

# THE LOCAL BRIEF



January 2012

Dear Village Retailer,  
Happy New Year!  
Please find enclosed your latest edition of *Rural Retailer*.

## Help to shape the local planning needs of your community

Independent retail News, [www.talkingretail.com](http://www.talkingretail.com), December 2011

Shop owners need to get involved in developing a planning vision for their local area if they want to protect town-centre and neighbourhood shopping areas and curb the growth of large out-of-town superstores. This was the key message from the Association of Convenience Stores (ACS) Heart of the Community conference that took place at the end of November 2011. Under the Localism Act that became law last year, planning has been handed down to a local level and the local plan is now a far more powerful tool. Local plans are crucial, the conference heard, as they outline what kind of development is permitted where. Retailers were urged to focus on engaging in the formation of the local plan in order to help shape and preserve the future of their communities.

However the ACS chief executive said that the current localism reforms don't fully address the problem of enabling communities to state what kind of stores they have on their high streets e.g. allowing them to favour independents. ACS would like to see new powers allowing communities to set out their vision for the retail mix wanted in their area and once agreed, councils could use planning powers to restrict local dominance of one type of business.

Concern was also expressed at the conference about the improvements it is felt are still needed to ensure national planning policy is as robust as possible. Hugh Ellis, chief planner at the Town and Country Planning Association, claimed that under the new National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) protection would be weaker for town centres than under the existing "town centre first" policy. However the Communities Minister, Bob Neill, stated town centre policy would be the core part of the final NPPF and would be robust enough. The NPPF will provide guidelines for local planning bodies and is likely to be ready by the end of March 2012. If you would like further information on the Localism Act or on the possible impact of the NPPF, a number of briefings are available on the ACRE website: <http://www.acre.org.uk/Resources/publications/acre-briefings/>

## Oil Scheme takes off!

Northamptonshire ACRE's new venture has got off to a flying start, with 4 local community co-ordinators and over 48 members in place already enjoying the benefits of bulk-buying domestic heating oil. Lots of people have asked us about the price of the oil so here's what's happened so far:-

- **In October**, we ordered 2,000 litres for our first 3 members. They paid 53.97p per litre, compared to an average price that day of 59p per litre.
- **In November**, we ordered 9,600 litres for 15 members, who paid 55.50p per litre compared to an average price that day of 61.50p per litre.
- **At the start of January 2012**, we ordered 5,600 litres for 9 members, who paid 54.9p per litre compared with an average price that day of 60.2p per litre.

Between them these members have saved a massive £973.40.

Since we set the scheme up, oil has been regularly in the news – and there is one thing that's certain – the price of oil is far more likely to go up than down and anything you can do to make it less of a burden has to be a good thing. So if your community hasn't yet got a co-ordinator, why not volunteer? There's plenty of information on our website or we can send you an information leaflet. Take the plunge – we'd love to hear from you!

### Please can you display our bulk oil poster?

If you would like to do so, contact Sarah Clarke on 01604 765888.

Many thanks.

### **Northants roll out of superfast broadband**

In December 2010 the government published its broadband strategy '*Britain's Superfast Broadband Future*' which set out the aim to ensure this country has the best Superfast Broadband in Europe by 2015. The government recognises that broadband is no longer a "nice to have" – it is an essential part of everyday living – affecting access to services, healthcare, education, housing and social inclusion to name but a few. Superfast broadband is defined as speeds greater than 24MBps. BT is already upgrading the existing network in many areas to high quality superfast fibre broadband. If you would like to know when BT Openreach may be upgrading your area, you can check it out at <http://www.superfast-openreach.co.uk/where-and-when/>.

One of the objectives of the strategy is to encourage private sector investment in those more remote areas where it is not currently commercially viable for private sector providers. To stimulate this interest, the government is investing £530m in the rollout of superfast broadband to more remote areas. A new team, Broadband Delivery UK (BDUK) has been set up to deliver this programme and is responsible for allocating £363m of the overall money to local authorities to help them in their rollout of superfast broadband to remote areas. Northamptonshire has been allocated £4,080,000.

As part of this programme, each local authority is required to produce a local broadband plan. The Northamptonshire plan identifies how the county intends to achieve 100% coverage across the county for all residential and business premises, including in those areas that are not seen as commercially viable, with the following timescales:

- By 2014, two thirds of premises able to access broadband speeds in excess of 30mb/s
- By 2015, 9 out of 10 premises able to access speeds in excess of 30mb/s and all premises able to access a minimum requirement of 2mb/s
- By 2015 fibre to the premise should be available for all newly built homes and businesses in the county
- By 2017 all homes would have access to superfast broadband services

Northamptonshire's plan was successfully signed off on 21st December 2011 and is only the sixth plan to achieve this so far. BDUK has allocated the £4.08m towards the roll out and the County Council has earmarked the same amount. You can read much more about the delivery of superfast broadband to Northamptonshire on the County Council page: <http://superfastnorthamptonshire.wordpress.com/>. We would encourage you to get involved especially if broadband access is an issue in your area. In fact, the County Council is asking all businesses and residents to sign an E-Petition which will help them to continue to build the case, and show the level of support across all parts of Northamptonshire, for investment in the roll out of superfast broadband. The survey is at: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/96W7GJ7>

### **New food storage rules**

The European Commission is currently considering new food storage rules that would require retailers to maintain food at 2° Celcius, several degrees below current standards. For small convenience stores, electricity is already a major business cost and these proposals would add considerably to them. In some cases, it could require the premature replacement of chillers or the installation of air conditioning to meet the new standard. Rural shops in particular cannot go on absorbing higher and higher costs in this period of tight consumer spending and intense competition.

Ken Parsons, Chief Executive of the RSA, commented, "We are not aware of any evidence that current standards are leading to problems with food hygiene This proposal is quite simply not needed and it seems a classic case of "if it ain't broke, don't fix it". It also seems an early test of the Government's commitment to their Red Tape Challenge. This really is a classic case of red tape that would have significant costs to the industry with minimal benefits to the consumer".

The Rural Shops Alliance (RSA) is the national voice for about 7,500 rural retailers.

## **£2m a week boost for organic food sales**

Sales of organic food have risen by 10 per cent in the past year, growing by £2 million a week: twice the rate of the rest of the grocery sector. The figures released by the Soil Association show that the British retail sector is now worth £1.2 billion a year. Their findings also disclose that many consumers buy organic food direct from farms, farm shops and farmers' markets, and that this market has grown by 16 per cent in a year to be worth £108 million. This sector is expected to grow even further in the coming year. Farmers such as Andrew Dennis from Woodlands Farm, near Boston, Lincolnshire, have seen the number of boxed deliveries to local customers soar. He now has 1,400 customers in a 50-mile radius of the farm, compared with about 800 three years ago. (*Times*, 16/11)

## **And don't forget....**

It's National Bramley week from the 5 -12th February. The first Bramley apple tree was grown from pips planted in 1809 and the original tree continues to bear fruit today. So encourage your customers to take part and celebrate this delicious cooking apple.



The first National Marmalade Week gets underway on 25th February and will feature the 7th annual World's Original Marmalade awards! It might be a good time to stock up on those various citrus fruits. For more information, visit: <http://www.marmaladeawards.com/festival/2012/01/664/national-marmalade-week/>

Once again we are highlighting Fairtrade Fortnight from February 27th to March 11th. View their website to find out how to get involved: [www.fairtrade.org.uk/](http://www.fairtrade.org.uk/)



And finally, it's Bubble Wrap Appreciation Day on 30th January. Yes honestly!

If you would like your shop removed from our database and to stop receiving *The Local Brief* and *Rural Retailer* please contact:

Elaine O'Leary, Northamptonshire ACRE, Hunsbury Hill Centre, Harksome Hill, Northampton, NN4 9QX.

**Tel: 01604 825 890**