

Our ambitions for South Bedfordshire are:

- a safer district
- a cleaner and more valued district
- providing more housing opportunities in the district
- a more prosperous district
- a more active district
- a well managed council



Post Office Closures Public Meeting 7 August 2008

Background

These notes summarise points raised at the public meeting held at South Bedfordshire District Council offices on the 7 August 2008 with regards to the Post Office closures consultation.

In addition to South Beds Officers and the representatives from Post Office Ltd, Postwatch and BRAF, over 45 people attended including a number of County, District, Town and Parish Councillors as well as the MP for South West Bedfordshire.

General issues

There were a number of general concerns raised about the whole process, in particular these focused on:

- The criteria and rules laid down by the government
- The current development particularly in the Leighton Linlade area and future proposed growth with South Beds
- The fact that existing branches did not offer access to the full range of capabilities (e.g. Car Tax).
- The realistic capacity of the alternative branches, both in terms of internal staffing levels and access to parking.
- Whether the needs of the local community had been taken into account, with particular reference to the impact on communities which have recently lost their Post Office in the previous round (i.e. Downside Estate and Totternhoe)
- The potential effects on those villages where post offices are linked to convenience stores and the potential loss of this vital community facility if it is no longer viable.
- That Council's and other agencies use of Paypoint and the problems experienced with the system.

Specific issues

A number of issues were raised about specific Post Office branches:

Eaton Bray

The 61 bus which links Edlesborough to Eaton Bray is only once every hour and, on arrival you have just 4 minutes to complete your transactions, or face a wait of an hour for the next bus.

The Eaton Bray shop has better access (wider isles etc) for wheel chairs and a bigger shop.

There are only two parking spaces near to the Edlesborough alternative post office, but there are around 12 for Eaton Bray.

High Street South

The Sub Post Master for the branch questioned a large number of facts in the Branch Access Report. This included:

- Opening hours were incorrectly stated and have been longer for several years.
- The journey to the alternative Langdale Post Office was on an incline.
- The amount of parking at the Langdale Post Office was significantly less.
- Other comments from the floor raised concerns as the local area had already lost the Downside Branch and would mean that a large number of residents in the most deprived part of Dunstable would be more than 1 mile away from the alternative Post Office.
- The general demographic in the area was weighted towards either single mothers on benefits and elderly people depending on which area near to the Post Office.

Linslade

It was noted that the Post Office served the entire area of Linslade and that its closure would result in a large proportion of the houses in Linslade being outside the 1 mile rule.

There is a Disabled centre just up the road from the Post Office and it would be almost impossible for those residents to commute to one of the alternative branches.

Capacity issues were raised about the Leighton Buzzard Branch both with the number of transactions undertaken and the parking available.

Questions and Answers

Where people raised specific questions the following answers were given:

- Was it realistically possible to prevent any of the closures?
 - Yes, in all but one area plan at least one post office has been rerieved and it was NOT on a like for like basis, so in one area three had been rerieved and one additional post office nominated.
 - The representative from the Federation of Sub Post Masters noted that around two in 100 up for closure had been saved.
- Why hadn't the local Postwatch representative been involved in the analysis of the South Beds branches?
 - This was due to a number of factors and it was not always possible, or appropriate for the local representative to be directly involved.
- Had the Post Office Ltd not already got information on usage figures at the branches etc that it could use?
 - Although the Post Office knew the number of transactions taking place, and had some ideas on the types of transactions e.g. money withdrawals, it was not able to see who had made the withdrawal. So a pensioner whose money was paid in to a bank account but then withdraws it at the post office could not be identified as such.
- Has local housing growth in the area been considered?
 - The District Council has provided some information, however the business planning process at the Post Office is up to 2011 only. This means that where planning permission has been granted it can be considered, but the wider growth numbers are not able to be considered.