



Dear Customer

**Consett Post Office®**  
**Victoria Road, Consett, DH8 5AA**

**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 PhoneHub, at 40 Middle Street, Consett, DH8 5QJ, where it will be operated by our new retail partner. I am also pleased to advise that opening hours will be increased to include Saturday afternoons.

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 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 Consett.

The current branch will close at 17:30 on Wednesday 13 November 2019, with the new branch opening at 09:00 on Thursday 14 November 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: **007329**.

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

Yours faithfully

**Steve Blampied**  
**Head of Directly Managed Branch Network**  
**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 July 2019**  
**Consultation ended**                      **11 September 2019**

### **Consultation responses**

- 149 responses from customers and local representatives

### **Customer forum event**

Held on Thursday 29 August 2019 attended by approximately 30 members of the public and local representatives.

### **Key issues raised**

- **Getting to the new location**
- **Access**
- **Customer service**
- **Range of products and services**
- **Staffing**
- **Impact on the local community and rationale for the move**
- **Potential impact of Local markets**
- **Current premises**

### **Response to issues raised**

#### **Getting to the new location**

The new branch will be located approximately 160 metres from the current branch, along varied terrain. With any relocation it is inevitable that whilst some customers will have an easier journey to the new location, regrettably others may have further to travel.

For customers using their own transport there are several car parks locally, the nearest being at Albert Road which is free for up to 3 hours with 157 spaces and 6 designated disabled bays, approximately 150 metres away. There are also 3 designated disabled bays on Wesley Street approximately 50 metres away. Public transport is also available to and from the surrounding areas, with Consett bus station approximately 320 metres away.

#### **Access**

The new branch will operate from a newly built dedicated open plan Post Office area, with an internal refurbishment, which will include automatic doors being installed at the entrance and an internal ramp with handrails to enable ease of access for wheelchair users and those with mobility issues.

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.

#### **Customer service**

There will be four counter serving positions which has been based on the current and forecast future business levels; two open plan positions, one traditional floor to ceiling screened position which would also provide travel money services and a Post Office serving point at retail counter. We will continue to monitor service demand in the Consett area, along with customer usage at the new branch following the move and will work with our new operator to make sure service standards are maintained.

#### **Range of products and services**

A wide range of services will still be available at the branch, with the exception of a Post Office cash machine. The nearest alternative external Post Office cash machine can be found approximately 1.2 miles away at Delves Lane Post Office, Medway Village Store, Delves Lane, Consett, DH8 7BH. 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.

**Staffing**

Any person employed to work in Consett 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 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.

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

Any business will occasionally face situations where decisions have to be taken based on individual, local circumstances (e.g. the closure of a store or redevelopment). Such situations can happen whether the branch is directly managed or franchised. In such circumstances, we will always look to relocate the Post Office branch to ensure Post Office services are maintained in the community.

Safety and security are very important to us as with any branch in our network. We take this into consideration when relocating and there will be strict guidelines and measures put in place to safeguard customers and staff.

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. Our new retail partner regards the Post Office network as a vital part of community service, and has satisfied us they will be able to successfully operate Consett Post Office.

**Potential impact of Local markets**

When proposing these plans we take access to the Post Office very seriously and we've taken into account that on market days this location is busier with shoppers. The market traders are required to comply with the relevant traffic and pedestrian regulations. We are satisfied that these measures mean that access to the store will not be compromised.

**Current premises**

We lease the current Post Office premises and will now look to surrender our lease back to our landlords.

## Appendix B

| <b>Consett Post Office information sheet</b>     |   |           |               |     |               |     |               |     |               |     |               |     |               |     |        |
|--|---|-----------|---------------|-----|---------------|-----|---------------|-----|---------------|-----|---------------|-----|---------------|-----|--------|
| <b>Address</b>                                   | PhoneHub<br>40 Middle Street<br>Consett<br>DH8 5QJ  |           |               |     |               |     |               |     |               |     |               |     |               |     |        |
| <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>Closed</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 | Closed |
| 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  | Closed  |           |               |     |               |     |               |     |               |     |               |     |               |     |        |
| <b>Post Office service at the retail counter</b> | <table border="1"> <tr><td>Mon - Sat</td><td>09:00 – 17:30</td></tr> <tr><td>Sun</td><td>Closed</td></tr> </table>  | Mon - Sat | 09:00 – 17:30 | Sun | Closed        |     |               |     |               |     |               |     |               |     |        |
| Mon - Sat  | 09:00 – 17:30   |           |               |     |               |     |               |     |               |     |               |     |               |     |        |
| Sun  | Closed  |           |               |     |               |     |               |     |               |     |               |     |               |     |        |
| <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 two open plan and a Post Office serving point at the retail counter. The total number of serving positions has been based on current and future predicted business levels.  |           |               |     |               |     |               |     |               |     |               |     |               |     |        |
| <b>Access &amp; facilities</b>                   | <p>Automatic doors will be installed at the entrance to the new premises, with an internal ramp with handrails. Low level serving counters, a low level writing desk and hearing loops will be available.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Parking</b></p> <p>There is a free car park on Albert Road, time restricted for up to 3 hours with 157 spaces and 6 designated disabled bays approximately 150 metres away. Also, there are 3 designated disabled bays on Wesley Street approximately 50 metres away.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Buses</b></p> <p>Public transport available to and from the surrounding areas. Consett bus station approximately 320 metres away from new location.</p> |           |               |     |               |     |               |     |               |     |               |     |               |     |        |
| <b>Route</b>                                     | Approximately 160 metres away from the current branch, along varied terrain.  |           |               |     |               |     |               |     |               |     |               |     |               |     |        |
| <b>Retail</b>                                    | Phones, phone accessories and stationery store.   |           |               |     |               |     |               |     |               |     |               |     |               |     |        |
| <b>Date of move</b>                              | Thursday 14 November 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**  
**Textphone: 03457 22 33 55**

<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.