

P-04-609 Support Small Businesses – Support our High Streets.

Correspondence from the Petitioner to the Clerking Team, 13.01.2015

Petition re Rates Relief

Firstly a practical point re process of signing a petition. Many people told me that they had signed the petition but I was unable to find their name. Only through talking with friends locally was I able to discover that if people did not use the 2 tick boxes the system still changed the page which led to people not registering their signature but thinking that they had. I realise this is a seemingly small matter but it did actually have a major impact on the final outcome.

My position

I am a sole trader and trying to establish a social enterprise to the benefit of the community in a small rural town. I am not a campaigner, nor part of any large advocacy group, nor seeking to make vast amounts of money. I simply want to contribute to my local community.

Until I saw the response from the Minister I was not aware of the schemes she mentions. I can now look them up. Thank you. I mention this as an example of how information fails to reach grass roots. This failure is exacerbated by the layers of funding and advisory bodies. To whom should I turn first in order to even find out about, never mind access advice and support?

The complexity of regulations and compliance issues, combined with uncertainty which generates difficulties planning leave me wondering why people continue to submit themselves to such a difficult task as establishing a new business.

The 100% rates relief is a vital lifeline and an encouragement to continue in what can feel a very hostile environment.

Small businesses are at the heart of rural town centres which are overlooked by the corporate and large chains and yet most national and local policy still appears to favour the old style retail park/large chains.

The social consequences of dying town centres will surely bring costs as yet unknown and unquantifiable so this request to extend the relief is not to protect a comfortable bourgeoisie but to ask that politicians recognise just how hard it is for small businesses to stay viable.

Local business groups are doing their best to engage with the local community but the current climate of uncertainty makes strategic planning almost impossible bearing in mind that most of such efforts are being carried out voluntarily at the margins of individuals time. As the retail arena shrinks the small business owner finds themselves in an ever more competitive situation, therefore busier, more anxious so therefore less able to provide coherent, planned and carefully executed voluntary effort.

I believe that support to such small businesses is a cross party issue. Anxiety, uncertainty, rapidly changing regulations are all throttling the energy and skills, the creativity and ingenuity of entrepreneurial people.

Please extend the rates relief. It will be such a powerful way to encourage local business.