



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

National Consultation Team
Post Office Ltd
FREEPOST CONSULTATION TEAM

14th November 2007

By post and e-mail

Dear Sir,

Proposed closure of White Notley, Panfield Lane and Bocking Church Street post offices.

I wish to state my emphatic opposition to proposed closure of the post office branches at White Notley, Panfield Lane and Bocking Church Street within my Parliamentary constituency. I have received a large number of representations from constituents of mine who feel that the threatened branches ought to be preserved and I write on behalf of all those who would be adversely affected by the proposals.

I appreciate that this consultation exercise is intended to determine whether any decisions have been arrived at mistakenly by Post Office Ltd., based on the available evidence and the required access criteria. I believe that mistakes have been made and, consequently, that there is a compelling argument in favour of retaining each of the threatened branches. Moreover, I believe that the argument for reconsidering your decision has a strong evidential rather than an emotional basis.

1. White Notley Post Office:

White Notley Post Office and its associated shop is the backbone of a small village in a rural area with a population of around 500 people. The Post Office provides an essential service for local residents, particularly the elderly, and the attached shop provides a degree of subsidy for utility bills and rent of the premises.

Over 10% of the local population use the branch weekly. Many residents have mobility constraints due to age or disability; while only a minority have access to their own transport. Public transport to alternative branches is neither direct nor regular. Furthermore, I am concerned that, even for those physically able to walk to either Black Notley or Silver End, the journey by foot should at the very least be considered difficult and is in fact likely to be dangerous or impossible.



I particularly note the absence of a footpath between White Notley, Silver End and Black Notley and I am concerned that Essex County Council has classified the latter road as a dangerous route. One constituent writes to me that, "For the elderly residents of the village, neither is accessible. The buses to Black Notley run infrequently (not even daily) with over two hour waits between an outward and return journey. The road link between White Notley and Black Notley is nearly all unpaved and most of it has no speed restriction." For my constituents to walk to Black Notley or Silver End is simply out of the question and I invite you to walk the route with me so that you may gain a better understanding of the difficulty involved.

I am aware of a number of detailed case studies which the local Parish Council has submitted to you in their very thorough response to the consultation and I regard them as indicative of the problems that existing customers will face. Given the branch location and the profile of the local population I question the premise that current branch users will be able to transfer their business elsewhere. On the contrary, I expect that should the branch be closed as planned they will be effectively disenfranchised from Post Office services. The local Post Office is a vital resource to a significant number of people in White Notley and I hope that you will reconsider your decision so that it may remain as such.

2. Bocking Church Street and Panfield Lane:

The closure of both Bocking Church Street and Panfield Lane Post Offices would leave the entire Bocking and north Braintree urban area without its own branch. The profile of customers using each branch also gives me some cause for concern. Bocking South ward has low levels of car ownership, a high number of lone parent households and, consequently, high levels of both income deprivation and income support claimants. It is my belief that it is entirely reasonable to maintain branches with a catchment area covering Bocking and the north of Braintree.

I understand that both branches became recipient offices after the closure of High Garrett, Bradford Street and Gosfield post offices. I am concerned that the proposed receiving branch at George Yard will not have sufficient capacity to take on additional business from both threatened branches, particularly during peak times. I am aware of significant complaints about the current performance of George Yard, and closure of either Panfield Lane or Bocking Church Street will only serve to exacerbate peak-time pressures there.

The following comment from a constituent is indicative: "The last time I was in there a few days ago, I left immediately when I saw the length of the queue." Having already discussed this issue with staff from Post Office Ltd. I am not reassured that staffing levels at George Yard are sufficient to cope with an influx of 17% anticipated additional business as a result of the proposed closures. I also submit that the combined footfall of Bocking Church Street and Panfield Lane, at 919 transactions per week, is quite sufficient to justify their retention.



If both branches are closed as planned then residents in Bocking and the villages to the north of Braintree who currently walk to their local branch will have to travel into George Yard in the centre of Braintree. There are already frequent problems with queuing, parking and access at George Yard. It is neither well provided with convenient parking, nor well situated for convenient for quick drop-off and pick-up. As one local councillor wrote to me, "I have spoken to a 91 year old lady within the one mile radius who presently walks to Panfield Lane Post Office but will need to walk and then catch a bus to town, walk across town, wait in a queue in the main Post Office and then repeat the process to return home." In my view this case is also indicative of the challenge which would be faced by many elderly residents to the north of Bocking.

Panfield Lane and Bocking Church Street serve large numbers of retired people; in both cases well over 50% of residents within the 1 mile catchment area are retired. Both branches are well used, and the combined footfall of 919 transactions per week is not inconsiderable. I must again emphasise that the loss of both branches will leave a large swathe of Bocking and Braintree without a branch and that displacing customers from both branches to the centre of Braintree will leave the elderly and those lacking private transport with, at the very least, a challenging journey.

I hope that you will take these comments into consideration when reaching your final decision, with a view to reversing the closures currently proposed. Although I understand that Post Office Ltd. has been forced into this decision making process by the Government and that disappointment is the inevitable result for some, I hope that residents in my constituency will continue to benefit in full from the Post Office's public service obligation to them.

I look forward to hearing from you.

With best wishes,