

**Bath & North East Somerset Council
Response to the Post Office proposals
(Feb 26th – April 9th 2008)**

**ENTERPRISE AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY PANEL**

Consultation deadline April 9th 2008

Dear Mrs Wright,
Network Development Manager
National Consultation Team

Network Change Programme – Area plan proposal for Bristol and Somerset

This is the formal response from Bath & North East Somerset Council through its Enterprise and Economic Development Panel to the above Area Plan. It has been produced following a wide ranging consultation with members of the public, Councillor representatives and through a multi-agency forum of interested parties (Council Members/Officers responsible for Adult Care, and Community Action, Federation of Small Businesses and many others).

Our response is in two parts, firstly in relation to the generality of the proposals and secondly, we have provided detailed comments in the document relating to individual proposals.

The Panel also has some general concerns about the process of the consultation and decision making, and has identified many inaccuracies in the way that the consultation was conducted.

- First, that subsequent to the Post Office's decision, about these facilities there appears to be no "appeal" mechanism or method of requiring the Post Office to reconsider their decision regarding closures.
- Secondly, there is a general but significant concern that there was no consideration of a plan to cope with the transitional phase between loss of income and the closure of business for the local communities affected.
- Thirdly, the Panel felt that the consultation process was an incredibly short time for the Council to make a response on the proposed closures. The Panel felt that the whole process was nothing more than a *fait à complis* where a numbers game is being played out by the Government at the public's expense!
- Fourthly, Parish Councils are not part of the statutory consultation, however, Parish Councillors are the representatives of the communities that the proposals are concerned with and therefore it is immoral that they should have been sidelined.

The Panel strongly believes that the restructuring of Royal Mail by the Government into individual business has deliberately isolated the Post Office and identified it as a loss making business.

The Panel also suggests that awareness of the Post Office 'brand' is lacking and that it could have been marketed far more effectively. The knock-on effect being to help to change the perception of Post Office facilities and to help empower the community in saving its Post Offices from closure.

Finally, there has been an overwhelming deep concern that has been expressed across the Council area at the scale of the proposed closures. Bath & North East Somerset is a large predominately rural area, with a growing population with a large concentration of elderly, disabled and infirm residents in our communities. The Panel is also very aware that the Equalities Impact Assessment and Sustainability (Race Relations Amendment Act 2006 updated to Equality Act 2006) has not been taken into account. Post Office Ltd has failed in its attempt to adequately explain whether these pieces of legislation have been considered within the Post Office closures plan.

Post Offices are a keystone operation amongst a range of crucial services upon which the community depends. The Council is exploring options to locate some of its payment systems/services within Post Offices and would hope that the Post Office would respond favourably to any approach.

I would be grateful for your full consideration of the issues raised in this response. If you require clarification of any issue then please do not hesitate to contact me. A duplicate of this response will also be copied to Postwatch.

Yours Sincerely,



Councillor Martin Veal
Chairman Enterprise and Economic Overview & Scrutiny Panel

Methodology

The Enterprise and Economic Development Panel formulated their final response through a combination of wide ranging consultation with members of the public, Councillor representatives and through a multi-agency forum of interested parties (Council Members/Officers responsible for Adult Care, and Community Action, Federation of Small Businesses and many more). A Public consultation meeting was held on the 18th March 2008.

The Council also carried out a brief on-line survey to try and capture local residents concerns. We had a total of 18 respondents who completed this survey.

After presentation of the evidence and after public debate the Panel has formulated the following points for the Post Office's consideration (as set out in the sections below)

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1) The elderly & disabled

- The impact of closure will be especially serious for older people, the infirm, carers and the disabled both within remote communities and in urban areas significantly where there are a number of issues involving access to alternative Post Offices. In particular the lack of nearby parking at some of the alternative branches is a notable concern.
- The topography of the areas have not been investigated fully. For example, the terrain surrounding the area for the proposed closure of Bathford Hill Post Office is incredibly steep and difficult, therefore, for the elderly or disabled to try to descend or climb to an alternative branch. These concerns have been neglected within the proposals.
- The impact / affect on the local community will be much greater than has been taken into account within these closure proposals. A sufficient degree of 'value' has not been considered or placed on the significance of the Post Office to a community. The disadvantaged and most vulnerable members within these communities are therefore most likely to suffer.
- The key concerns associated with the above are that some elderly and less able people will no longer be able to walk to their local Post Office which has become a key part of the structure of their lives. It provides the opportunity for the elderly, the infirm, carers and the disabled to keep active and socialise with the rest of the local community. The Panel were shocked by the absence of any assessment of this value to the community.
- *Jane Shayler, Divisional Director, Adult Care. Housing and Health, B&NES Council* stressed her concern with the loss of social interaction that the Post Office provides to the local community. This would have a particularly negative impact on those who have suffered from a stroke, as the best recovery is found to be through social interaction as it provides structure and general purpose each day. Promoting re-integration and independence for those most vulnerable within the local community.

- *Quote from POSTWATCH (Richard Brown) presentation provided at Public Consultation on the 18th March:* “Given the demographics of Post Office customers, and that this programme is concerned with rural areas (as well as urban), it’s worth mentioning Postwatch’s special statutory duty to look after the interests of potentially vulnerable customers: particularly people with disabilities, chronically sick, elderly, individuals on low incomes, customers residing in rural areas. Looking at levels of access for these individuals will be a key priority in the programme”.

2) Affect of closure on local business

- The Council does not feel that the likely impact on local economies has been taken into account in the Area Plan, particularly in those instances where a branch is connected to an adjoining business such as a shop. Branch closure will impact on the sustainability of the associated business. It will also detrimentally affect businesses that rely on their local Post Office network to deliver and receive parcels. Neighbouring shops are also likely to see a reduction in trade.
- The possible knock-on effect of these closures is that the convenience store is likely to close as a result of Post Office closure. Some local authorities are offering a retail advice service to tackle this.
- *Questions asked within the Council’s public consultation meeting on the 18th March asked the following question to the Post Office representative:*

Q1.Has the Post Office and the regional spatial strategy been considered within these proposals?

A1. Claim that there are 3,500 available Post Offices within the country. Post Office Ltd has a requirement to deal with expansion and take into account the known development and planned expansion not the expectation of growth in your local area.

- *Results from the on line Council's Post Office consultation survey:*
One of the main issues that residents were worried about was the effect on local business coupled by the effect of regeneration in the area.
- *Update provided by The Federation of Small Businesses (FSB):* They have been lobbying the government and the Post Office on behalf of businesses for nearly two years. The case is proved that the closure of rural and urban Post Offices, and the changes in Post Office services, have impacted negatively on business and the local communities.

The Panel also acknowledges that not all Post Offices are as economically viable as others. For example, many of the FSB members are in fact sub-postmasters. In the course of their surveys and investigations, they have been informed that some of the sub-postmasters do not actually wish to continue offering Post Office services, as services have reduced drastically over the last few years. In many cases these postmasters would like to give up the Post Office side of their business - and use the compensation money to refurbish and expand their retail facilities to ensure future success.

3) The value of the local Post Office within the Community

The economic and social value of the local Post Office within the community has not been taken into account. The government standpoint on these closures is contrary to their national policies such as improving the carbon footprint, improving the local community. Neither of these high priority policies has been considered within the planned proposals.

There is little value or weight placed upon people within a local community, especially the distances they will have to travel. These will be considerable when attempting to reach the next alternative Post Office. In this plan Post Office Ltd has abrogated its social responsibility on this matter.

- *Dick Whittington, Community Action*, “community shops are run by the community for the community, and it’s critical for the need to think about the long term particularly for rural and urban communities:-
 - a. It is recommended that detailed discussions are needed with the sub postmasters affected.
 - b. This is NOT a voluntary process, but many sub postmasters may welcome the compensation package. Parish Councils are a glaring omission NOT being part of the statutory consultation.
 - c. There is a need to think about future national and local policy in the longer term”.
- The Post Office is often the first social opportunity for young children to socially interact in commerce, for example, children learn how to deal with money and to relate to children’s play characters such as Postman Pat and the Piggy Bank with visiting their local Post Office.

4) The concern about increase in the carbon footprint

- Part of the National Government and the EU’s current policy is the reduction of the carbon footprint. This has not been taken into account within the consideration of these proposed closures.
- *Based on the results of the Council’s on line survey:* A key concern by respondents was that the move to an alternative branch could increase the need to use private vehicles and public transport, if any were available. Therefore, Post Office users would be using more fuel, and create a lot more road traffic and thus increasing CO₂, which the Government is trying to reduce.
- Also of concern: one of the main criteria within the branch access report is the consideration of bus routes. However a number of the local bus routes have been cut by First Group for not being environmentally economic. There is a lack of co-ordination between the proposals for closure and the First Group identified on viable bus routes.

5) Increasing deprivation

- Rural Deprivation has not been taken into account within these proposals. It is difficult to define but there are small pockets of rural deprivation in areas that are classified as wealthy that have not been considered.
- Pockets of Clandown & Park Estate have been reported as ‘a most deprived area’ based on income deprivation figures for the area. Although they are not the most deprived areas in B&NES, they are the most deprived area where a Post Office is due for closure. The Panel is not convinced that this has been taken into account. It is their opinion that the effect will be a further deprivation of the area by the closure of the local Post Office.
- The Equalities Impact Assessment and Sustainability (Race Relations Amendment Act 2006 updated to Equality Act 2006) has not been taken into account. Post Office Ltd has failed in its attempt to adequately explain whether these pieces of legislation have been considered within the Post Office closures plan. Equality of access to services is key to preventing increases of deprivation.
- *Results from the Councils on line Post Office survey:*
Some of the key issues that residents are worried about was the concern with social isolation and the knock-on effect on the elderly, disabled and the infirm and their carers.

6) Public concerns specific to individual areas/Post Offices in B&NES

In summary these relate to:-

- The lack of disabled access at some or all of the alternative/nearest branches to which customers will be expected to migrate, and the absence of low floor/wheelchair access on the bus routes travelling to alternative branches. In some cases bus services travelling to both the first and second alternative branches are not registered as providing this type of access. In other instances where the bus service to the first alternative branch is not registered as

providing low floor/wheelchair access, the bus services to the second alternative branches cannot be guaranteed.

- There are branch closures located in areas where there are no direct bus services to the first or second alternative branch.
- The pressure of additional custom will lead to longer queues/transaction times in the central Post Office (already severely pressed at key times), and the alternative Post Offices.
- The impact on local economies where a branch is connected to a shop/village store or part of a larger shopping complex.
- The concern about the increase in traffic congestion in central Bath as a result of more people using the Crown Post Office, particularly during peak times.
- *On line Council survey indicated results:*
 - a. Currently 71% of respondents travel by foot to their local Post Office and only 19% by private vehicle.
 - b. One respondent travels to their local Post Office in a wheel chair along with their carer.
 - c. The question was asked whether people would be able to travel to their next Post Office? 17% said “no”. Some of the main barriers to this access were the ease of physical access and the cost associated with travel.
 - d. The closure would see the demise of the local community and the general social cost of these closures has not been taken into account within the proposals. For example; “Very often the in-shop Post Office is integral to the continuance of the local village shop and both are a vital resource for rural/small communities. Not everyone is able or willing to bank/shop/pay road tax via the internet. What the Government is doing is effectively increasingly isolating and limiting the choice of the most vulnerable sectors of the public”.

7) Strategies for coping with closure

The Panel stresses a concern that the Post Office has no strategy for transition period.

The Panel suggest the following strategies for consideration:-

- *Helping to maintain viable village shops:* twinning vulnerable Post Offices, so various branches can open various sessions (am/pm - days of the week) with the same staff.
- *Scope for community owned shops:* i.e. the Council would like to see some basic Post Office services retained in a village, or suburban service area, perhaps located in the community shop or other suitable premises. Whether this is in the form of stamps and other services available from the shop, for example, or possibly from a mobile service regularly visiting the sites in question.
- *Thinking of other ways of meeting service needs:* i.e. 'One Stop Shop'.
- *Village hubs and community self-help.* I.e. outreach points.
- *Making sure that the issue stays on the agenda* i.e. local Government funding.

**FURTHER SUPPORTING INFORMATION ON A BRANCH BY BRANCH
BASIS.**

**(INFORMATION COLLATED FROM PUBLIC CONSULTATION AND
LETTERS/ EMAILS RECEIVED WITHIN THE COUNCIL)**

1. Bathford

Ease of Access:

There is a concern that the closure will leave the parishioners of Bathford without access to any Post Office services, and that Bathford does not appear to be on the list for any form of outreach services. There are distinct topographical issues for the elderly, the disabled, carers and the infirm.

A member of the public asked the Post Office if Bathford could be considered for an outreach service. The response from Post Office Ltd appears to indicate that because it is less than a mile from its nearest alternative at Batheaston (according to our data and on-the-ground surveying) is outside of the outreach model.

Retail Type/Impact on local economy, housing and commercial development

The Parish Council acknowledges that the sub-postmaster does not wish to carry on the business as it is not financially viable.

2. Bear Flat



Local Councillors presented concerns over the closure of Bear Flat Post Office and have recently submitted a petition from local residents of over 1,000 signatures straight to central Government.

Terrain/Geography between branches/Road distances

A location of the next available branches are incredibly hilly and is therefore difficult for local elderly residents, or those with a disability etc, to travel too. Local residents are generally unsure where the next appropriate available branch will be for them to use.

Letter's received within the Council from local residents:

a. "The alternative Post Office in the centre of Bath is at the bottom of an exceptionally steep and long hill. We could drive down - there is nowhere to park and as that part of Bath is being developed, it is a building site. We could catch a bus, but these are variable so there is a very unpleasant walk across blocked roads .The Moorland Road Post Office is also a hill or two away - albeit less steep, but it is just as inaccessible by bus or car & is also very crowded".

b. "There is no bus route available to alternative branch at 28 Moorland Road".

Retail Type/Impact on local economy/Housing and commercial development

The alternative Southgate Development has not been taken into consideration within these proposals. The Southgate Post Office is currently very busy, and difficult due to the extreme steepness of the hill to the Bear Flat area, it is not felt to be a viable alternative for the local residents in the area and has therefore not been fully assessed or appreciated by Post Office Ltd.

There are 24 Business within Bear Flat and the cost of these closures on them will be significant to them. A Councillor highlighted at our public consultation meeting that “There is an estimated 15% decline in business activity with these Post Office closures”.

Letters received into the Council from local residents:

- a. “This Post Office is used constantly and therefore brings business to other local shops something both the Government and B&NES have said they wish to support and encourage. It would seem ironic for the catalyst for local shops to be removed and local businesses have expressed their concern forcibly. The economic stability of Bear Flat as a thriving local community would be put in danger”.
- b. “The area is densely populated and more houses are being squeezed in all the time”.

Alternative branches- parking at branch

The parking at the alternative branch in Southgate is incredibly difficult and costly.

Local businesses depend on the Post Office for sending bulky parcels and letters again on a daily basis and would find it difficult in a working day to drive to Bath or Moorland Road where parking is very difficult and in the case of Bath very expensive.

The two nearest Post Offices to the one at Bear Flat are both nearly always full of people, indeed there is normally a queue and at least a 10 minute wait

Popularity

Bear Flat is a densely populated suburb of Bath with a traditional family community. There are a high percentage of self employed residents who depend on their Post Office.

The vulnerable

Old people and young families with babies and toddlers are among the vulnerable who would find it difficult to drive or take a bus into Bath or walk to Moorland Road. They use the Post Office often on a daily basis and would have no viable alternative.

Environment

Currently the community walk to the Post Office does not impact on the carbon footprint but the closure would increase the use of vehicles and increase upon the currently low carbon footprint for the area.

3. Claremont

There is currently an ongoing petition to save Claremont Post Office with approximately 5,000 signatures. This can be found on <http://campaigns.libdems.org.uk/savebathspostoffices>.

Terrain/Geography between branches/Road distances

There is substantial concern that the elderly residents who use Claremont are going to struggle to negotiate the steep hill between it and the alternative. There is also a significant bus journey to the first alternative branch at Larkhall which elderly and infirm residents would also have to consider.

Population

The current population size, within 1 mile of the local branch, is significantly larger than that of the alternative branch in Larkhall (22279 / 17899) *Post Office Branch Access Report*.

Retail Type/Impact on local economy/Housing and commercial development

Claremont Post Office is currently situated on a busy crossroad close to a church, an off-licence, a medical centre, a chemist and a dentist and is part of a small but vibrant suburban centre. Closing this Post Office will have a significant detrimental effect on the local community and its surrounding businesses and facilities.

4. Lower Weston



An ongoing petition from local residents on the closure of this Post Office has received over 1,000 responses. Refer to the Liberal Democrats website:
<http://www.bathlibdems.org.uk/>

Local Councillors presented the view of the community on this closure to the Panel:-

“Many of the nearby businesses have told us that they also use the Post Office and it would take a lot more time out of their working day for a member of staff to have to travel to Weston village or the city centre to carry out their business. Indeed one business owner told us that he had recently located to a nearby office because the premise is near a Post Office. Another small business told us that he spends £4,000 a year at the Post Office if you equate this to the 30 or more local businesses, this is a lot of business that Lower Weston Post Office receives”.

“Elderly and vulnerable residents cannot be expected to walk up the long, steep hill to Weston Village. The previous closure of Yomede Post Office has already given a number of people a long walk to the services that they need”.

Alternative Branch/Bus Operating Company/Bus Route Number/Bus Service

There is no direct bus route to any of the suggested alternative Post Offices.

Public letters/ emails received:

a. “It is extremely disingenuous to suggest that there is 'free' roadside parking close to the PO in Weston and Moorland Road – it is very difficult to park there during working hours”.

- b. “No account has been made of local people who work on the outskirts of the town, and who only have one hour for lunch and have to drive into town to go to their Bank etc. Street parking is all that is available in such a short time, and by the time you have queued to get into a multi-storey car park and made your way to the street, this leaves very little time to go anywhere, and street parking has now become prohibitively expensive in Bath, and hard to come by”.
- c. “This also increases congestion in the City Centre, which is something Bath & North East Somerset Council is trying to avoid”.

Retail Type/Impact on local Economy/Housing and Commercial Development

The Western Riverside Development has not been taken into account. In the Crest Nicholson site of Western Riverside alone there will be 2,200 homes with approximately 4,000 residents with the first residents moving in as early as 2009. Additionally the Western Riverside development will contain other properties including a new school and many businesses for whom Lower Weston Post Office will be their nearest.

5-6 Staff jobs will be potentially lost within this Post Office.

Public letter/ emails received within the Council:

- a. “The Post Office is used by the local business community. People will use alternative carriers for parcels. This Post Office has a thriving stationery shop attached”.
- b. “Major development is proposed adjacent to Homebase on the riverbank and Newbridge Road Post Office will be the residents’ closest branch. Instead of closing these branches, you should be encouraging local PO’s to provide increased services, such as Passports, Car tax/licensing etc. so that an increased number of people do not have to go into town to spend an even longer time queuing at the main Post Office, which is going to be under even more pressure, once they have closed”.

Population

The current population size, within 1 mile of the local branch, is significantly larger than that of the current alternative branch. (31971 / 15428) *Post Office Branch Access report.*

Public letters received within the Council:

- a. “Newbridge Post Office is part of a vibrant local area in Chelsea Road, Station Road and Newbridge Road. It also has a Bank and numerous small shops that are well frequented by locals. It is not necessary to venture outside of this area for anything. The removal of the local post-office would downgrade the area. It is constantly busy and a necessary service to those who live and work here.”
- b. “Residents as far away as Kelston village that they use the Post Office and residents the opposite way by Victoria Park use the Lower Weston Post Office”.

Social need

There is concern that this branch is often used as a social point for the community and one resident has said that if this Post Office closes they will have no real reason to go out anymore. It will destroy another local community facility.

The vulnerable

Many elderly people use this Post Office and they would find it extremely difficult to travel to Moorland Road or Weston.

5. **Clandown**

Ease of Access:

There is also no disabled access on bus routes 178 & 184 that travel the route.

Alternative Branch/Bus Operating Company/Bus Route Number/Bus Service

The current bus service to the next alternative Post Office (Wells Road) in Radstock only runs every 3 hours. This is not sufficient for local residents who may have to wait another three hours before they can return home by bus.

Terrain/Geography between branches/Road distances

The Terrain is too hilly between the branches to attempt to walk.

Population

Letter from local resident: “The Post Office is the major hub of the village life, which when we moved here some 5 years ago, we did so because the village had a shop, a Post Office and a pub”.

6. East Harptree

Terrain/ Geography between branches/ road distance

There is also varied terrain between branches that the elderly and disabled would be expected to travel.

Letter from local resident: “You could walk, but it is over a mile each way with no pavement, and uphill on the return back”.

Ease of Access

Key point from local resident of area: “Several 70, 80 and 90's year olds no longer drive due to failing eyesight, how are they expected to travel to the next alternative Post Office?”

Alternative Branch/Bus Operating Company/Bus Route Number/Bus Service

The bus service which runs to West Harptree only goes twice a day; at 13:00 and 16:10. This restricted service makes it potentially difficult for anyone to access the alternative Post Office. Furthermore the next bus stop is 50 yards further away than the previous bus stop this is significant for those that have mobility problems.

7. Farmborough

Terrain/ Geography between branches/ road distance

The road distance from the proposed closing branch is more than 1 mile (1.5 miles).

Alternative Branch

Disabled access is not guaranteed on all buses to the next branch in Timsbury.

Retail type/ impact on local economy/ housing & commercial development

Response from local residents: “The local community of Farmborough is concerned about the loss of the Post Office and shop and there is a worry that the shop's closure and allowance in a change of use for the premises will occur. This will not benefit a community that has recently been experiencing social problems”.

Alternative branches- parking at branch

The alternative branch suggested for Farmborough and Marksbury Post Office residents/ users is the same Post Office in (Timsbury High Street) therefore causing a larger population than estimated and putting extra pressure on service delivery.

8. Marksbury

Terrain/ Geography between branches/ road distance

The road distance from proposed closing branch to next local branch in Timsbury is more than 1 mile (2.7) miles.

Alternative Branch/Bus Operating Company/Bus Route Number/Bus Service

The alternative branch suggested for Farmborough and Marksbury Post Office residents/ Users is the same Post Office in (Timsbury High Street) therefore causing a larger population than estimated and putting extra pressure on services at the alternative Post Office.

The bus route available has no guaranteed disabled access, based on the branch access report.

The vulnerable

Letter from local resident: “There is no shop in the village; the Post Office is the only remaining link. Owning a computer is well above the budget of many pensioner living on approx £100 per week”.

9. Newton St Loe

The Chair of the Parish Council conducted a Public petition and questionnaire, which went to every house and business in the village concerning the proposed closure of the Post Office. The response was in favour of keeping the Post Office open, the older members of the community were especially concerned. A copy of this petition and questionnaires was sent to Post Office Ltd.

Population

The population size for Post Office to close is greater than the alternative branch suggested in Corston Bath (2269 / 1735 *within one mile of branch*) *Post Office Branch Access Report*.

Alternative Branch/Bus Operating Company/Bus Route Number/Bus Service

There is no direct bus route between the two branches and the next alternative branch is a mile away.

10. Park Estate

A local Councillor submitted a petition by local residents to the EED Panel, with over 450 signatures collected in one week.

Terrain/ Geography between branches/ road distance

Letter received from local resident: “the report comments that this branch is “0.9 miles away” from the Park estate branch, you do not seem to consider that Park estate is actually central to that area with residents up on Longmeadow Road having the same distance again to travel”.

During the Council’s public consultation meeting, members of the public challenged the accuracy of the reported 0.9 of a mile figure estimated within the access reports, and emphasised to the Panel the inaccuracies in the measurement of distance between branches.

Ease of Access

Letter received from local resident: “It seems a relatively small distance to the main Post Office in Keynsham High Street in practical terms, for the less mobile the distance can seem impossible and many would rely even more heavily on services like Dial-a Ride”

Alternative Branch/Bus Operating Company/Bus Route Number/Bus Service

- a. The locations of the nearest bus stop are significantly further than current (660 yard / 3330 yards from branch) with disabled access not guaranteed on all bus services.
- b. The bus route to High Street (Nearest Post Office) does not serve all local areas.
- c. Reported Queues at High Street Post Office are reported by residents as problematic, and many are made to stand for any length of time.

Retail Type/Impact on local economy/Housing and commercial development

The Keynsham South Ward Forum and local community have been trying to improve the area and this is felt to be a significant blow to their previous, current and future efforts. They have considerable concern about the new homes planned for the area and therefore the extra pressure that will be placed upon the alternative branches, 700 new homes in four years and Somer Housing Association will add another 100 homes.

Public responses received by the Council:

- a. "With the proposed additional housing that is planned for Keynsham, some of it earmarked in this area, it is lunacy to close what could become an even busier sub Post Office. There are no criteria as to why this branch should close."
- b. "The Queens Road area is designated for 700 new houses in the next 5 years so it seems very short-sighted to be closing a vital service at this time".
- c. "There is also a general fear that shops on the same road as this Post Office will now close".

A letter received from the local MP

"With plans for several hundred new homes to be built quite close to this branch there are serious local concerns that the Post Office is being short-sighted in announcing this branch closure, knowing the demand for the branch looks set to rise in the foreseeable future due to the new housing".

Alternative branches (parking at branch)

Response from local residents: "It is inaccurate to say that there are roadside parking facilities in front of the 44 High Street branch - these are in fact on the other side of a busy road, with only two disabled bays at one end. A pedestrian wishing to cross has to walk a long way to a zebra crossing then back to the Post Office - hardly convenient for a disabled customer".

Deprivation

Key responses from local residents:

- a. "Another service would be removed from a social deprived area".
- b. "The removal of a local service for the elderly disabled people, or people with mobility problems who would be unable to access the High Street will cause social isolation, resulting in loss of independence".