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5 November 2007

Dear Sir/Madam

### **Post Office Network Change Programme Consultation**

I am writing in connection with the above. Post Office Limited is proposing that Post Offices in Acton, Ballingdon, Assington, Burstall and Copdock will close, with Assington to operate as an 'Outreach' operation. These are all located in the Babergh District.

Sheila McCann from POL attended a Council meeting on 16 October to explain the reasoning behind the proposals, so our Members are fully aware of the perceived need for change. Those Parish Councils whose Post Offices have been earmarked for either closure or a change in operation were also present at this meeting.

The Council's Overview & Scrutiny Committee wish to thank Ms McCann for her presentation. The Committee has now considered the proposals and have asked me provide you with Babergh's formal response to the consultation exercise you are undertaking.

Babergh is extremely concerned about the very limited role local authorities have been allowed to play in the entire closure process. Local authorities have been simply regarded by POL as one of many 'consultees' in this exercise; only limited effort has been made to include us in meaningful discussions. In Babergh's view this has compromised the outcome of the Change Programme.

The key criteria is that 95% of the population in rural areas must be within three miles of a Post Office. The three-mile rule, applied indiscriminately, comes up with unexpected results, which may look fine on paper but in reality cause certain problems.


For example, the three-mile rule is all very well for car owners but this district has an infrequent bus service and a six mile round trip by bus could well take several hours. This will place a considerable strain on many sections of the population affected by the proposed closures, especially the elderly and vulnerable.

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Babergh also has deep and real concerns about the minimal and limited nature of the involvement of Parish and Town Councils in the process, believing that they could have provided valuable insights into the community development role that Post Offices provide in certain villages. As a result of excluding Parish Councils from the analysis about which Post Offices should be closed, the full local impact on community cohesion has not been taken into account. This is a significant and worrying omission.

It's proposed that the Post Office in Assington will operate as an 'Outreach' facility. It is not clear what the next steps will be in determining the exact nature of this new arrangement. It is hoped that, on this occasion, the Parish Council and the local community will be given a *real* opportunity to help shape the delivery of the new service.

It's clear that Post Office Ltd has been working on these changes for a considerable time. Allowing 6 weeks for every stakeholder in the country to consider such an important issue is inadequate.

Babergh is a rural district in south Suffolk, characterised by its many villages and hamlets and the market towns of Hadleigh and Sudbury. The Post Office Change Programme does not give sufficient allowance for the considerable limitations our community faces in terms of the mostly rural road network and limited public transport services. Babergh already has one of the highest incidences of poor 'Access to Services' in Suffolk and the region (as measured by the Index of Multiple Deprivation) so the closure programme will simply worsen this position and impact chiefly on our most disadvantaged residents.

Yours faithfully

Mike Hammond  
Corporate Director

c.c.

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The Rt. Hon Pat McFadden MP  
Postal Affairs Minister  
House of Commons


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