



**Report of the External Scrutiny Panel following
a special meeting to consider the closures of
post office branches in Milton Keynes**

Final Report (August 2008)

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Recommendations:	
1	<p>That the Leader of the Council be requested</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. to write to the Labour Government urging them to reconsider cutting this vital service and asking them to consider providing greater assistance with overhead costs, such as software, to enable post office branches to remain open and provide essential services to vulnerable populations. b. to write to both Local MPs to express the Council's concerns with regards to closures and to ask for their support in enlarging the services that the government channels through post offices to improve their profitability.
2	In light of the high levels of growth in the area the Post Office Limited were to be requested to review whether the closure targets were appropriate for this area.

3	That the Post Office Ltd be advised to review the population data on which they had based these proposals using more accurate and relevant local population statistics. It should be regarded the highest priority that the Post Office and relevant officers at Milton Keynes Council meet to discuss accurate population levels and issues of housing levels.
4	The Post Office Ltd be made aware of the extent of in-migration, new housing and regeneration schemes as a foundation for future service requirements.
5	That the Post Office Ltd be advised to meet with the Council to ascertain a more accurate picture of the transport network in Milton Keynes so as the proposals could be reassessed in light of more recent information.
6	That in light of the Post Office Ltd undertaking a national review of how to address queues in branches it was suggested that the Post Office Ltd should the Crown Walk and Queensway branches for action to ascertain how queue length could be minimised and customers served more quickly.
7	That the Post Office Ltd be requested to review the use of counters to ensure that adequate levels of staffing were provided for the busiest periods of the day to minimise customer waiting times. Additional resources should be provided to branches to ensure that they could cope with customer numbers and maintain adequate numbers of customer serving positions.
8	That the Post Office Ltd be advised to review disabled access at the Queensway branch to ensure that it was fully accessible and would be able to cope with the increased numbers of customer sessions should any of the proposed branch closures impact on these branches. They were also asked to consider the difficulty of access to the Crown Walk branch, since its distance from any road access made it impractical for people with low energy levels, even though technically its accessibility was moderate
9	That the Post Office Ltd be requested to consider that the travel distance for residents in Stoke Goldington would be far over 3 miles to their nearest post office branch.
10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. That the Panel welcome the action from the Council in undertaking the business case to ascertain how the Council could relocate some of the Post Office services. b. That officers at Milton Keynes Council be requested to meet with the Post Office Limited's Local Funding Team to investigate the feasibility of how alternative services might be funded by the Council.

1. Background

1.1 On 21 July 2008 the External Scrutiny Panel held a special meeting to consider the Local Area Plan proposals for Cambridgeshire, Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire and South Lincolnshire. The Panel was constituted by the following Members:

Councillor: Campbell (Chair)

Councillors: Ferrans, Fraser, Jury, A Morris, Potts and A Wright

1.2 The Local Area Plan laid out proposals to close 6 post office branches in Milton Keynes. Those branches proposed for closure were as follows:

- (i) 258 Conniburrow Boulevard, Conniburrow
- (ii) Fishermead
- (iii) 82 Aylesbury Street, Bletchley
- (iv) 2 Watling Street, Little Brickhill
- (v) 169 Water Eaton Road, Bletchley
- (vi) Weston Underwood

1.3 The main purpose of the meeting was to enable members of the public to respond to the proposals and to question the Post Office Ltd as to the justification for closing these offices in Milton Keynes.

1.4 Akudo Ukachukwu (External Relations Manager), Laura Tarling (Network Development Manager) and Baldev Kahlon (Field Change Adviser) attended from the Post Office Ltd to outline proposals and answer questions from the public. There were also 46 members of the public and a number of elected Members and officers of Milton Keynes Council in attendance.

1.5 A wide number of comments were raised throughout the meeting which are detailed for each of the proposed closures in the attached **Annex**. Many of the issues detailed relate to the unsuitable nature of the alternatives proposed in each case.

1.6 Detailed at Section 2 to this report is an outline of all of the issues discussed with regards to the Local Area Plan proposals and the recommendations made by the Panel.

1.7 Akudo Ukachukwu opened the meeting on behalf of the Post Office Ltd explaining why the specific branches listed in the Local Area Plan had been identified for closure. It was stated that the Post Office Ltd was undertaking a 'Network Change Programme' involving the compulsory closure of 2,500 post offices nationally. These compulsory closures were being required by central government due to the general decline in the use of post offices and the loss of various products that had previously been offered via post offices (for example television licenses).

- 1.8 There was a series of access criteria used by the Post Office Ltd to determine which branches should remain open and which should be closed or replaced by outreach services. There were minimum access criteria outlined by the government and further criteria that included the size of nearby branches, the ability of alternative branches to absorb extra customers and the financial saving to the Post Office Ltd.
- 1.9 It was highlighted that the post office needed to achieve a break-even financial position by 2011 and in order to facilitate this the Post Office Ltd needed to be made more efficient and sustainable. It was commented that the current business plan ended in 2011 so there should be no more branch closures before then. After 2011 further closures would be dependent on central government, the Post Office Ltd's ability to achieve their break-even position and the sustainability of the service.
- 1.10 In addition to this Laura Tarling commented that there was presently being undertaken a 7 week consultation (that ended on 26 August 2008) that allowed people to respond to proposals. It was stated the aim of consultation on the local area plan and attendance at public meetings was to gather relevant local information by talking to local people directly. Members of the public were to be encouraged to respond in writing to the consultation team directly:

Laura Tarling,
National Consultation Team,
Post Office Limited,
FREEPOST

- 1.11 Officers stated that as a result of each Local Area Plan consultation thus far there had been changes with regards to the branches that had been proposed for closure. The number that had been proposed for closure in this local area was below average. It was also commented that if replacement services for some branches were sought these could be placed in other areas (such as Luton). If it was decided to relieve one of the branches in the proposals following an initial consultation there would be a further period of 6 week public consultation.

2. Issues and Choices

Local Area Plan Proposals

- 2.1 Concerns were raised that many services were being removed from post offices without any viable alternatives being provided. Central government had not considered the impact that closures would have on local communities and the difficulties that would arise (for the elderly especially) in not being able to access services. Many elderly persons had Post Office bank accounts as they did not trust banks and this service was now being taken away from them. The Post Office needed to ensure that these services continued to be provided in an accessible

way to those that used them currently, which could include access via other local retail outlets.

- 2.2 The Government needed to be aware that whilst the online route was being promoted for many services, such as the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA), many people did not have access to a computer so access to application forms and services that were currently provided by Post Office branches was essential. Customers should not have to queue up simply to pick up an application form.
- 2.3 The Panel also raised concerns that the proposals had not been produced in a range of different language to make the consultation accessible to a wide range of Black Minority Ethnic (BME) groups. The Post Office should have coordinated with Parish Councils in order to ascertain, which BME groups resided in local areas so as appropriate information could be distributed to engage with communities.
- 2.4 It was commented that the asset and service stripping of the Post Office Ltd had been the primary reason why the Post Office Ltd had found themselves in the position of closing post office branches.

Recommendation 1:

That the Leader of the Council be requested

- a. to write to the Labour Government urging them to reconsider cutting this vital service and asking them to consider providing greater assistance with overhead costs, such as software, to enable post office branches to remain open and provide essential services to vulnerable populations.
- b. to write to both Local MPs to express the Council's concerns with regards to closures and to ask for their support in enlarging the services that the government channels through post offices to improve their profitability.

- 2.5 The Panel commented that the pressure exerted by successive governments to divert services from Post Offices, to actively invite competition and to restrict the options Post Offices have to do other types of business has led to a position where vitally needed services are being withdrawn.
- 2.6 The Panel also raised concerns that some of the overheads being charged might not represent true savings to the Post Office Ltd (software still had to be paid for whether for 1000 branches or 10000) and therefore represented an irrelevant target for the Post Office Ltd to meet.
- 2.7 The Panel considered that the lack of criteria at a local level acted against many small parts of and isolated communities. It was further noted that the wide area concerned involved three areas with very high levels of growth, i.e. Milton Keynes, Cambridge and Northampton and yet had been set a target of closures only 1% below national average

levels. This was further demonstrated by the fact that although the Post Office representatives indicated that nationally the access criteria were being more than met the evidence from local knowledge appeared to indicate that significant parts of the Milton Keynes Borough would now fail to meet the criteria, which was deemed to be inappropriate.

Recommendation 2:

In light of the high levels of growth in the area the Post Office Limited were to be requested to review whether the closure targets were appropriate for this area.

Pre-Consultation and Population data

- 2.8 The Panel raised concerns that there had been insufficient conversation with officers at Milton Keynes Council during the pre-consultation stage, specifically with regard to housing completion figures. The population data contained within the branch access reports for those branches proposed for closure was considered to be wholly inaccurate as it was based on 2001 census data. The proposed closures could not therefore be considered appropriate as they were based on incorrect information. It was stated the Post Office Ltd should have fully researched the local area (e.g. using the Milton Keynes Observatory) prior to developing any proposals for branch closures.

Recommendation 3:

That the Post Office Ltd be advised to review the population data on which they had based these proposals using more accurate and relevant local population statistics. It should be regarded the highest priority that the Post Office and relevant officers at Milton Keynes Council meet to discuss accurate population levels and issues of housing levels.

- 2.9 Whilst officers stated that the Post Office had to use national level data it was highlighted that Milton Keynes was one of the fastest growing areas in the country and as a result the census information did not take account of the huge levels of growth that had occurred locally since 2001. There had for example been a huge increase in the growth rate of elderly persons and as a result the rural areas of Milton Keynes were suffering from a lack of services. The Panel further stated that due to the huge levels of growth in Milton Keynes there was a general lack of capacity within many post office branches to cope with the levels of customers.
- 2.10 It was highlighted that there was extensive migration into Milton Keynes as a result of growth and regeneration programmes. The Post Office

Ltd needed to be made aware of the extent of new homes and regeneration being undertaken in Milton Keynes and should be provided with specific details on the types of new homes being built. The information should detail those estates that were predominantly occupied by commuters.

Recommendation 4:

The Post Office Ltd be made aware of the extent of in-migration, new housing and regeneration schemes as a foundation for future service requirements.

Carbon Emissions

- 2.11 The Panel raised concerns that the Post Office Ltd had not considered the effects that closing branches would have on local carbon emissions. The Post Office Ltd commented that the access criteria laid out by central government did not consider environmental issues. Royal Mail did however recognise that emissions were an issue and they were considering how to balance emissions locally.

Bus and Transport Services

- 2.12 Concerns were raised throughout the proposals that the bus and transport services detailed in the branch access reports were wholly inaccurate. It was highlighted throughout the proposals that there was a lack of accessible bus services in Milton Keynes, specifically for the elderly and the disabled, which would lead to many of the alternative branches being inaccessible. This was especially true in rural areas where access to alternatives would be very difficult due to irregular bus services.

Recommendation 5:

That the Post Office Ltd be advised to meet with the Council to ascertain a more accurate picture of the transport network in Milton Keynes so as the proposals could be reassessed in light of more recent information.

Customer Sessions and Customer Serving Positions

- 2.13 Concerns were raised with regards to each of the proposals that the numbers of customer sessions reported on average per week were inaccurate and that there was insufficient numbers of customer serving positions at each of the alternative branches. It was stated that in many branches the average number of counters open was less than

adequate to deal with high customer numbers and large queues at some points of the day.

- 2.14 Specific concerns were raised with regards to queues at both the Queensway and Crown Walk branches. Concerns relating to these branches were stressed as the proposed closures suggested they would be the 1st alternative branch in the case of more than one branch closure.

Recommendation 6:

That in light of the Post Office Ltd undertaking a national review of how to address queues in branches it was suggested that the Post Office Ltd should the Crown Walk and Queensway branches for action to ascertain how queue length could be minimised and customers served more quickly.

Recommendation 7:

That the Post Office Ltd be requested to review the use of counters to ensure that adequate levels of staffing were provided for the busiest periods of the day to minimise customer waiting times. Additional resources should be provided to branches to ensure that they could cope with customer numbers and maintain adequate numbers of customer serving positions.

Leasing Arrangements

- 2.15 Concerns were raised that the proposals did not take account of the expiration of leases at alternative branches. It was considered difficult to make any detailed conclusions about the proposed branch closures without taking into account leasing arrangements at the Crown Walk and Queensway branches and the potential impact to customers when these leases expired.

Accessibility to Branches

- 2.16 The Panel raised concerns with regards to the accessibility of some branches for the elderly or disabled. Many of the branches were considered to be impractical for wheelchairs or parents with buggies. Similarly there were concerns that there were inadequate parking facilities for disabled persons near to alternative branches.

Recommendation 8:

That the Post Office Ltd be advised to review disabled access at the Queensway branch to ensure that it was fully accessible and would be able to cope with the increased numbers of customer sessions should any of the proposed branch closures impact on these branches. They were also asked to consider the difficulty of access to the Crown Walk branch, since its distance from any road access made it impractical for people with low energy levels, even though technically its accessibility was moderate

- 2.17 The Panel also raised concerns with regards to the distance to the nearest alternative branch for customers in Stoke Goldington who had been adversely affected by closures resulting in them having to go to the branch in Weston Underwood. The closure in Weston Underwood would result in them being outside the 3 mile recommended radius of their nearest branch.

Recommendation 9:

That the Post Office Ltd be requested to consider that the travel distance for residents in Stoke Goldington would be far over 3 miles to their nearest post office branch.

Alternative Service Provision

- 2.18 The Panel considered that alternative means should be sought through which Milton Keynes Council could provide Post Office services. Geoff Snelson stated that the Cabinet had agreed to allocate £30,000 to a business case to ascertain how the Council could relocate some of the Post Office services if branches were closed. A report on these proposals would be prepared by September 2008..
- 2.19 It was highlighted that in cases where the local authority did investigate the feasibility of funding services itself there was no extension to the consultation on the local area plan.

Recommendation 10:

- a. That the Panel welcome the action from the Council in undertaking the business case to ascertain how the Council could relocate some of the Post Office services.
- b. That officers at Milton Keynes Council be requested to meet with the Post Office Ltd's Local Funding Team to investigate the feasibility of how alternative services might be funded by the Council.

Branches proposed for Closure	285 Conniburrow Boulevard, Conniburrow (Milton Keynes North East)
1st alternative branch	17 – 19 Crown Walk (Milton Keynes North East)
2nd alternative branch	3 Tower Crescent, Neath Hill (Milton Keynes North East)

Local Area Plan

- 1 Concerns were raised that in reaching proposals the local area plan had excluded locally important issues which meant the consultation was invalid. It was stated that the local community had been designed around the Post Office and the centre of that community was now being removed.
- 2 It was commented that there were a large variety of persons from different ethnic backgrounds residing in this area and it was unfair to assume they could respond to the local area plan consultation without consultation materials being provided in different languages.

Customer Serving Positions

- 3 There were serious concerns about lack of staff at the Crown Walk branch, which would have a profound effect on its ability to serve customers quickly and deal with the numbers of customer sessions. It was commented that many of the 14 serving positions were rarely open and increasing the capacity of staff at this branch was essential.

Customer Sessions

- 4 Concerns were raised that there would not be the capacity at the Crown Walk branch to cope with the increased number of customer sessions. There were already considerable problems with queue lengths and the amount of time it took to serve customers. The lengths of queues at some period of the day were considered to be entirely unacceptable at the Crown Walk branch. Closing the Conniburrow branch would only exacerbate these problems.
- 5 Concerns were raised that this post office branch was attached to other retail amenities and if closed this would result in the loss of both of these amenities for local customers.

Ease of Access to Alternative Branch

- 6 Concerns were raised with regards to accessibility at the Crown Walk branch. Whilst many bus services went to this branch it was a considerable distance to walk to and was inaccessible to many local residents.
- 7 It was commented that closing the Conniburrow branch would remove the independence of many elderly and disabled persons living in the local area as they would not be able to access the Crown Walk Branch. The Crown Walk branch was inaccessible to many disabled customers and could not be accessed easily by wheelchairs.

- 8 Improvements at this branch to ensure that it was fully accessible to the disabled needed to be investigated and implemented so as to minimise the effects to any vulnerable groups.

Parking Facilities at the Branch

- 9 Concerns were raised about the lack of accessible parking spaces at the Crown Walk branch as many of the spaces were often taken up by other customers using the shopping centre. There were also concerns raised about the lack of accessible disabled parking spaces at this branch.

Bus and Transport Services

- 10 Current transport to the Crown Walk branch was inappropriate for many disabled persons who required special transport to get into the centre of Milton Keynes. The Post Office needed to consider more fully access criteria for the centre of Milton Keynes, including the terrain and current bus routes.

Leasing Arrangements

- 11 Concerns were raised that the lease on the branch at Crown Walk only had 3 years to completion and following that the branch could move. There were concerns about the impact of any further closures on customers at this branch.

Branch proposed for Closure	Fishermead (Milton Keynes North East)
1st alternative branch	17 – 19 Crown Walk (Milton Keynes North East)
2nd alternative branch	Garroways, Coffee Hall (Milton Keynes South West)

- 1 The information listed for Fishermead did not take account of the variety of services locally, which included a pharmacy, schools and a children's centre.

Customer Service Positions

- 2 It was stated that the second alternative branch at Coffee Hall was inappropriate as there were only 2 customer service positions.

Customer Sessions

- 3 The number of customer sessions listed for the Fishermead branch were challenged, it was stated that these were too low.
- 4 It was stated that Fishermead had a high number of houses in multiple occupancy (HIMOs) and neither this nor the high numbers of minorities in the area had been taken into account in the population data for the area.
- 5 It was stated that there had not been a Post Office branch at Granville Square, Willen for three years, which may have had an effect on the number of customer sessions at the Fishermead office. Whilst it was stated that the Post Office Ltd was looking to reopen the Willen branch, the impact of the numbers of customer sessions at the former Willen branch should be taken into consideration as part of the proposals to close the Fishermead branch.
- 6 Concerns were raised that 4 sub post offices had previously been closed in Campbell Park, which had doubled the numbers of customers at the Crown Walk branch. It was unable to cope with the numbers of customers that currently went to the branch.

Ease of Access to the Branch

- 7 Concerns were raised that the Crown Walk branch was inaccessible as it was located at the top of a hill. This made it inaccessible to the elderly, disabled and young mothers who may wish to use it and it was inappropriate as an alternative.

Road Distance to Proposed Branch

- 8 The distance stated to the Crown Walk branch (0.9) miles was incorrect.

Bus and Transport Services

- 9 Concerns were raised that bus services in the area were inappropriate and irregular and journeys into the centre took too long. The branch access report also stated that there was a regular bus service to the Coffee Hall

branch, this was not correct. There was no direct route to this branch and customers would be required to change buses at least once. This was inappropriate for the elderly or disabled. Due to the lack of an appropriate bus service to the Crown Walk branch it was not considered to be an appropriate alternative.

Branch proposed for Closure	82 Aylesbury Street, Bletchley (Milton Keynes South West)
1st alternative branch	140 Queensway Bletchley
2nd alternative branch	110 Serpentine Court, Lakes Estate, Bletchley

Customer Serving Positions

- 1 Concerns were raised about access to customer serving positions at the Queensway branch. It was stated that the majority of the 10 positions were never open. It was also stated that the branch was currently unable to deal with the pressures of customer numbers placed upon it and proposing this as an alternative to three other branches would not help this pressure.

Customer Sessions

- 2 Concerns were raised that the population age profile did not take into account the previous closure of the Post Office branch at Simpson. Whilst the baseline figure for network planning was April 2007 it was considered important that this be taken into account in when considering the effect of any closure on the wider population.
- 3 Concerns were highlighted that there were 2 new developments being built near to Aylesbury Street (social housing and elderly developments). These would have an impact on the number of customers in these areas and should be taken into account.
- 4 There had been complaints from the elderly community in the nearby area, who were the predominant group in the population age profile (61%). It was commented that the Post Office would be unlikely to reach the same conclusions with regards to this branch closure if they were fully aware of local issues and the population profile.
- 5 Complaints were raised by the local business community that used this Post Office branch frequently as they would be forced to take their business elsewhere. Many customers walked to this branch and having to find alternative means of reaching an alternative was inconvenient.
- 6 Further concerns were raised with regards to Bletchley being the largest industrial area in Milton Keynes. Removing the post office branch would have a substantial effect on a large number of small businesses.
- 7 Concerns were raised that this post office branch was attached to other retail amenities and if closed this would result in the loss of both of these amenities for local customers.

Bus and Transport Services

- 8 Concerns were raised about the lack of available and reliable bus services to alternative branches. Bus services were inconvenient to this area and were not fully accessible for the elderly or disabled. It was not considered easy to get transport to the alternative branches proposed.

Parking Facilities at the Branch

- 9 There was limited parking availability at the alternative branches detailed in the branch access report.

Additional Retail Environment Nearby

- 10 There were a lack of varied retail services at the alternative branches proposed. Customers would be forced to go to a different branch without having any access to any of the other services they might wish to receive.

Leasing Arrangements

- 11 Further concerns were raised by the Panel with regards to the lease at the Queensway branch, which only had 2 years to completion. Members commented it was impossible to make a decision on the proposals to close the Aylesbury Street branch until the issues with regards to the lease at Queensway had been resolved.

Disability access

- 12 Concerns were raised that closing the branch would have an impact on carers who would need extra time to go to the post office on behalf of others, this was unacceptable.
- 13 Disabled access at the Queensway branch was considered to be impractical and there was needed to be adaptations made to enable easier access for persons with disabilities.

Branch proposed for Closure	2 Watling Street, Little Brickhill (Milton Keynes North East)
1st alternative branch	140 Queensway, Bletchley (Milton Keynes South West)
2nd alternative branch	17 Market Place, Woburn (Mid Bedfordshire)

Population Age Profile

1. It was stated that 59% of the local population were over 60 years of age and as a result removing the local branch would create difficulties for those persons to access services.
2. There were also a large number of home-run businesses in the locality that used the Post Office to run their business. Closing the branch would have a profound effect on their ability to continue to do this.

Customer Sessions

3. Concerns were raised that there were a total of three branches directed to the alternative branch at 140 Queensway and this would have a huge effect on the numbers of customer sessions. It was commented that the branch would not be able to cope with the stress placed on it by closing all three of these branches.

Road Distance to Proposed Branch

4. It was stated that the 1st alternative branch (140 Queensway) was further than any of the other proposed closures (2.7 miles) and this figure was incorrect. Due to access and road layout the distance was actually 3.2 miles.

Bus and Transport Services

5. It was stated that the local bus services were irregular and unreliable making the alternative branches inaccessible. It was also stated the bus stop was not within 100 yards of the branch on the return journey into Little Brickhill. This created accessibility problems for the elderly.

Branch proposed for Closure	169 Water Eaton Road, Water Eaton, Bletchley (Milton Keynes South West)
1st alternative branch	140 Queensway, Bletchley (Milton Keynes South West)
2nd alternative branch	110 Serpentine Court, Lakes Estate, Bletchley (Milton Keynes South West)

Customer Service Positions

1. A written statement commented that the second alternative branch at the Lakes Estate was inappropriate as there was only 1 customer service position. This would be inadequate to cope with additional customer sessions.

Customer Sessions

2. Concerns were raised about the numbers of customer sessions that would result at the 1st alternative branch at Queensway due to proposals for the customers of 3 branches to attend this branch and high population figures in the local area.

Ease of Access to the Branch

3. Further written statements highlighted that accessibility to the alternative branch in Queensway would be difficult as there were no bus routes that passed that branch and it was inaccessible by foot to the elderly or disabled.
4. It was also stated that whilst the branch was located in a pedestrian area there were a number of steps which could make access to the branch difficult for the elderly or disabled.
5. It was stated that the second alternative at Serpentine Court was not considered to be a viable alternative for local people. A written statement raised specific concerns about the suitability of the Lakes Estate branch for elderly persons who may feel unsafe in that area when collecting pensions or accessing different services.

Parking Facilities at the Branch

6. A written statement highlighted that parking at the alternative branch at Serpentine Court was difficult as there were approximately only 6 parking spaces and these were shared with other shops and local services. There would be inappropriate parking facilities to cope with the additional numbers of customer sessions.

Branch proposed for Closure	High Street, Weston Underwood, Olney (Milton Keynes North East)
1st alternative branch	18 Market Place, Olney (Milton Keynes North East)
2nd alternative branch	15 High Street, Lavendon, Olney (Milton Keynes North East)

1. It was noted that the post mistress at the branch in Weston Underwood had offered to take a pay cut in order to keep the branch open. It was commented by the representatives of the Post Office Ltd that salaries were not the only consideration to be taken into account with regards to closures. There were also a large number of overheads regarding the branches.

Opening Hours

2. It was stated the opening hours listed in the branch access report were incorrect.

Customer Sessions

3. Concerns were raised that post office branches had been closed in Stoke Goldington, which had affected the customer sessions at Weston Underwood. There was a continual affect on customers in the area and it was now the only post office branch left in the 'gate villages'. There had been a steady increased in mail work at this branch as a result of past closures.
4. It needed to be taken into account that the Weston Underwood served a number of local areas due to other closures. It did not only serve the immediate area.

Parking Facilities at the Branch

5. It was stated that parking at the alternative branch in Olney was inappropriate. Spaces were occupied by employees of local businesses from the early hours of the morning meaning there were no spaces for post office customers.

Bus and Transport Services

6. It was stated that the alternative branches did not meet the access criteria, the branch in Lavendon was 4.8 miles away. It was also stated that there was no direct bus service to the alternative branch, the alternatives were therefore considered to be inappropriate.