



Dear Customer

Darlington Post Office®
Crown Street, Darlington, DL1 1AB

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 37B Cornmill Shopping Centre, Priestgate, Darlington, DL1 1LS, where it will be operated by WHSmith High Street Ltd. The branch will have extended opening hours including Saturday afternoons and 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 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 Darlington.

The current branch will close at 17:30 on Wednesday 18 September 2019, with the new branch opening at 09:00 on Thursday 19 September 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: **011309**.

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

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "S. Blampied".

Steve Blampied
Head of Directly Managed Branch Network
Post Office Limited

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

Appendix A – Response to Local Public Consultation

Consultation started **24 April 2019**
Consultation ended **5 June 2019**

Consultation responses

- 53 responses from customers and local representatives

Customer forum event

Held on Wednesday 22 May 2019 attended by 3 members of the public.

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**
- **Current premises**
- **Consultation process**

Response to issues raised

Getting to the new location

The new branch will be located approximately 170 metres from the current branch, along varied terrain. Some customers commented that they felt the move to a more central location within the town was helpful, along with the extended opening hours. However, 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 the Cornmill Shopping Centre with 400 spaces and designated disabled bays available on level one, approximately 170 metres away. There are also several time restricted designated disabled bays next to the Priestgate entrance into the shopping centre. Public transport is also available to and from the surrounding areas, with several bus stops in the vicinity of the shopping centre.

Access

The branch will operate from a newly built dedicated open plan Post Office area located at the rear of the WHSmith store. 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 the entrance being kept open during store opening times. Externally the store front will include Post Office signage and an opening hours board.

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.

Additionally, with the aim of further assisting customers we will contact local disability groups to discuss access arrangements in the new branch.

Customer service

There will be five counter serving positions which has been based on current and forecast future business levels; three 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 most home shopping returns, E Top-Ups, and a range of bill payments. Following the move, the Post Office will be open on Saturday afternoons and Sundays, providing customers with more flexibility around their visits. We will continue to monitor service demand in this area of Darlington, along with customer usage at the new branch following the move and will work with WHSmith 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 mile away at Albert Road Post Office, 66-70 North Road, Darlington, DL1 2EQ. 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 Darlington 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.

Impact on the local community and rationale for the move

The Post Office and WHSmith benefit from each other's service range and customer footfall. 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 180 Post Office branches to very high standards. We are confident that Darlington Post Office will meet those same high standards.

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.

Current premises

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

Consultation process

When we propose a change to our network, we work hard to make sure as many people as possible in the local community know about it and provide them with the opportunity to let us have their views. The Principles of Community Engagement we follow when making changes in the Post Office network is agreed between Post Office Limited and Citizens Advice, the independent statutory consumer watchdog. In line with these principles, we contacted local representatives and customer information letters and posters were made available in branch from the first day of consultation. Details were also published on our website postofficeviews.co.uk, where customers could also let us have their views through our E-consultation channel.

Appendix B

Darlington Post Office information sheet															
Address	WHSmith 37B Cornmill Shopping Centre Priestgate Darlington DL1 1LS														
Opening hours	<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>11:00 – 15:00</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	11:00 – 15:00
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	11:00 – 15:00														
Products & Services	A wide range of services will still be available at the branch, with the exception of a cash machine.														
Serving positions	There will be five serving positions in total; two screened and three 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>There are several entrances into the shopping centre, the entrance at Northgate is the nearest to the current Post Office. Access into the store from the shopping centre is level, with the entrance being kept open during store opening times. 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 are several car parks in the vicinity of the new premises:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cornmill Shopping Centre car park, pay on exit with 400 spaces and designated disabled bays on level one approximately 170 metres away. • Commercial Street West car park, pay and display with 157 spaces and 8 designated disabled bays approximately 190 metres from the centre entrance on Northgate. • There are several time restricted designated disabled bays next to the Priestgate entrance into the shopping centre. <p style="text-align: center;">Buses</p> <p>Public transport available to and from the surrounding areas.</p>														
Route	Approximately 170 metres away from the current branch, along varied terrain.														
Retail	Cards and stationery														
Date of move	Thursday 19 September 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
FREEPOST Your Comments
Call: 03452 66 01 15
Textphone: 03457 22 33 55

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.