



Dear Customer

**Ashford Post Office®**  
**Tufton Street, Ashford, TN23 1QN**

**Local public consultation decision**

I'm writing to confirm that, following a period of local public consultation and review, we have made the decision to proceed with the proposal to move the above Post Office into WHSmith, 70-72 High Street, Ashford, TN24 8TB, where it will be run by WHSmith High Street Ltd, with extended opening hours including Sundays.

I would like to thank everyone who took the time to let us have their comments and provide information. All the feedback we received helped us to better understand the views of customers and their representatives and this was taken into account, along with all other relevant factors, in making our decision. A summary of the key issues raised in consultation and our response to each key issue is enclosed, along with an information sheet providing further details about the new branch.

After careful consideration of the feedback received, we remain confident that the new branch will continue to meet customer needs and deliver an excellent service, whilst securing the long-term viability of Post Office services in Ashford.

Posters will now be displayed in branch to let customers know about this decision. The current branch will close at 17:30 on 20 March 2019, with the new branch opening at 09:00 on 21 March 2019.

You can also find a copy of this letter on our website at [postofficeviews.co.uk](http://postofficeviews.co.uk). When entering the website you will be asked to enter the code for this branch: **010925**.

Yours faithfully

**Roger Gale**  
**Network & Sales Director**  
**Post Office Limited**

[postofficeviews.co.uk](http://postofficeviews.co.uk)  
[comments@postoffice.co.uk](mailto:comments@postoffice.co.uk)  
FREEPOST Your Comments

## **Appendix A – Response to Local Public Consultation**

**Consultation started** 24 October 2018

**Consultation ended** 5 December 2018

### **Consultation responses**

- 29 responses from customers

### **Customer forum event**

Held on 20 November 2018 attended by two members of the public and one branch employee.

### **Key issues raised**

- Location of new Post Office
- Access within WHSmith
- Staffing and customer service
- Range of products and services
- Impact on the local community

### **Location of new Post Office**

The new branch will be located approximately 160 metres away from the current branch, along level terrain. For customers using their own transport, there is a pay and display multi-storey car park on Edinburgh Road with 289 spaces and 24 designated disabled bays. Blue badge holders can refer to Ashford Council website for relevant information on access to the pedestrianised area. For those using public transport to access the new Post Office the nearest bus stop is approximately 145 metres away.

### **Access within WHSmith**

The new branch will operate from a newly built dedicated open plan Post Office area located to the rear of the premises on the left hand side of the WHSmith store. Access into the store is level with automatic doors at the entrance. There will be directional signage from the entrance door through to the new Post Office area. To make sure there is sufficient space for Post Office customers, including wheelchair users, to move around the store and reach the Post Office area without hindrance, the entrance area and shopping aisles will be kept free of obstructions. The Post Office counter will be built to Post Office specifications and will include lighting to industry standards, low level counters, PIN pads and hearing loops. There will be space for people to wait for service and customer seating will also be provided.

### **Staffing and customer service**

There will be four counter serving positions which has been based on current and forecast future business levels; three open plan positions and one traditional floor to ceiling screened position which will also provide travel money services. Additionally there will be three self-service kiosks for mails transactions including home shopping returns, E Top-Ups, and a range of bill payments. Following the move, the Post Office will be open on Sundays, providing customers with more flexibility around their visits. We will continue to monitor service demand in the Ashford area, along with customer usage at the new branch following the move and we will work with WHSmith to make sure service standards are maintained.

Any person employed to work in Ashford Post Office will be trained to the highest Post Office standards and, just as with branches we run ourselves, the branch staff will receive on-going training on products and services, as well as general operational and service related matters. Post Office Area Managers will work with WHSmith and the branch team to provide support, in the same way they already do in existing Post Office branches operated by us or other retail partners. In respect of the team working at the current branch, we have a strong track record of supporting our people through change. We will do all that we can to find a solution that works for each individual within the options available.

**Range of products and services**

A wide range of services would still be available at the branch, with the exception of a Post Office cash machine and Biometric Enrolment Service for the Home Office. Personal banking and Post Office Card Account customers can continue to make cash withdrawals free of charge at the main counter. The nearest alternative external Post Office cash machine can be found at Faversham Post Office, East Street, Faversham, Kent, ME13 8AA, approximately 13.8 miles away. Outside of opening hours, customers can also access their Post Office Card Account at Newtown Post Office (approx. 1.2 miles) and Cradlebridge Drive Post Office (approx. 1.4 miles) which offer extended opening hours. All Post Office branches offer free access to cash for the major high street banks and customers will be able to use their debit card to withdraw cash at the counter of the new branch, during all the extended opening hours.

The UK Visa and Immigration Biometric Enrolment Service for the Home Office service is currently available nationwide by agreement with the Home Office, and is provided through a mix of directly managed and WH Smiths branch locations. From early 2019 the Home Office will transfer the Biometric Enrolment Service to a new national provider and this service will no longer be available at Post Office branches.

DVLA Photocard Driving Licence renewal and Security Industry Authority (SIA) licence application services will still be available, and we can also confirm that the drop and go facility will remain in the new branch.

**Impact on the local community and rationale for the move**

The Post Office and WHSmith benefit from each other's service range and customer loyalty. We are both an integral part of services provided on the high street across the UK, and both absolutely committed to providing excellent customer service. We believe the best approach to retaining this branch, so it can continue to serve its community effectively and sustainably, is to transfer to a third party retailer. WHSmith already successfully operates over 130 Post Office branches to very high standards. We are confident that Ashford Post Office will meet those same high standards.

## Appendix B

<b>Ashford Post Office information sheet</b>															
<b>Address</b>	WHSmith 70-72 High Street Ashford TN24 8TB														
<b>Opening hours</b>	<table border="1"> <tr><td>Mon</td><td>09:00 – 17:30</td></tr> <tr><td>Tue</td><td>09:00 – 17:30</td></tr> <tr><td>Wed</td><td>09:00 – 17:30</td></tr> <tr><td>Thu</td><td>09:00 – 17:30</td></tr> <tr><td>Fri</td><td>09:00 – 17:30</td></tr> <tr><td>Sat</td><td>09:00 – 17:30</td></tr> <tr><td>Sun</td><td>10:00 – 14:00</td></tr> </table>	Mon	09:00 – 17:30	Tue	09:00 – 17:30	Wed	09:00 – 17:30	Thu	09:00 – 17:30	Fri	09:00 – 17:30	Sat	09:00 – 17:30	Sun	10:00 – 14:00
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Sun	10:00 – 14:00														
<b>Products &amp; Services</b>	A wide range of services will still be available at the branch, with the exception of a cash machine.														
<b>Serving positions</b>	There will be four serving positions in total; one screened and three open plan. The total number of serving positions has been based on current and future predicted business levels.														
<b>Additional Facilities</b>	Three self-service kiosks for mails transactions including home shopping returns, E Top-Ups, and a range of bill payments.														
<b>Access &amp; facilities</b>	Access is level with automatic doors at the entrance to the new premises. Low level serving counters, a low level writing desk and hearing loops will be available.														
<b>Route</b>	Approximately 160 metres away from the current branch, along level terrain.														
<b>Transport &amp; parking</b>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Parking</b></p> <p>There is a pay and display multi-storey car park on Edinburgh Road, 289 spaces and 24 designated disabled bays available.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Buses</b></p> <p>Public transport available to and from the surrounding areas.</p>														
<b>Retail</b>	Cards and Stationery														
<b>Date of move</b>	Thursday 21 March 2019														

**To get this information in a different format, for example, in larger print, audio or braille please call 03452 66 01 15 or Textphone 03457 22 33 55.**

## **Principles of Community Engagement on changes to the Post Office network**

We are committed to engaging and supporting our customers and their representatives as we make changes to the Post Office network. The following principles will be adopted when communicating about changes to your local Post Office branch.

We will **Notify** - where we are informing customers of changes around:

- Opening hours
- Temporary closure<sup>1</sup>/ temporary service interruption
- Re-opening of a temporarily closed branch in the same site
- Opening a new branch unrelated to a previous closure
- Location used by a Mobile Post Office within a community

We will display a poster in branch (or nearby if appropriate) to notify customers of the above changes, providing four weeks' notice. Where four weeks' notice is not possible, we will provide notice as soon as we are able to. For temporary closures we will include details of the nearest alternative Post Offices and our customer helpline/textphone.

We will **Engage** - where we are seeking feedback on a decision that has been made on:

- Re-opening of a temporarily closed branch in a new location (where the branch has been closed for more than three months)
- Franchising of a Directly Managed branch in its existing site

While the decision to proceed will have already been made, we will welcome suggestions about specific aspects of the change such as access arrangements and the internal layout. We will provide four weeks' notice or, where extenuating circumstances prevent this, we will provide as much notice as possible.

During this period we will display a poster in branch and provide information online. We will contact locally elected representatives<sup>2</sup>, the Consumer Advocacy Bodies and selected charities<sup>3</sup>, providing clear information on any changes to services or access arrangements at the branch. We will ask locally elected representatives to share information with other key community outlets (such as notice boards, local charities, magazines, GP surgeries etc.). We will publish the outcome of the engagement online and in branch, providing a summary of key issues raised with a clear response to each and any changes made to our original plans.

We will **Consult** - where we are seeking feedback on proposals prior to a decision being made on the:

- Permanent closure of a Post Office branch<sup>4</sup>
- Permanent relocation of a Post Office branch (including the franchising of a Directly Managed branch to a new site)

We will carry out a six-week<sup>5</sup> local public consultation, informing customers, locally elected representatives, Consumer Advocacy Bodies and selected charities of the proposal. This information will also be made available online and for a Directly Managed branch a press release will be issued to local media. We will ask locally elected representatives to share information with other key community outlets (such as notice boards, local charities, magazines, GP surgeries etc.).

The consultation will ask specific questions on areas where we would like feedback on access to Post Office services and will confirm when the change will happen if the decision is made to proceed. We will provide clear information on any changes to services as well as access to and into the new branch.

We welcome all feedback with the following factors being taken into account in making our decision, which we expect to make within four weeks of the close of consultation:

- Customer access to, into and inside the new or alternative branch/branches with particular regard to vulnerable consumers
- Any local community issues which could be affected by or affect the proposal

At the end of the consultation process we will write to locally elected representatives, Consumer Advocacy Bodies and respondents to the consultation (where practical) to confirm our decision and provide a summary of key issues raised with a clear response to each. This information will be made available online and in branch (where possible).

***These Principles have been agreed with Citizens Advice, Citizens Advice Scotland and the General Consumer Council for Northern Ireland; the independent statutory consumer watchdogs.***

*What to do if you feel these Principles haven't been followed:*

Please get in touch so we can investigate your complaint. We'll explain in our reply whether we believe we have followed our Principles of Community Engagement and will provide you with the contact details for the relevant consumer watchdog (Citizens Advice, Citizens Advice Scotland or the Consumer Council for Northern Ireland) if you're not satisfied with our response. The watchdog will independently assess whether we have followed the Principles of Community Engagement process (rather than the decision itself) and recommend any actions with respect to the complaint.

**postofficeviews.co.uk**  
**comments@postoffice.co.uk**  
**FREEPOST Your Comments**  
**Call: 03452 66 01 15**  
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<sup>1</sup>We will provide an update to locally elected representatives if the status of the temporarily closed branch has not changed after 12 months.

<sup>2</sup> Locally elected representatives include but are not restricted to the Member of Parliament, Scottish Parliament, Welsh Assembly, or Northern Ireland Assembly, Local Authority Chief Executive, Ward Councillors, Parish or Community Council.

<sup>3</sup> Selected charities are local Citizens Advice, Age UK, Northern Ireland's Disability Action and Northern Ireland's Rural Community Network. All parties referred to in 2 and 3 above are encouraged to share all information with local groups and organisations who they believe have an active interest in changes to their local Post Office.

<sup>4</sup> There may be a small number of cases where due to circumstances outside our control we have no option other than to permanently close a branch in a particular location. In these cases the consultation will seek feedback on alternative Post Office service provision in the area.

<sup>5</sup> If the consultation includes more than four weeks in July in Scotland and Northern Ireland or more than four weeks in August in England and Wales we will extend the period by one calendar week. We will not start any local public consultation during the two-week period which includes the Christmas and New Year bank holidays.