



# MID SUSSEX LIBERAL DEMOCRATS

Parliamentary Spokesman

Serena Tierney

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**Greener, smarter, fairer**

17<sup>th</sup> February 2008

Gary Herbert  
Network Development Manager  
Post Office Limited  
[consultation@postoffice.co.uk](mailto:consultation@postoffice.co.uk)

Dear Sir,

**Re: Area Plan Decision Booklet: Sussex**

I note that in Section 4 of the Area Plan Decision Booklet: Sussex it is stated in Paragraph 2 that:

“This section therefore contains a summary of the key aspects of the responses to local public consultation received by Post Office Ltd in relation to each of the branches originally proposed for closure in the Sussex Area Plan Proposal.

“However, all such responses have been reviewed, considered and taken into account by Post Office Ltd when making the decisions set out below.”

In order to assess whether or not Post Office Ltd has complied with its legal obligations in relation to this consultation and for the avoidance of doubt under the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act 2000, would you kindly let me have full details of the review, consideration and accounting by Post Office Ltd of the following factors in relation to each post office specified and the points of general application to all four:

Mid Sussex Liberal Democrat Parliamentary Spokesman  
Serena Tierney  
10 Wheatsheaf Lane, Cuckfield, West Sussex, RH17 5TZ

### **1) Post Office Church Road branch:**

- a. This is a growing and profitable branch whose business has tripled in the past 15 years.
- b. The main post office is likely to move (as it has three times in recent years) when the planned town centre revitalisation takes place.
- c. In any event there is already a planning application for a cafe on the ground floor of the main post office which will render the post office unsuitable for disabled access.
- d. It is a busy and viable branch with 200-300 customers per day. The shop operated at that branch will not be viable without post office business.
- e. Closure of the branch is likely to lead to closure of at least some of the dozen or so neighbouring businesses.
- f. The branch provides an unusually high level of banking provision for local businesses.
- g. Many customers use the cashback facility which allows them to draw cash without charge.
- h. This is the only post office in Burgess Hill that can accommodate wheelchair users with a suitable counter with no barrier.

### **2) Post Office Franklands Village branch:**

- a. This is a busy and viable branch which provides banking facilities for local businesses.
- b. The branch is situated within a shop providing full general store facilities that are particularly valued by elderly and disabled customers. The general store is unlikely to be viable without the post office business.
- c. Many customers use the cashback facility which allows them to draw cash without charge.
- d. This is likely to be the nearest branch to a significant amount of planned new housing which will be a significant distance (more than 0.7miles) from the main post office.

### **3) Post Office New England Road branch:**

- a. The branch is situated is situated within a shop which provides full general store facilities that are particularly valued by its many elderly and disabled customers.

- b. The neighbouring pharmacy is unlikely to remain viable in the absence of the existence of the post office.
- c. Many customers use the cashback facility which allows them to draw cash without charge.
- d. Given that this is an area of high social deprivation, a large number of professional carers visit the post office, pharmacist and general store on behalf of those for whom they care. In the absence of nearby facilities the taxpayer will be obliged to provide additional assistance to meet the basic needs of the people thus cared for.

#### **4) Post Office St John's Common branch:**

- a. The main post office is likely to move (as it has three times in recent years) when the planned town centre revitalisation takes place.
- b. The branch is situated within a shop which provides full general store facilities that are particularly valued by elderly and disabled customers.
- c. This is a busy and viable branch which provides banking facilities for local businesses.
- d. Many customers use the cashback facility which allows them to draw cash without charge.
- e. This is likely to be the nearest branch to a significant amount of planned new housing which will be a significant distance (more than 0.7miles) from the main post office.

#### **Matters of general application to all four post offices**

- 1) These are all high-use, profitable post offices.
- 2) Each of these post offices exists within another local business which is unlikely to be viable if the post office closes, resulting in the loss of much-valued and needed facilities to the most vulnerable sections of our community who will in practice be unable to use the alternative facilities without assistance. This will have a serious damaging effect on each of these communities.
- 3) If these four post offices close, then the Government's own access criteria (95%) are not met: 808 (leaving 93.4%) of households in Burgess Hill and 732 (leaving 93.7%) in Haywards Heath will not be within one mile of their nearest branch. These figures will be increased as the planned 26,000 new homes are built in the area.
- 4) Both the Burgess Hill and Haywards Heath main post offices currently frequently have long queues and are unable to service efficiently the number of customers using those offices before taking into account the additional

requirements to serve the customers displaced by the closure of these four branches.

I am particularly interested in your comments in the light of the factors that Post Office Ltd stated that it was taking into account when deciding whether or not to close each branch, namely: the number of customers currently using a particular post office branch; the size and ability of nearby branches to absorb extra customers; alternative access to key post office services such as cash withdrawals; the impact on other local businesses; and local demographics.

In view of the strict time limits for making an application for judicial review of administrative decisions I should be grateful for your earliest and detailed reply.

Yours sincerely,

Serena Tierney

**Serena Tierney**  
**Parliamentary Spokesman,**  
**Mid Sussex Liberal Democrats**