



Dear Customer

Chester Post Office®
2 St John Street, Chester, CH1 1AA

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, at 5-7 Foregate Street, Chester, CH1 1HH, where it will be operated by WHSmith High Street Ltd. I am also pleased to advise that in addition to Sundays, opening hours have been extended further to those detailed in our proposal letter to include earlier opening and later closing on Monday through to Saturday.

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 which was fully taken into account, along with all other relevant factors, in making our decision. A summary of the key issues raised in the consultation and our response to each of them 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 Chester.

The current branch will close at 17:30 on Wednesday 26 June 2019, with the new branch opening at 08:30 on Thursday 27 June 2019.

You can also find a copy of this letter on our website at postofficeviews.co.uk. When entering the website you will be asked to enter the code for this branch: 009614

Posters will now be displayed in branch to let customers know about this decision.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Roger Gale".

Roger Gale
Network & Sales Director
Post Office Limited

postofficeviews.co.uk
comments@postoffice.co.uk
FREEPOST Your Comments

Appendix A – Response to Local Public Consultation

Consultation started: 30 January 2019

Consultation ended: 13 March 2019

Consultation responses

- 29 responses from customers and local representatives

Customer forum event

Held on 6 March 2019 attended by 7 members of the public.

Key issues raised

- Access & Facilities
- Range of products and services
- Parking
- Staffing
- Impact on local community

Response to issues raised

Access & Facilities

The branch will operate from a newly built dedicated open plan Post Office area located in the basement of the WHSmith store and customer access both into and within the store will meet Post Office Ltd.'s own accessibility standards and all applicable legislation. Access into the store will be level with double automatic doors. The Post Office area can be accessed by a down escalator, stairs or a lift that can accommodate up to 13 people. However if for any reason customers are unable to access the basement area, alternative arrangements to Post Office services would be put in place from a designated till point at the ground floor retail counter as required. These arrangements would enable customer access to all of the services normally available downstairs except for a small number of high value services such as business banking and foreign currency.

There will be directional signage from the entrance through to the new Post Office area and 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 areas 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 plus customer seating will also be provided.

The counter coverage has been determined based on regular customer numbers at Chester Post office and we believe this will meet the demands of customers using the branch. Following the move, the Post Office will be open on Sundays and have extended opening times from Mondays to Saturdays, providing customers with more flexibility around their visits.

A war memorial is located in Chester Post Office dedicated to those of our colleagues who worked for the organisation when it was known as the General Post Office (GPO), which included what is now Royal Mail. We will be working with Royal Mail to identify the most appropriate place to relocate the memorial so that members of the public can continue to pay their respects to those of our colleagues who sacrificed their lives. We fully recognise the importance and significance of war memorials and, once agreed, the relocation will be handled with great care and sensitivity, including a re-dedication ceremony.

Range of products and services

The same range of Post office products and services will still be available at the branch, with the exception of an external cash machine. There are two nearby Post Office branches with Post Office external cash machines that would provide an alternative, depending on whether you were accessing the branch on foot or by car: Northgate Street Post Office, 122 Northgate Street, Chester CH1 2HT is approximately 0.3 miles on foot and 1.3 miles by car and Brook Street Post Office, 48 Brook Street, Chester, CH1 3DN is approximately 0.5 miles on foot and 1.1 miles if travelling by car. Post Office branches offer free access to cash for the major high street banks and customer will be able to use their debit card to withdraw cash at the counter of the new branch during all the extended opening hours.

Staffing

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.

Any person employed to work in the new WHSmith Post Office will be trained to the highest Post Office standards and, just as with branches we run ourselves, the branch team 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.

Location and parking

With any relocation it is inevitable that whilst some customers will have an easier journey to the new location, regrettably others will have further to travel. The new branch is located approximately 65 metres from the current branch, along varied terrain.

We recognise that as the WHSmith store is within a pedestrianised area there are no bus stops or parking spaces directly outside the premises. However, as the new premises is located close by the current branch, customers would be able to use the same local transport and parking facilities. There are disabled bays for approximately three cars on Eastgate Street approximately 30 metres away from the WHSmith store where Blue Badge holders can stay for a maximum of 3 hours.

Impact on the local community

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 operate over 150 Post Office branches to very high standards. We are confident that Chester Post Office will meet those same high standards.

Appendix B

Chester Post Office information sheet															
Address	WHSmith 5-7 Foregate Street Chester CH1 1HH														
Opening hours	<table border="1"> <tr><td>Mon</td><td>08:30 -18:00</td></tr> <tr><td>Tue</td><td>08:30 - 18:00</td></tr> <tr><td>Wed</td><td>08:30 - 18:00</td></tr> <tr><td>Thu</td><td>08:30 - 18:00</td></tr> <tr><td>Fri</td><td>08:30 - 18:00</td></tr> <tr><td>Sat</td><td>08:30 - 18:00</td></tr> <tr><td>Sun</td><td>11:00 - 15:00</td></tr> </table>	Mon	08:30 -18:00	Tue	08:30 - 18:00	Wed	08:30 - 18:00	Thu	08:30 - 18:00	Fri	08:30 - 18:00	Sat	08:30 - 18:00	Sun	11:00 - 15:00
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Products & Services	The same range of services will still be available at the new branch, with the exception of a cash machine.														
Serving positions	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.														
Additional facilities	Two self-service kiosks for mails transactions including home shopping returns, E Top-Ups, and a range of bill payments.														
Access & facilities	<p>There are two entrances into the store which are both level with automatic doors. The Post Office area will be located in the basement of the store, which can be accessed by a down escalator, stairs and a lift that can accommodate up to 13 people. Low level serving counters, a low level writing desk and hearing loops would be available.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Parking</p> <p style="text-align: center;">As the new premises are located close by the current branch, customers will be able to use the same local transport and parking facilities</p>														
Route	Approximately 65 metres away from the current branch, along mostly level terrain.														
Retail	Cards and Stationery														
Date of move	Thursday 27 June 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 closure¹/ 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 representatives², the Consumer Advocacy Bodies and selected charities³, 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 branch⁴
- 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-week⁵ 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
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¹We will provide an update to locally elected representatives if the status of the temporarily closed branch has not changed after 12 months.

² 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.

³ 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.

⁴ 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.

⁵ 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.