Year Award...

By Estelle Thomas,  
Rural Services Manager  
with the Isle of Wight Rural  
Community Council

### Isle of Wight Store Wins



Charles Brading and Linda Ashby-Prior's shop in the small village of Nettlestone on the Isle of Wight has become Londis Rural Retailer of the Year, beating 1600 other entrants to the title.

Linda explained, "We were nominated by our Londis Regional Sales Manager. We had 2 mystery shoppers, then a visit from a judge who thoroughly checked our 'due diligence' procedures - it was very intimidating when she changed into her white coat, hat and hairnet. The third stage was when Mike Green of Harris International Marketing came down with a TV crew. He was especially interested in our local produce, including our Isle of Wight butter, cream, milk and local crab".

"The award has given us a great ego boost, it was fantastic, a great honour. The staff are really chuffed at having had a part in winning it. And as soon as the banner went up, the customers really started to take notice, wanting to know how we achieved it."

Charles added, "We are open 17 hrs a day, 7 days a week. Linda and I work from 3.30 am through to lunchtime then another team takes over until 9pm. We get the shop looking its best before the customers start coming in - bread baked, papers sorted, that sort of thing."

"We like to be as good as the big stores for freshness, quality and innovation. It's a whole package to make a good village store. We encourage staff to talk to customers, to use their names whenever possible. We try to do that bit extra for them, like taking shopping out to cars, or home delivery. We also like to challenge the customers with new products and ideas. If we have a new line for, say, bread, we will give it

away free for a few days and ask them what they think of it."

"The Londis brand is very important to us - it provides huge back-up and support. They are renowned for their fresh produce; we are getting lots of exciting products through, like fresh smoked salmon twice a week, fresh fish, salads like coleslaw and potato salad. We get good service with new products too, sometimes getting them two weeks before local supermarkets. Londis is a very strong brand and really committed to the independent retailer. It's a nice feeling knowing that you have their strength behind you."

All of us at the Rural Shops Alliance would like to add our congratulations to Charles and Linda on their success.



# BAGS FOR LIFE – printed with your own shop details

In our last edition we asked how many rural retailers were interested in sourcing bags branded with their own shop details. The response we received was overwhelming and so we have teamed up with a leading producer of shopping bags to bring you a very special deal.

We are combining small orders from a lot of individual shops so that you can all benefit from the discounts that come with large orders. If you tried to order 150 bags they would be very expensive, but if we combine orders from a lot of shops, the price comes down for everybody.

We have looked at various materials and sizes. The general feeling from retailers is that jute bags provide the best combination of strength, durability and appearance, as well as being seen as a very green option by customers.

- The RSA jute bag measures a generous 14" high x 18" wide x 8" gusset.
- The bag is natural jute colour with a smart green contrasting gusset and handles.
- They come packed in boxes of 75. The minimum order is 2 boxes (150 bags)
- Each bag will be personalised with your own shop details on both sides. This can be your existing logo or else we offer a smart standard design – the RSA



A bag similar to the RSA style. Gussets & handles for the RSA bags will be green

green and blue wavy lines with details of your shop in the same colours above it.

Whichever option you take, each bag becomes a high class advert and a constant reminder to your customers to use your shop.

These bags:

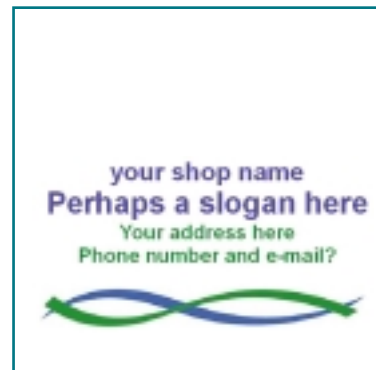
- Are made from high quality materials, well constructed and will be hard-wearing in use
- They are produced in a factory in India with high standards of employee welfare; they do not come from sweatshops
- Your own shop details will be printed onto the flat material giving a much better appearance

The price is £1.60 + VAT per bag, fully inclusive of design set-up costs and delivery (these are often charged extra elsewhere).

This price would enable you to sell the bags to your customers at cost for a price of £1.89 inc VAT. However, the retailers who have seen these bags have told us that they would be very happy selling them at £2.49, so there is room to take a healthy profit margin if you want to.

If you like the sound of these bags but really cannot order 150 of them, please telephone the RSA on 01305 259911 to hear about other options.

Design layout for the RSA bag



## HOW IT WORKS

- Complete the order form and enclose a cheque for the full cost
- You will receive an acknowledgement from the RSA.
- You will then receive a proof of the design from the supplier for formal approval.
- About 14 weeks after ordering, the bags will be delivered.

## WE THINK

**This is a brand new service from the RSA to support rural retailers. We think it is a brilliant way to get your name in front of your customers for years to come.**

**Promoting your business doesn't get any better than this. We're offering a low minimum order, a good price and we've made it really easy for you to order.**

**GO FOR IT!**

## RSA BAGS FOR LIFE - ORDER FORM

Name

Address

Phone

e-mail

NUMBER OF BAGS REQUIRED:   
(order in multiples of 75 only: 150, 225, 300, 375, 450, 525 etc)

### OWN ARTWORK SUPPLIED

Please enclose your own design on a CD or floppy disc with your order (jpeg and/or AI format, write on the disc or CD your shop name). The design must at most be two colours plus black, the quality of the bags will obviously reflect the quality and resolution of your artwork. We suggest you keep the design simple – pictures of buildings etc are often too detailed to work well on textured bags. Remember the gusset and handles will be green. OR

### RSA STANDARD DESIGN

Your personalised shop details or other text will appear above the RSA "hills and rivers" symbol in blue and green. See illustrated layout for details. The text you require:

Line 1 of text

Line 2 of text

Line 3 of text

Line 4 of text

Please print very clearly and accurately to avoid any mistakes.

Please send this form to:

The Rural Shops Alliance, Little Keep, Bridport Rd.,  
Dorchester, Dorset, DT1 1SQ

If you have any queries please phone us on 01305 259911

# Post Office Closures in Kent – the way forward

The programme for closures in Kent was the first to be completed and hence where the learning process is most advanced. After the consultation process had run its course, the final result was the closure of nineteen rural post offices.

Some proprietors were happy to go with their compensation package, as they wanted to retire anyway. Of the nineteen, seven were stand-alone offices and very small; apart from a couple, little could be done to help, especially as two had already closed even before the closure programme had begun. Inevitably we have seen several shop closures and here we have been advising the owners to apply for planning permission for residential use for the building. We would normally oppose this, but these are exceptional times.

We have had a series of meetings with communities and retailers to see how PO services could be maintained. In some rural locations, we are working to persuade villagers without a local post office to visit the next village rather than the nearest largest town, in an effort to sustain the existing village shops and PO's. In one community the closed post office was in a room in the village hall which cost £45,000 to build after a great deal of fundraising approximately 5 years ago. This room is now being converted to a community room with computers and volunteers to help villagers do a lot of their PO business online and a parcel collection service is also being set up.

There is a really positive slant on 6 of the remaining shops, where they are spending some of their compensation to develop their businesses. In two cases, the space vacated by the PO is already being used to stock new product lines and trade is holding up well. Of the remaining four, two owners have already refitted their shops and the remaining two will be doing so in the next few months. These six retailers are all very positive about the future and believe they can maintain footfall and increase customer spend with re-fitted shops and a good stock range, plus an aggressive promotional campaign. Approaches have included installation of a bake-off bread oven, increasing ranges of local foods and developing existing ranges further – especially wine. In one case, the shop has installed tables and chairs for coffee and homemade cakes – this is doing well.

I have spoken with all the parish councils where the post office section closed but the shop is still open, to suggest they work closely with their retailers to promote the virtues of the village

shop on a regular basis, for example through the parish magazine or by offering them a free stall at village events. As everybody is at last waking up to retailers needing to be community focused, in Kent we believe that parish councils and other village organisations have a big part to play in the future of their shops and PO's. Just because the door is open and the lights are on does not mean everything is rosy and the shop is safe. There needs to be a regular and good rapport between the parish council chair and clerk with the retailer so that problems are known early and addressed. The retailer also has to be pro-active and build partnerships with his community, e.g. links to the school and local clubs and perhaps loyalty schemes based on sales and number of visits to the shop.

To encourage working together in this 2-way deal, I am running a Community Retailer 2008 Awards programme in Kent. 30 parish councils submitted entries and we have just short listed 7 shops, which our team of judges are visiting in July, with the finals night in September running alongside Village of the Year competition. All short listed retailers will be invited to this evening with their parish councils. We are trying to get a two way deal going in Kent where retailers become involved in the community but also various groups e.g. parish councils, W.I.s Village halls take a greater involvement in their village shop. The local media and Radio Kent have been supportive, giving us ongoing coverage and visiting some of the village shops involved.

**We are actively exploring these and other ideas so that we can have a sustainable and vibrant rural retail sector in the future.**



Langton Green, near Tunbridge Wells. Post Office closed in January, and owner decided to close the shop at same time. PO has been on premises since 1920s. The ex-subpostmistress now runs a coffee morning once a week for her old customers.



Rodmersham Green, near Sittingbourne. Post Office closed. The proprietors have revamped the shop, now selling a lot of local niche products, organic foods, Kent beers and other local drinks etc. They have also set up a small cafe area. They would not want to go back to having the post office.

# Thousands Sign Up



More independent retailers than ever before signed up to support the My Shop is Your Shop (MSYS) National Independents' Week Campaign, held this year June 2nd – 8th.

It was organised by the FWD PRAG Group that includes the Rural Shops Alliance. In addition to the special money off coupons published in the Daily Mirror on 30 May, retailers were invited to plan a week of activities. There were two new ideas. Tuesday 2nd June was National Cuppa day supported by Tetley GB and United Biscuits. Many RSA retailers, some with the help of Tetley staff, gave their customers a cuppa and biscuits.

Wednesday was designated Walk & Shop Day to show that walking to the local shop both reduces carbon emissions and provides good exercise. RSA retailers were also very active in holding a number of local wine tastings and street parties for

their communities, whilst retail members of the RSA Steering Group Sylvia Winters and Gloria & Tom Williams were active in telling the media what it was about.

Ken Parsons, RSA Chief Executive, commented; *"It was very encouraging to see the year on year development of the MSYS NIW programme and how many more RSA retailers than ever before supported the activities. Many claimed the free POS kits and they and their staff wore the famous yellow t-shirts during the week. The programme really helped our members get closer to the communities they serve, as well as generating additional sales and new customers."*

## RSA at the Shows...



MSYS enthusiastic retailer Lesley Brown of Barnstable volunteered time on the MSYS stand at the Pro-Retail Show and signs up a retailer for the free National Independents' Week POS kit.

Members of the RSA Team were based on the MSYS stand at the Convenience Retailing Show (CRS) at the NEC Birmingham and the Pro-retail Show at the International Centre Telford. This gave us a great opportunity to meet with a significant number of independent retailers and retail members of the RSA. We were able to communicate the benefits of the MSYS programme and to reinforce the message of the unique value of the local independent to its community. Almost all shopkeepers signed up for the free MSYS NIW pos kits so that they could make the most of the opportunity the promotion offered. All members of the RSA

Team welcomed the chance to meet rural retailers and to talk about the special challenges and opportunities facing them.

Ken Parsons reported; *"I was encouraged by the number of rural retailers who attended the shows and their keenness to learn. Seeking information about suppliers' new products, new display and merchandising ideas and talking to their trade association and other retailers. Reactions to the new RSA logo and the relaunch of Rural Retailer confirmed that we are going in the right direction."*

# Challenge 21



Shopkeepers and their staff have generally done an excellent job in restricting sales of tobacco to those over-18. Most people seem to have had fewer unpleasant incidents refusing sales to young smokers than was expected. However, it is vital that rural retailers continue to do all that they can to protect themselves against the penalties for infringing the under age sales legislation. These are now so harsh, including large fines and/or loss of licence, that all retailers need to adhere not just to the law but also to adopt some further commonsense measures. In this way they are protected as much they can be if they are let down by a member of staff. We suggest:

- Ensure that all staff members are trained on their legal responsibilities. Keep a written record of all such training, with staff signing to show they received it.
- Displaying a permanent notice for staff reminding them of their responsibilities.
- Adopt a 'Challenge 21' policy, whereby all customers seeking to purchase age restricted products, and who appear to be 21 or under, are asked for proof of age. Train staff to look down the queue and decide whom to challenge before they reach the counter.
- Display a clearly visible notice to tell customers about this policy.
- Apply it consistently, even if the customer is known; refuse the sale if acceptable proof is not

forthcoming.

- Maintain a written record of all refusals to serve, which includes time, product, date, customer appearance, and the staff member's name a model layout is available on the RSA website.

In the event of an alleged breach of the law, these measures will show that the retailer has acted responsibly and takes the issue seriously. There is little or no defence for a retailer who does not take adequate steps to minimise the risk of infringing the legislation. There is a number of proof of age cards available that can safely be accepted, in addition to photo driving licences and passports. However, there are also a number of fraudulent cards in circulation. All of the major current proof of age cards are accredited by the Proof of Age Standards Scheme, and carry the PASS logo as an embedded hologram – see the sample cards above.

- Further advice is available from local Trading Standards Officers, and CitizenCard provide free point of sale material (0870 240 1221, or sales@noidnosale.com).
- Free POS material is also available at [www.wsta.co.uk](http://www.wsta.co.uk)

### THE TRUE MEANING OF BARCODES

The leader of a Russian doomsday sect recently attempted to kill himself. Pyotr Kuznetsov put his head on a tree stump and started hitting it with a log. The reported reason was "that the end of the world has not come".

Mr Kuznetsov's sect calls itself the True Orthodox Church and its members reject processed food and consider that bar codes are satanic symbols. Perhaps a bad experience with the self scan checkout at Tesco?

# Retailers nationwide get a chance to 'Savour the Flavour'



'Savour the Flavour' is a new scheme from Heart of England Fine Foods (HEFF). It provides, often for free, branded display equipment and support to retailers, provided they stock lines produced in the Heart of England region. Hence it allows smaller retailers to enhance their range without the expense of buying refrigeration.

The first retailer from outside the West Midlands to join the scheme is Shepherd's Farm Shop in Gloucestershire. Through Savour the Flavour, the shop has acquired a

multi-deck chiller and a mini freezer, which have proved a major boon to the business.

Founder Susie Keenan explained: "Our existing units were just getting too full and this new equipment has allowed us to enhance our range of local items as well as saving us the cost of buying this type of equipment ourselves which would have been a significant outlay for a business of this size."

Louise Pickford, Business Development Manager at HEFF added: "Savour the Flavour is a scheme which is helping many smaller retailers expand their product range and thus footfall and revenue without having to tie up funds in capital goods.

The beauty of the scheme is its versatility – participants can use it to add different product lines to their offering or to enhance their range of existing products if they are a specialist store".

- **Retailers can find out more about Savour the Flavour at [www.heff.co.uk](http://www.heff.co.uk) or by calling HEFF on 01746 785185.**

## DO YOU REALLY KNOW YOUR STUFF?

The Rural Shops Alliance is looking for a small number of experienced retailers who would be interested in sharing their knowledge and expertise with other rural shopkeepers. This work would be on a paid consultancy basis and appropriate training would be available as necessary to suitable candidates in some parts of the country.

We are looking for people who can work with a wide range of people (you know what an awkward bunch rural retailers can be!) and would be able to spend a few days a month away from their shop. If you are interested, please tell us a bit about yourself and your shop.

Please e-mail [recruitment@rural-shops-alliance.co.uk](mailto:recruitment@rural-shops-alliance.co.uk) or write to the Dorchester office address, marking the envelope "recruitment".

## It's a Potential Minefield Out there!

A quote from a c-store operator: "One of my employee's conduct was particularly bad and I started a disciplinary process. I fixed a meeting but she didn't attend, alleging that she was unwell. Subsequently I received doctor's certificates over a long period stating that she was unfit for work, so I decided to give her notice anyway.

Fortunately, before I did so I checked the legal position using the PbsBlueprint Online website – I clicked onto 'Absence' and 'Long-term sickness' and found that I had to proceed very carefully indeed.

Not only did I need to resolve the initial disciplinary proceedings but I realised I needed to get a doctor's report – for which I had to follow statutory procedures under the Medical Reports Act. Having then taken further verbal advice from the Pbs telephone Helpline I was able to proceed to a lawful dismissal of the employee. However, if I had proceeded as I had planned I could have faced a claim for unfair dismissal and liability for thousands of pounds in compensation.

Even worse, if the long-term sickness could itself have been construed as a disability or the sickness (including stress) arose from an underlying disability I might have faced a claim for unlimited compensation under the Disability Discrimination Act".

Graham Randall adds,

"I admire independent business people and do understand their need to take calculated risks. But I am often amazed at the unnecessary risks vast numbers of business owners take in running their businesses. They can end up risking everything they have worked for by failing to have a proper framework in place to

deal with vital aspects of their business.

Every business needs policies and procedures in regard to such matters as quality and compliance controls, customer services, property management, Health and Safety and increasingly the environment. In addition those employing staff need employment policies and procedures to cover issues such as equal opportunities, non-discrimination, recruitment, training, security and other employees' rights as well as their responsibilities.

Many shopkeepers decide to face legal problems as they arise rather than reduce the chance of them happening by having the right framework in place. They argue that they do not have even the available time to keep up to date with all legislation let alone put it into practice. They further contend that it is far too expensive to seek help from independent advisers.

As a subscriber to PbsBlueprint Online you are provided with the frameworks you need for your business as well as a regular update on any new legislation. You can download such vital documents as Contracts of Employment, Staff Handbook and Health & Safety documentation.

### SPECIAL OFFER

- **As a rural retailer in a county signed up to the Rural Shops Alliance, you can get a third off your subscription! So as an RSA member, £10 plus VAT per month is all it costs and the minimum commitment is just one month – you can cancel at any time. Find out more at [www.pbsblueprint.co.uk](http://www.pbsblueprint.co.uk).**



# Greasy Spoon or Gastronomic Goldmine?

In the last edition of Rural Retailer, Mike Gene of HIM pointed out that hot food to go is the fastest growing category in convenience stores.

You have probably driven along a main road with a mobile snack bar parked in what seems every lay-by. You may even have wondered how so many of them can make a living. The answer is that these days there are a lot of people on the move and they have the money to spend on food and drink on the go. Meeting the needs of drivers can be very profitable. Nearly every trading estate or cluster of offices in the country has a sandwich van that comes round every day. Sometimes there is a burger van at lunchtimes. Modern petrol forecourts have their hot food counter.

So the demand is certainly there for tasty fast food. Now compare the ingredient cost of a bacon buttie and a cup of tea with its price to the customer .....and you will see the attractions.

An increasing number of rural shops have recognised this potential. It is not for everybody. Location is crucial. Ideally you need a prominent spot with good parking on a main road, a factory estate next door, a large school or college, or maybe even a tourist site without its own cafe.

If you want to go down this route, you must do some homework. You must make sure you can meet Environmental Health requirements, of course; this may involve additional sinks, better splash-backs etc.. Ask before you set off. Make sure that there are no legal barriers (in your lease, or as a covenant on the building for example). You must make sure that the primary purpose of your business remains retail; otherwise you might have to apply for permission for a change of use on your building, which could be difficult.

You need to practice your cooking – try out your offering on the family (they'll appreciate eating something still within its date code for once!). It does not have to be complicated and you can start with basic equipment; better catering kit can come later. This is an area that you can develop gradually. A lot of shopkeepers start by selling bought-in products – a small Nescafe coffee machine or a Bake'n'Bite hot pie unit, for example – before extending their range.

## WHITACRE HEATH POST OFFICE, WARWICKSHIRE

Whitacre Heath is a village to the east of Birmingham, quite close to the conurbation but still separate. It is a couple of miles from a motorway junction but is not really on the way to anywhere. It's not an easy place to trade. This shop and post office is in the downstairs of typical house, with the two rooms knocked together, so space is really tight as well.

However, this is a classic example of developing by moving one step at a time. When the Wrights bought the business, the previous owners were already supplying cold sandwiches. It soon became apparent that there was a chance to expand the market by catering for both hot and cold food. Helped financially by a local Warwickshire grant scheme, over time the output from their bake-off bread oven was joined by a widening range of other hot foods,

with a hot food cabinet taking over much of the counter space. This is not a large shop and neither is the back preparation area, but somehow it all comes together. Some passing trade, workmen in the village, employees from local businesses, are all keen supporters of the shop.

The current hot food menu is a selection of meat slices and pies, sausage rolls, sandwiches, paninis and home baked bread rolls and baguettes, also a joint of home cooked meat that is cut freshly for every sandwich. Peter Wright believes that it is important to offer good quality at good prices – repeat business is far more important to him than a high margin. Certainly a hot beef roll full of good quality meat at well under £2 represents great value for money. And the aroma.....very hard to resist.



Whitacre Heath Post Office and Stores

## THE COST OF WATER

Amidst all the worries about petrol and food supplies in the world, spare a thought for the future cost of water supplies across the globe.

Taking everything into account, it takes at least 2,000 litres of water to grow a kilo of rice, 1,000 litres to grow a kilo of wheat and even 500 litres for a kilo of potatoes. At the prices of a bottle of Buxton or Perrier, it makes the cost of a humble spud seem positively cheap.

(figures from the book "When the Rivers Run Dry" by Fred Pearce, environmental correspondent to New Scientist magazine)

## Food to Go continued...

### SANDON VILLAGE STORES, STAFFORDSHIRE

Sandon is a small picturesque estate village to the north of Stafford. The village shop has had a chequered history. The post office closed several years ago and the shop itself, located right on the edge of the small village, has not done particularly well.

However, a new owner seems to have found the key to making it a success. David Hoelzel owns a nearby garden centre and spotted the potential for selling hot food. The shop lies on the busy A51 road, with a lay-by next to it, and so makes

an ideal stop for drivers. A fairly basic kitchen is sufficient to produce the all-day breakfasts, hot and cold sandwiches, toasties, jacket potatoes, with tea and coffees. Certainly in the morning a steady stream of drivers makes the popularity of this stop very clear, with many of them also buying a paper, confectionery or a canned drink. A key to its viability, though, is the fact that it can be operated by one (energetic and capable) person, the simple menu allowing cooking and serving to be combined in one role.

It is not an exaggeration to say that this trade is keeping the shop open – with the huge benefit that the village retains its local shop as a result. And of course, given David's background, the next step has been the development of an outside area as an outlet for his garden centre products. A hanging basket with your breakfast butty – no problem!



David spotted a gap in the market and has kept the village shop alive at Sandon











A "SATURDAY NIGHT SPECIAL" SPECIAL OFFER?

A car dealer in Missouri, USA, recently claimed that his special offer had increased sales of cars fourfold.

The deal – a free handgun with each car bought.

We suggest that you don't try this one on this side of the Atlantic.

## Retailer Services

	<p>Is a national organisation of independent shopfitting companies, all of whom offer a complete survey, design and installation service</p>		<p>Offers a new source of income for rural shops acting as a parcel despatch and collection point, providing commission and extra footfall</p>
	<p>Has been part of the rural community for nearly a century, providing expert advice and a personal, friendly and local service</p>		<p>Offers a service specially for high cash turnover businesses that offers low fees and convenient banking via your local post office</p>
	<p>Is the largest independent direct supplier of cards in the UK. They offer a full range of cards with a great service</p>		<p>Is one of the leading providers of cash machines, providing a high level of service to help you meet your customers' needs</p>
	<p>Based in Accrington, this long-established family-owned wholesale distributor offers over 5000 lines with telesales and online ordering</p>		<p>Have over 20 years' experience providing affordable EPOS systems that meet the specific needs of convenience stores, newsagents, etc.</p>
	<p>Provides all aspects of shopfitting, combining traditional friendly service with modern technology at a competitive price</p>		<p>Is the number one supplier of home entertainment to the convenience sector, offering a wide selection for customers to rent or buy</p>

To obtain further information on any of these companies, please fill in the details below:

Name:  Tel:

Business Address:

E-mail (where applicable):

Please send more details on the following service(s): (tick applicable)

<input type="checkbox"/> Choices UK	<input type="checkbox"/> Contrast Shopfitters	<input type="checkbox"/> Co-operative Bank	<input type="checkbox"/> DHL
<input type="checkbox"/> Hanco	<input type="checkbox"/> Harrison Direct	<input type="checkbox"/> NFU Mutual	<input type="checkbox"/> Paper House
<input type="checkbox"/> Team Design	<input type="checkbox"/> YP Electronics		

Send to: To: The Rural Shops Alliance, The Little Keep, Bridport Rd., Dorchester, Dorset, DT1 1SQ  
 Fax: 01305 259384 e-mail: info@rural-shops-alliance.co.uk

Now in its seventh year, this is the biggest national promotion of the diverse and delicious food that we produce in Britain. This year it will take place September 20th – October 5th. At the RSA we believe passionately in the opportunities in selling locally produced food for rural shopkeepers:

- Customers love local food and want to buy it
- It's a great point of difference from the supermarkets
- It increases sales and generates good profit margins
- It supports your local producers and the wider community

IGD data suggests that 67% of consumers actively look out for local foods. British Food Fortnight represents a great opportunity to meet their needs and also to support your local producers. Retailers who have taken part in previous years report excellent increases in sales.

**“Sales of the lines we featured during British Food Fortnight went up by hundreds of per cent”**

Les Rutherford, Store Manager, Budgens,  
Keyworth, Notts.

**“I would recommend any retailer to get involved with British food fortnight. It creates so much more awareness for the store”**

Malcolm Bodell, Store Manager, Bow

**Here are some ideas on how to make the most of the Fortnight:**

- Increase your range of British Food – retailers report that 84% of new lines introduced for the event stay as stock items afterwards
- Make sure your British foods are highlighted with their POS material
- Really tell your customers where your food comes from – they love to know which producer or which farm where this is possible. The more local it is, the better
- Create a special display of interesting British food – and let your local media know what you are doing
- Cross-sell: locally produced burgers certainly need locally baked rolls to put them in!
- If your customer numbers justify it, organise a food tasting with a local producer. Even an hour or so on a Saturday morning can generate real interest and bring in new customers.



You can see full details and more ideas on the British Food fortnight website:  
[www.britishfoodfortnight.co.uk](http://www.britishfoodfortnight.co.uk)

