

The All Party Parliamentary Small Shops Group

The All Party Parliamentary Small Shops Group (APPSSG) was established in 2003 by a cross party group of MPs to raise awareness among Parliamentarians of a broad range of issues of concern to small shopkeepers as opposed to large multiples. The Group has drawn attention to the vital roles that small shops play both commercially and socially within the communities that they serve.

The APPSSG provides a forum for informed discussion of the obstacles faced by small shopkeepers and it aims to promote better and fairer laws to help preserve and foster retail diversity. Wafer thin margins, combined with the constant threat of unfair competition from supermarket behemoths, mean that small shops, an essential part of the fabric of rural and urban life, are disappearing in their thousands each year. The Group's work is underpinned by the Independent Retailers' Confederation, and through this the Rural Shops Alliance has taken a key role in defining and influencing the Group's strategy and debates. Issues that the APPSSG has discussed recently are all close to RSA members' hearts, including retail crime, excessive insurance premiums, planning reform, red tape and environmental legislation.

Since 2003 the APPSSG has been chaired by Labour MP Jim Dowd. Under Jim's Chairmanship the Group gained significant notoriety, in particular through its public inquiry into the retail sector and a subsequent report, 'The Nation's High Street in 2015', published in 2006. This report and the resulting political debate set the background for the announcement of the Competition Commission

inquiry into the UK Grocery Market, which published its findings in April 2008. Following five years of service to the Group, Jim has decided to step down and a new Chairman is to be appointed for 2009. A replacement for Jim Dowd has now been agreed and will be announced at the first meeting of the Group early in 2009. The new Chairman will be a Conservative MP who is a seasoned Parliamentarian and current member of the Group, and has a reputation for speaking out in support of small shops and the vital services they provide to their local communities.

Under the new Chairman the Group will look to re-launch its work programme and diversify its interests. The Group will hold two meetings per year with one focusing on the economic role played by small shops in their local communities and one on their social role. The APPSSG will provide a platform for retailers and Parliamentarians to debate and celebrate the positive roles that small shops have to play in the UK during this challenging period. The Group will also work to generally promote the work and importance of independent retailers throughout the UK – something RSA members will appreciate only too well!

