



bira

British Independent Retailers Association

Bira Manifesto

Making the high
street better

Foreword

Foreword by Andrew Goodacre,
CEO of Bira.

In a swiftly changing retail landscape, the British Independent Retailers Association (Bira) staunchly advocates for the needs of independent retail businesses across the UK, steadfast in its commitment to 'Making the High Street Better.'

Addressing the myriad challenges faced by smaller enterprises on our vibrant high streets, Bira employs advocacy, campaigning, collaboration, and engagement to champion initiatives that empower independent retailers to not only survive but thrive in a competitive market.



Our manifesto envisions a high street characterised by fairness, sustainability, diversity, and growth – a vision contributing to the vitality of local communities and the broader economy.

The future of the High Street.

At Bira, we envision the future of retail to be a dynamic, thriving high street that serves as the heartbeat of local communities.

Our vision is rooted in sustainability, inclusivity, and technological innovation, fostering an environment where independent retailers not only survive but excel. The very big drive is to keep high streets diverse and vibrant.

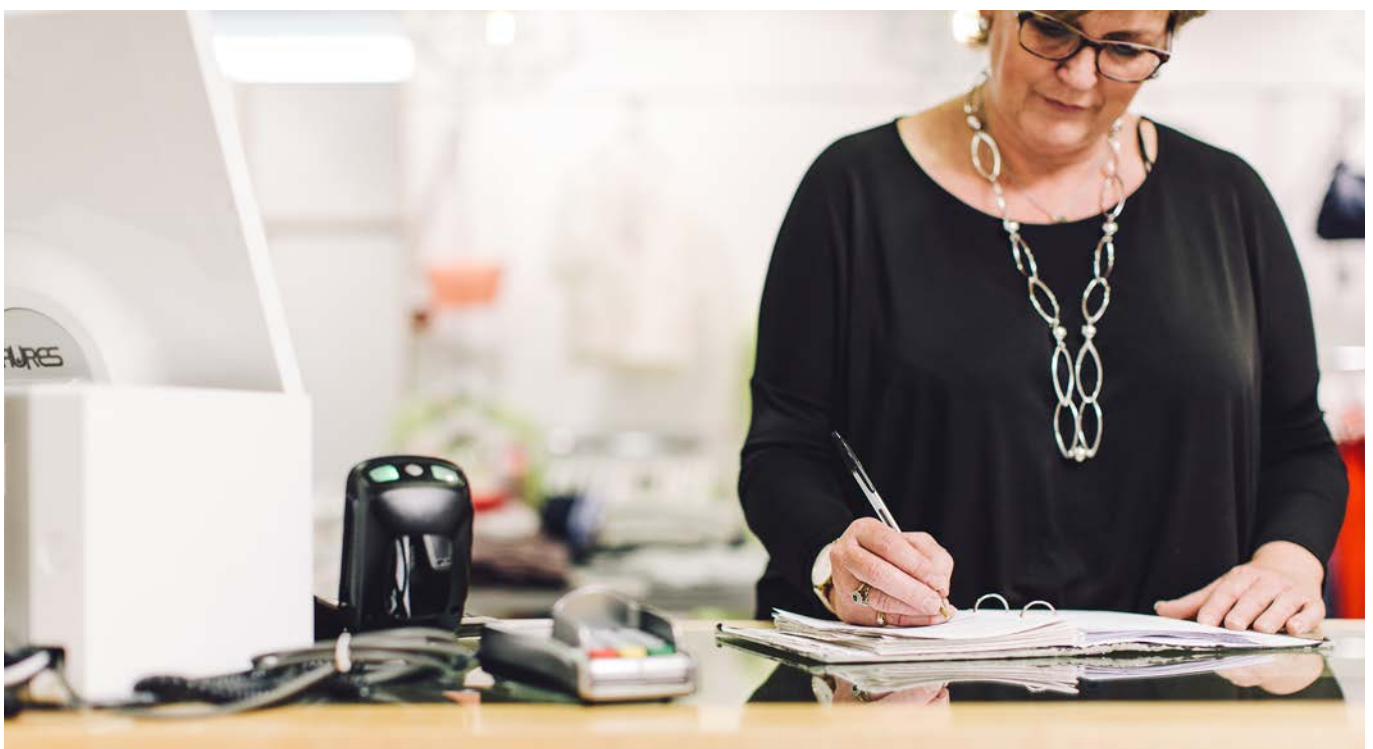
Retail is an important contributor, but so is leisure, hospitality, culture and residency and all these sectors must work together to develop a place where people want to spend time and money.

Bira's vision is for a high street that champions the interests of independent retailers, promotes sustainability, and contributes to the overall well-being of local communities and the broader economy.



Bira employs advocacy, campaigning, collaboration, and engagement to champion initiatives that empower independent retailers.

Andrew Goodacre, Chief Executive Officer, Bira



Our Vision

Our vision for that future includes:

Sustainable Practices

Independent retailers lead in sustainable products and circular economy principles.

Bira envisions a high street promoting locally sourced, ethically produced goods. Circularity will become increasingly important – repairing and servicing items just as important as replacement.

Technology Integration

Independent retailers use some technology for enhanced customer experiences, without losing sight of the need for a personal touch. Technology tailors offerings for unique and memorable customer experiences. Bira values a high street building customer loyalty through personal connections.

As large retailers invest in technology and consumers increasingly use technology, Bira envisions a high street leveraging e-commerce, data analytics, and digital marketing.

Inclusive and Diverse High Streets

High streets reflect community diversity with a range of products for all demographics.

Bira sees high streets as inclusive spaces where everyone feels welcome. We want all groups to use the high streets, and that is why all high streets need to be accessible and safe.

Flexible and Adaptable Spaces

Independent retailers innovate with dynamic pop-ups and collaborative hubs. Bira sees a high street evolving quickly to meet market trends. There is too much unused space vacated by retail that could be used in different ways for start-ups, community projects and general re-purposing.



Bira Manifesto

Making the high street better

Continuous Learning and Skills Development

Independent retailers invest in ongoing education to adapt to emerging trends.

Bira's vision is a future where indie retailers enhance their business acumen through skill development. Retail is a sector where people of all age can develop careers and be part of community business. The sector is dynamic because shoppers behaviours are changing quickly. Bira would like to see government support in the form of funding made more widely available and more accessible to the smaller business owners.

Community Hubs

High streets become vibrant community hubs with events and cultural activities.

Independent retailers act as community anchors, fostering social interaction. This is particularly important for vulnerable people and our ageing population.



Our Campaigns

Business Rates

The business rates system in the UK dates back to the 1980s, replacing the local property tax. Over time, concerns have grown about its impact on small retailers, creating a burden that affects their viability. Bira recognises the need for comprehensive reforms to make the system fairer and more adaptable to the changing retail landscape. Actively engaging with stakeholders, including the government and treasury, Bira advocates for changes that promote fairness, sustainability, and growth for independent retailers.

The focus is on addressing the challenges posed by business rates to ensure a supportive environment for small businesses in the UK.

Bira's campaign for reduced business rates for small retailers proved to be a catalyst for the introduction of the retail rates discount in 2019. Bira was also supportive of reducing the revaluation cycle from 5 to 3 years, making rates more relevant to the business and the trading environment.

Our Ask:



Reform of business rates system to reduce the burden to the retail sector.



The retail rates discount to be made permanent at 75%.



Reduction in the multiplier, down to 35p in the pound.



Taxation

Recognising the challenges posed by corporation tax and VAT, Bira campaigns for a simplified taxation system in the UK that encourages growth, investment, and good business performance. Bira would like to see policies that address corporation tax complexities, emphasising the need for a well-structured system that benefits businesses of all sizes.

Retail already pays more than its fair share of tax compared to other sectors. In many ways retail is the biggest tax collector of the government, from PAYE, National Insurance, Business Rates to VAT etc. The tax burden is increasing all the time. and the consequence is reduced investment in premises and people.

Our Ask:

Introduce a corporate tax allowance for small business owners. In the same way that employees have a tax allowance, we believe there should be a corporate tax allowance for small retailers so the first £25k of profit is tax free.

Today's Contribution

- £99.5bn GVA pa
- 5% of GDP
- £1 in GVA creates +£2.10 in wider community
- £439bn spent in retail (excluding automotive) in 2022
- 4.8% productivity growth 2019-2022 vs 1.9% for the UK
- Pays 44% of profits in tax or £1.27 for every £1 invested
- Invests £17bn+ pa
- 8.3% of business investment
- £540m raised for charitable causes in 2022

Figures from the British Retail Consortium

Bira Manifesto

Making the high street better

Cost Burdens

Bira Addresses Rising Costs

The rising costs of operating on the high street, including business rates, rents, energy, and labour, are significant challenges for retailers. Bira recognises and addresses these issues through ongoing discussions and lobbying efforts with relevant authorities, advocating for reforms, government support, and fair practices.

Our Ask:



Energy - Businesses to be able to renegotiate contracts that were signed in extreme circumstances when energy prices were at their highest in 2022.



National Minimum Wage – An equivalent increase in employers national insurance allowance to offset the impact of National Minimum Wage increases.



Greater transparency - On billing and broker commissions for all businesses.

Landlord & Tenant Act

Bira Advocates for Fair Rent Reviews

All too often, small retailers feel vulnerable with landlords and landlord behaviour. We regularly hear of hardworking shop owners having to accept significant rent increases or leave the premises. For too long the power has been with landlords.

Rent is a substantial cost for retailers, and Bira calls for a fair and balanced approach to rent reviews. Advocating for a long-overdue revision of the Landlord and Tenant Act, Bira aims to ensure greater security of tenure for tenants, the removal of upward-only rent reviews, and rents reflecting market conditions rather than being solely dictated by landlords.

Our Ask:



For greater security for tenants.



The removal of upward only rent reviews.



We would also like to see clarity and transparency of service agreements.



PUDDING BASINS

KitchenCraft

OVEN, MICROWAVE, FREEZER & DISHWASHER-SAFE

5 AVAILABLE SIZES

9.5CM	0.31	3.75"	0.18"
11CM	0.35	4.5"	0.21"
15CM	0.57	6"	0.34"
17CM	1.01	7"	0.44"
20CM	1.22	8"	0.51"

TRADITIONAL
STONEWARE PUDDING
BASINS WITH LIPPED
RIM FOR FASTENING
COVERS OR MUSLIN

A CHOICE OF SIZES
AVAILABLE FROM AN
INDIVIDUAL PUDDING
BASIN TO A LARGE
FAMILY SIZE

51

Bira Manifesto

Making the high street better

Cash & Payments

Bira Supports Access to Cash and Business Banking

In the past 13 years, we have seen the number of bank and building society branches reduce from 17000 to 7700 – an average loss of 714 branches a year. The banks will tell us that this is due to customers changing the way they bank with more people using digital banking, telephone banking etc. It must also be noted that bank closures also reduces footfall into towns and high streets, so closures hurt retail businesses in more than one way.

However, we feel that the banks are driving this behaviour as much as responding to it, and these closures have little respect for the needs of local communities or businesses working within them. All too often the focus is often on the impact on the vulnerable parts of our population, the elderly. We often forget that businesses that allow people to spend cash in their shops, need access to cash just as much as the average person, if not more. Banks will point business towards post office, but these are also under more pressure and reducing in numbers having more than halved since the 1980s.

Finally independent retailers work hard to make profit. It seems only fair that should a small retailer manage to create cash reserves in a bank account, then that account should attract a market rate of interest. All too often the interest on bank accounts for a smaller business is very low and this is unfair.

Our Ask:

For an introduction of more banking hubs. We only have 31 so far in the whole of the UK to replace 10,000 branches and we want to see the roll out of these hubs increasing substantially in the coming years.

Banks to pay competitive or equivalent interest rates for business accounts as they do on consumer accounts. It's unfair that a business saving money should not benefit the same way as a normal person. SMEs are missing out on £7 billion in interest rates every year.




Regulatory Burden

Bira Addresses Regulatory Challenges


Regulations, especially those concerning age-restricted items, can burden retailers. Bira actively engages with relevant authorities, participates in consultations, and collaborates with other retail associations to shape regulations that are reasonable, practical, and proportionate to the needs of the industry.

An example of this is the sale of bladed items. Shop owners have adopted the new rules in a responsible way, however we always said that the problem would therefore be an online problem and it is still possible to buy banned items very easily online.

Our Ask:



Regulation for small retailers should be proportionate and not place an unnecessary cost burden on the retailer.



Enforcement of businesses not following the rules is necessary. The relevant authorities need better funding and must address the wild west of the internet with regards to banned/age restricted items.


The People in Retail

Bira Supports Retail Skills Development


Bira focuses on attracting young talent to the retail industry and supports smaller businesses in adopting technology and developing their skills. Advocating for apprenticeship reforms, embracing technology, and collaborating with government departments to provide funding and grants to small retailers. Bira aims to enhance the skills and capabilities of retail owners and employees in the independent sector.

How do we make retail, specifically indie retail, a place people want to work?

Our Ask:



For a reform of the apprenticeship scheme. Although small retailers don't pay into the scheme, it is still too impractical for the smaller business to employ an apprentice.



When funds/ grants are made available, they need to be easy to find, with a user friendly application process.

Bira Manifesto

Making the high street better

Property & Place Management

Bira Advocates for Recognition of Independent Retail

There are still too many examples of poor planning and poor cohesiveness of ideas which have a negative impact on the high street businesses. For example there seems to be a rush to remove cars from our towns and high streets, without thinking of suitable alternatives as not everyone wants to ride a bike.

Bira actively engages with local authorities through the High Streets Task Force to ensure the contribution of independent retail is recognised and supported in the development and planning of high streets and town centres.

A diverse high street creates a vibrant and engaging environment, supporting the local economy, preserving cultural heritage, and meeting varied consumer needs. Bira advocates for a diverse high street that fosters community engagement and contributes to the overall vitality of towns and cities.

Our Ask:

To make it mandatory for local authorities to engage and involve small retailers with any proposed plans to change and improve 'their place'.

Proactively seek alternative use for retail space which is still empty after a long time. It doesn't have to be retail, it can be pop up centres for new starters, community spaces for young people etc.



Retail Crime

Bira's survey of its members in late 2023 revealed a significant surge in retail crime over the past year. Shockingly, 40% of shop owners or staff experienced verbal abuse, and 6.5% faced physical harm, including being spat at, assaulted, or having items thrown at them. Disturbingly, 82% of those physically abused chose not to report it to the police, and for those who did, only 18% saw prosecutions.

The survey highlighted that 70% of those verbally abused felt the situation had worsened in the last 12 months, while 50% of those physically abused reported a deterioration. Alarming figures showed that 66% of verbal abuse cases went unreported, with 50% of reported incidents not attended by the police, and 42% resulting in no prosecutions. These concerning trends underscore the urgent need for effective measures to address and combat escalating retail crime.

A lot of the focus has been on the theft of items and abuse aimed at retail workers and shop owners. We should not lose sight of the fact that antisocial behaviour can make a high street feel unsafe and deter people from using it.

Our Ask:

Implement the new law to make abuse of retail staff a standalone offence in England and Wales, as it already is in Scotland.

Secondly, continue to demand better policing on our high streets in general with greater police presence.



Bira Manifesto

Making the high street better

Accessibility

Bira Advocates for Accessibility to high streets and shops

Accessibility is about seeing if we have done enough for the elderly and disabled, or mothers with pushchairs and prams. It is about ensuring that all people can get around easily and safely. Also it's about making things easy to understand and use, for example pricing and using large print on labels.

A recent study by the International Longevity Centre showed that older households have significant spending power. By 2040, 63p in every pound will be spent by older households. However instead of them going to the high street, they are staying at home to shop. Over 65% of people aged 65+ are shopping online. There are small changes that shop keepers can make which will make a big difference to in-person shopping experiences for everyone, such as making the aisles wide enough for pushchairs, wheelchairs and those with mobility issues.

Bira addresses concerns about local authorities' attitudes towards parking, advocating for affordable and available parking options. Emphasising the importance of diverse payment options, pedestrianisation alternatives, and comprehensive planning, Bira aims to support the interests of small businesses and ensure the continued vitality of town centres.

Our Ask:



Stop making car parking a barrier to accessing our high streets. Local authorities and councils should be obliged to provide free time limited parking to allow everyone the chance to visit and shop.

Sustainability

Bira Promotes Sustainable Practices

Recognising the increasing desire for sustainable shopping, Bira encourages independent retailers to curate sustainable product ranges, minimise packaging waste, and embrace circular economy principles. Bira advocates for government support, grants, and financial incentives to facilitate sustainability efforts in the retail sector.

Our Ask:

- 
- Greater clarity on the funds that are available for small retailers to access.*
- 
- More education on what it really means to be sustainable.*
- 
- Too many goods are imported and now is the time to encourage investment in on-shore manufacturing.*



Bira's Manifesto

Bira's manifesto outlines a comprehensive vision for a high street that champions the interests of independent retailers, promotes sustainability, and contributes to the overall well-being of local communities and the broader economy.

Achieving our vision for the future of retail requires a concerted effort from various stakeholders. Bira commits to fostering collaboration between independent retailers, hospitality, leisure, local communities, and government bodies.

Through continued advocacy, collaboration, and engagement, Bira strives to make the high street better for everyone.

About Bira

The British Independent Retailers Association (Bira) works with over 6,000 independent businesses of all sizes, and it's our goal to make every member feel supported, informed and inspired. We're here to offer help independent retail businesses didn't even know they needed.

By joining Bira members receive access to a wealth of business benefits, from free legal advice to preferential card rates, business banking to specialist insurance, tax accountants to music. There's strength in numbers, so we are also able to offer exclusive rates and discounts that we negotiate on behalf of our members with over 180 suppliers representing approximately 2000 associated brands across a range of retail.

We also make sure our members are represented at all levels, getting the voice of independent retail heard at the top.

For more details about the work we do, visit www.Bira.co.uk

Contact

If you require any further information please get in touch:

British Independent Retailers Association

Telephone: 0121 446 6688

Address: 225 Bristol Rd, Edgbaston,
Birmingham, B5 7UB

Email: info@Bira.co.uk

