



Dear Customer

**Colchester Post Office®
68-70 North Hill, Colchester, CO1 1PX**

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 19 Culver Walk, Lion Walk Shopping Centre, Colchester, CO1 1LX, 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 from Mondays through to Saturdays.

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 Colchester.

The current branch will close at 17:30 on Wednesday 1 May 2019, with the new branch opening at 08:30 on Thursday 2 May 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: **010116**.

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

Yours faithfully

**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: 14 November 2018
Consultation ended: 28 December 2018

Consultation responses

- 372 responses from customers and local representatives

Meetings

Post Office representatives met with the Leader and Chief Executive of Colchester Borough Council on 27 November 2018.

Customer forum event

Held on 4 December 2018 attended by 10 members of the public.

Key issues raised

- Access within WHSmith
- Getting to the new location
- Evacuation procedure
- Relocation of the war memorial
- Range of products and services
- Staffing
- Customer service
- Impact on the local community and rationale for the move

Response to issues raised

Access within WHSmith

The branch will operate from a newly built dedicated open plan Post Office area located on the ground floor to the rear of the store. Access into the store is via a small incline and through automatic doors, and customer access both into and within the store will meet Post Office Ltd's own accessibility standards and all applicable legislation. There will be directional signage from the entrance 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 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. There will be space for people to wait for service and customer seating will also be provided.

Getting to the new location

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. We carefully considered factors such as the local terrain, parking or transport links when developing our proposal. We also took account of whether there were any particular local road traffic issues that may negatively impact accessibility.

The new branch will be located approximately 400 metres from the current branch, along varied terrain. For customers using their own transport Vineyard Street pay and display car park with 101 spaces and 5 designated disabled bays is approximately 190 metres away. For those using public transport to get to the new branch, the nearest bus stop is approximately 140 metres from the new location.

Additionally, with the aim of further assisting customers, we will inform the local authority of the change and explore what steps can be taken to improve access for customers, such as the provision of designated disabled parking in the vicinity of the new branch and directional signage to the new location. We would also seek to engage with local disability groups to discuss access arrangements in the new branch.

Evacuation procedure

The safety and security of our customers is of paramount importance to us. WHSmith already has stringent plans in place for evacuating their store in the event of a power failure / fire and these will be extended to include the Post Office area. WHSmith staff would be responsible for ensuring the safe exit of customers from all parts of the store, and they will ensure the new Post Office staff are fully trained in the evacuation procedures for the site. This is a Health and Safety requirement, and both WHSmith and Post Office Ltd are committed to ensuring the safety of their customers at all times.

Relocation of the war memorial

We are 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. Please be assured that we fully recognise the importance and significance of war memorials and, once agreed, the relocation will be handled with due and proper care and sensitivity, including a re-dedication ceremony.

Range of products and services

A wide range of services would still be available at the branch, with the exception of an internal Post Office cash machine. 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 WHSmith 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.

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 Colchester 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.

Customer service

There will be six counter serving positions which has been based on current and forecast future business levels; four open plan positions and two traditional floor to ceiling screened positions which will also provide travel money services. Additionally there will be four 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, and have earlier opening on Mondays to Saturdays, providing customers with more flexibility around their visits. We will continue to monitor service demand in the Colchester area, along with customer usage at the new branch following the move and will work with WHSmith to make sure service standards are maintained.

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 operate over 130 Post Office branches to very high standards. We are confident that Colchester Post Office will meet those same high standards.

Appendix B

Colchester Post Office information sheet															
Address	WHSmith 19 Culver Walk Lion Walk Shopping Centre Colchester CO1 1LX														
Opening hours	<table border="1"> <tr><td>Mon</td><td>08:30 – 17:30</td></tr> <tr><td>Tue</td><td>08:30 – 17:30</td></tr> <tr><td>Wed</td><td>08:30 – 17:30</td></tr> <tr><td>Thu</td><td>08:30 – 17:30</td></tr> <tr><td>Fri</td><td>08:30 – 17:30</td></tr> <tr><td>Sat</td><td>08:30 – 17:30</td></tr> <tr><td>Sun</td><td>10:30 – 14:30</td></tr> </table>	Mon	08:30 – 17:30	Tue	08:30 – 17:30	Wed	08:30 – 17:30	Thu	08:30 – 17:30	Fri	08:30 – 17:30	Sat	08:30 – 17:30	Sun	10:30 – 14:30
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Products & Services	A wide range of products and services will still be available, with the exception of a cash machine.														
Serving positions	There will be six serving positions in total; two screened and four open plan. The total number of serving positions has been based on current and future predicted business levels.														
Additional facilities	Four self-service kiosks for mails transactions including home shopping returns, E Top-Ups, and a range of bill payments.														
Access & facilities	<p>Access into the store is via a small incline and through automatic doors. Low level serving counters, a low level writing desk and hearing loops will be available.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Parking</p> <p>There is a pay and display car park on Vineyard Street with 101 spaces and 5 designated disabled bays approximately 190 metres away.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Buses</p> <p>Public transport available to and from the surrounding areas. The nearest bus stop is approximately 140 metres away from the new premises.</p>														
Route	Approximately 400 metres away from the current branch, along varied terrain.														
Retail	Cards and stationery.														
Date of move	Thursday 2 May 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
comments@postoffice.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.