

XXXXXXXXXXXX 0845 034 9495
XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

Adrian Wales
Network Development Manager
Post Office Ltd
FREEPOST CONSULTATION TEAM

Contact: Paul Jackson

My Reference:

Date: 16 January 2008

Dear Mr Wales

NETWORK CHANGE PROGRAMME, NORTH YORKSHIRE WITH YORKSHIRE EAST AND KEIGHLEY

I am responding on behalf of the Howardian Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Joint Advisory Committee to the proposals for changes to the Post Office network that serves the AONB. Four Post Offices are earmarked for conversion to outreach service (Nunnington, Terrington, Slingsby, Huttons Ambo), with two proposed for retention (Ampleforth, Coxwold).

I would wish to make the following observations:

- The Howardian Hills is characterised by small rural communities with limited services. The Joint Advisory Committee believes that in order to sustain the management of the AONB for its nationally important landscape qualities, it needs to have viable local communities. Rural services have been contracting for some while, but this proposal could result in the loss of a high proportion of the remaining village shops within the AONB.
- The reduced foot-fall associated with the closure of the Post Office counters at Terrington, Slingsby and Huttons Ambo, combined with the loss of income, is likely to put severe strain on the economic viability of these businesses. At a time when climate change is becoming a major policy driver for the Government it seems self-defeating to close village services, thereby requiring residents to drive to local towns or service providers to drive out to them. Public transport services are patchy within the AONB, with only one of the four villages earmarked for conversion to outreach having a regular service, either throughout the day or the week.
- Village shops are one of the key attributes of Service Villages (as designated in the Local Development Framework covering the AONB). These Service Villages are considered to have some scope to accommodate additional residential development, due to the range of services they contain. If the closure of a Post Office counter leads to the closure of the shop, then that village will no longer be considered as a Service Village and the continued development of a sustainable local community would be stifled.

Cont'd....

- We recognise however that hard choices need to be made, although it seems iniquitous that if a Post Office in the AONB is saved then another one somewhere else will have to close. Should it transpire that the plans are enacted as proposed, then it will be important to implement the most sustainable outreach solution in each village. To that end, outreach point opening times should be set so as to fit with any local bus service that may be present, for both in-bound and out-bound journeys. The exact type of outreach service should be decided in close consultation with the village involved, but on the face of it the most logical options would appear to be:

Terrington – Partner service, in village shop.

Slingsby – Partner service, in village shop.

Huttons Ambo – Partner service, in village shop.

Nunnington – Partner service, Jasmine House; or Partner/Hosted service, Royal Oak public house.

These will of course depend on a variety of parties (premises owners, Core Sub-postmaster, etc being willing to implement the suggestions as viable economic propositions).

- We note that the Post Office in Coxwold is earmarked for retention, even though it is due to close in mid-February. It would seem unlikely that anyone will come forward to take-on the business – shops and Post Offices coming onto the market in recent years in this area don't have a good track record of survival. It will therefore be important to develop a replacement outreach service for Coxwold, should this eventuality arise.
- That also leads on to the whole issue of where and how Post Office services should be provided in the future. Hovingham, Welburn and Brandsby have all lost their Post Offices in recent years, despite being 3 of the biggest villages in the AONB. Whilst it would be unfair to penalise those communities that have hung onto their Post Offices, it must be questionable to provide outreach services to Nunnington but not to Hovingham (a Service Village 3 miles away that has perhaps three times the population, as well as a good passing trade and reasonable bus links).
- I therefore hope that when this round of re-organisation has been completed, it will be possible to look at introducing new outreach services in those larger communities within the AONB, perhaps in innovative partnerships with Local Authorities. By doing so, it might be possible to blend the economic realities of Post Office service provision with the need to protect and nurture sustainable local communities. Such an approach would strengthen local identity and community, whilst at the same time reducing the amount of carbon dioxide that would be generated if villagers had to travel every time they wanted to access even the most basic services.

I hope that you will be able to take these comments on board.

Yours sincerely

ROBERT WAINWRIGHT
JAC Chairman
Howardian Hills AONB Joint Advisory Committee