

Midlothian Council - Local Development Plan 2 (working draft Evidence Report Chapter for comment)

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10th January 2024

To whom it may concern,

Local Development Plan 2 - working draft Evidence Report Chapter

The Scottish Grocers' Federation (SGF) is the leading trade association for the Scottish Convenience store sector. There are 5,171 convenience stores in Scotland, which includes all the major symbol groups, co-ops, and convenience multiples in Scotland ([Scottish Local Shop Report 2023](#) (SLSR 2023)).

SGF promotes responsible community retailing and works with key stakeholders to encourage a greater understanding of the contribution convenience retailers make to Scotland's communities. In total, convenience stores provide around **49,000 jobs in Scotland** (SLSR 2023).

Convenience stores trade across all locations in Scotland, providing a core grocery offer and expanding range of services in response to changing consumer demands close to where people live. **The valued services provided by local shops include bill payment services (76%), cashback (70%), and branches of the Post Office network (27%)** (SLSR 2023).

Over the past year, the UK convenience sector contributed over £10.6bn in GVA and over £9.1bn in taxes (SLSR 2023). **Modern convenience stores are community assets and now more than ever have an increasingly important role in their local communities.** As local economic multipliers, they are also important employers of local staff, with that money often put back into the local community and helping to strengthen local economies.

Views on working draft Evidence Report (Town Centres and Retailing)

SGF welcomes the opportunity to submit a response to this phase of the Local Development Plan and broadly agrees with many of the principles set out in the document provided.

SGF has previously supported initiatives outlined by the Scottish Government and several Local Authorities to improve planning outcomes for communities and ensure local access to essential retail facilities and services. With a focus on local living and updating planning and development aims for communities, applicants, and decision makers.

As referenced in the Evidence Report sections 13.1.5, 13.1.10 and 13.2.5, we mark in particular examples such as the recent Scottish Government 'Local living and 20-minute neighbourhoods - planning guidance' as an important step in the right direction for improving planning outcomes.

It is SGF's view that the primary objective of planning and development should always be to improve the wellbeing and quality of life within in the community. SGF also believes it is important to highlight the specific importance of enabling a thriving local economy, local employment and access to highly valued services and amenities, for both individuals and the community as a whole. Therefore, while we do not take a view on any specific locality, we agree that there should be an emphasis on ensuring town centres and communities have access to essential services first and foremost. Such as a local convenience stores and the services they provide, alongside a variety of other outlets. As discussed in section 13.1.4.

For example, our research shows that customers value many of the services offered in their convenience store such as access to cash, post office facilities and click & collect. SGF's Scottish Local Shop Report 2023 (SLSR 2023) also highlights through consumer polling that convenience stores are ranked among the other important services as having the most positive impact on the local area, alongside dedicated Post Offices and pharmacies.

In addition, convenience stores are well known to be local economic multipliers, supporting local employment and growth. Potentially mitigating the concerns of 'vacancy rate' discussed in the

Report. Likewise, SGF's Go Local programme, for example, supports local producers access local markets, while the SGF Healthy Living Programme ensures that communities have access to fresh and beneficial food options.

While we broadly recognise and support the goals of the Evidence Report, as discussed. SGF is of the view that the success of the Local Development Plan will be largely determined by meaningful uptake, and how these ideas are put into practice by planning authorities.

SGF is of the view that a collaborative approach to local development and planning requirements provides the best overall outcome. Despite being vital for their communities, many convenience retailers are experiencing a very challenging economic environment. Issues such as energy costs, cost-of-living, stubbornly high food inflation, especially for staple items, are having an impact on both business and household budgets.

While we recognise the issues raised in sections 13.2.8-11 and the changing nature of shopper habits, convenience stores remain an essential service for most residents. With the average customer using their local store 2.7 times per week and 57% of customers accessing their local store on foot (SLSR 2023). Moreover, 67% of customers would prefer to see investment in their immediate local area, over the nearest town/city centre, and shop staff often live within the community they serve, with 42% walking to work.

Furthermore, some of the challenges above could be mitigated through more robust support and engagement with government and local authorities. A collaborative approach to local investment, development and planning will not only benefit local businesses but local communities and the local economy as well. In addition, ongoing concerns such as business rates and overregulation on the convenience sector is undoubtedly stifling business investment in communities and local economic growth.

Overall, SGF recognises the potential benefits of an improved Local Development Plan and welcomes the opportunity to respond to this Evidence Report.

SGF

Scottish Grocers' Federation

www.scottishshop.org.uk

Promoting Responsible Community Retailing Since 1918
to ensure a sustainable and prosperous convenience industry in Scotland



SGF hopes you find the information provided in this response useful.

Yours sincerely,

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- SGF gives permission to the Midlothian Council to share this response internally as required and is content to be contacted again in the future, as required.

4

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