

# Opinion – Sainsburys on the march

✘ by Councillor Melanie Main

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Margiottas, the well respected Edinburgh grocers, have sold their Marchmont Road shop to Sainsbury's. When it opens later in the year it will be the twentieth Sainsbury's store in Edinburgh – unless their new superstore in Gorgie opens first. Six superstores and 15 local shops. Surely enough is enough?

Many residents seem dismayed, but resigned, to Sainsbury's arrival. However the ultimate power lies with the consumer. We all need to shop, and what we buy and where is the bottom line for supermarkets and local shops. Most people who use local shops don't use them exclusively: a mixture of supermarket and local. I believe we must all try harder and buy more locally.

Soon there will be little choice and no local economy in our high street, unless the city council secures ways to level the playing field between the powerful supermarkets and the small local business. Unfortunately for some, high streets death-by-supermarket has already occurred. An impoverished local environment and lack of choice is becoming all too common.

When I asked Andrew Burns, the Council Leader, to commit to exploring all options to redress the balance yesterday at Leaders Questions his response only went so far as to say planning and licensing law left the Council powerless to do anything.

But we can't just shrug our shoulders and turn our backs, not

least because local can mean sustainable, and also fosters stronger community.

Local businesses are acutely realistic about their situation. For some, battered by massive supermarket out of town stores and the current economic climate, a Sainsbury on their doorstep is the last straw: Marchmont's last butcher is preparing to retire and to try to sell up. Other shopkeepers shrug it off as inevitable and prepare to hunker down to weather the inevitable price war between the Co-op and Sainsbury's. Those that choose to stay deserve our support, and support from their Council.

What strikes me from talking to local shopkeepers today is their resilience; those who succeed have found new ways to survive, moving into niche markets, setting up delivery services. And the council should be making every effort to help – Edinburgh businesses are expected to buy commercial parking permits – I've never seen a Tesco or Sainsbury delivery lorry displaying one? Thanks to Green MSP Alison Johnstone local shops can share recycling contracts to cut costs – but the Council doesn't tell shopkeepers so no one knows!. Small measures, but these can make the difference when margins are so tight.

Traders associations spring up to fight the relentless invasion by the supermarkets, but they inevitably fold within a few years, because of the workload involved and running costs – Why doesn't the Council provide support to Traders Associations?

Our local shops deserve more than just domestic trade – does your employer use local services? Edinburgh Council could do far more to support local business: the city's local economy would be far more secure if the city 'shopped local' more often. It is in their power and hiding behind European Procurement law will not do. For instance some primary schools buy fruit from local shops – why not all of them?

A recent internal audit showed that a primary head teacher could secure local services for two thirds of the price that city procurement managed – and would have saved enough to paint three classrooms, proving it's not necessarily cheaper to buy from the big guys who pay their rates and taxes far away, if they pay them at all.

If the Council chooses to tackle the plight of our disappearing local high streets, it needs to understand what shops need to do to survive and proactively encourage and support them. First we need that clear commitment.