



Dear Customer

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

**Local public consultation**

I'm writing to let you know that we are proposing to move Darlington Post Office to a new location - WHSmith, 37B Cornmill Shopping Centre, Priestgate, Darlington, DL1 1LS. If the move goes ahead the branch will be run by WHSmith High Street Ltd, with extended opening hours including Saturday afternoons and Sundays.

**Why are we proposing this move?**

This move is part of the continuing modernisation of our branch network. We believe the most effective way to secure the long term viability of Post Office services in Darlington is through a carefully selected retail partner, and we are confident that our proposal is the best way of safeguarding services for the community for years to come. The vast majority of our 11,500 Post Office branches, large and small, are successfully operated in this way with retail partners and we believe this is the best approach to keeping Post Offices in main shopping locations and at the heart of communities where they play an important role in local economies.

Alongside modernising our branch network, we're continuing to develop our services to remain relevant for customers. As well as traditional mails and other services, today's Post Office network provides for the collection or return of online shopping, offers a 'click and collect' service for foreign currency available from over 3,500 branches and day-to-day banking for the majority of customers of UK banks - 99 per cent of UK personal banking customers and 95 per cent of business customers can now carry out day to day banking at any of our branches.

A wide range of services would still be available at the branch, with the exception of a cash machine. The nearest alternative external cash machine at a Post Office branch 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.

**About our retail partner**

WHSmith is one of the UK's largest booksellers, stationers and newsagents, operating more than 1,400 stores, with an extensive reach and a presence on nearly every significant UK high street. WHSmith has been successfully operating Post Offices within its stores since 2007 and currently runs over 150 branches. Throughout this extended period they have satisfied us that they will be able to successfully run the branch in Darlington, by showing that they can deliver excellent standards of customer service, with trained staff promoting products and services in a modern environment.

## The new Darlington Post Office branch

The new branch will operate from a newly built dedicated open plan Post Office area located towards the rear of the WHSmith store. Access into the store from the shopping centre is level, with the entrance being kept open during store opening times.

Directional signage will be provided from the entrance door through to the new Post Office area. There will be five serving positions, which has been based on current and forecast future business levels; three open plan positions and two traditional screened positions which will also provide travel money services. Open plan serving positions are successfully used across the Post Office network, as an alternative to the more traditional positions and still have a partitioned screen but this is lower, helping to provide for a more personal service and discreet conversations when needed. Additionally, there will be four self-service kiosks for mails transactions including home shopping returns, E Top-Ups, and a range of bill payments.

We have stringent standards to ensure good access for all customers and our plans for the new branch include widened aisles, low-level counters, PIN pads, hearing loops and customer seating.

## What's next?

We're now starting a period of local public consultation and we'd welcome your views on the proposal. The change of management of the branch to one that is operated by a retail partner rather than by us directly is a commercial decision for Post Office Ltd and therefore we are not seeking feedback on this aspect of the change. However we welcome feedback and comments that can help inform our plans, particularly on the following areas:

- How easy is it to get to the proposed new location?
- Are the new premises easy for you to get into and are they easily accessible once inside?
- Are there any other local community issues which you believe could be affected by or affect the proposed move?
- If the move were to proceed is there anything we could do to make it easier for customers?

If you are a local representative, it would be helpful if you could share this information with any local groups or organisations that you know within the community, for example on noticeboards, local charities and in GP surgeries, to help our customers and your constituents understand what is happening to the Post Office in Darlington. If you would like a supply of posters please let us know.

You can share your views on the proposed change through our easy and convenient online questionnaire via the link below. When entering the site you can use the search function to find the consultation for this branch either by branch name, postcode or the unique branch code **011309**.

[postofficeviews.co.uk](https://postofficeviews.co.uk)

## How to contact us:

[postofficeviews.co.uk](https://postofficeviews.co.uk)

[comments@postoffice.co.uk](mailto:comments@postoffice.co.uk)

Call: 03452 66 01 15

Textphone: 03457 22 33 55

FREEPOST Your Comments

**Please note this is the full address to use and no further address details are required.**

Want to tell us what you think right here and now? Scan here.

If you don't have a QR code scanner on your phone, you can find one in your app store.



Items sent by Freepost take two working days to arrive, so responses by Freepost should be sent in sufficient time to arrive before the end of the consultation period. Working days do not include Saturdays or Sundays. Responses received after the deadline will not be considered.

**Dates for local public consultation:**

Local Public Consultation starts	<b>24 April 2019</b>
Local Public Consultation ends	<b>5 June 2019</b>
Proposed month of change	<b>September 2019</b>

Post Office Ltd will host a customer forum in the coming weeks, and everyone will be welcome to attend to hear more about the proposed new location. We're currently finalising details of this event and further information will be provided in branch.

We are committed to engaging with and supporting our customers and their representatives as we make changes to the Post Office network. This notification is being carried out in line with our Principles of Community Engagement which have been agreed with Citizens Advice, Citizens Advice Scotland and the General Consumer Council for Northern Ireland - the independent statutory consumer watchdogs. A copy is available at the end of this letter.

Thank you for considering our proposal. Any information we receive will be considered as we finalise our plans for the new branch. I've enclosed an information sheet that provides more details about the new location.

Yours faithfully



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

Darlington Post Office information sheet							
	Current location				Proposed new location		
Address	Crown Street Darlington DL1 1AB				WHSmith 37B Cornmill Shopping Centre Priestgate Darlington DL1 1LS		
Post Office Opening Hours		Mon	09:00 – 17:30			Mon	09:00 – 17:30
		Tue	09:30 – 17:30			Tue	09:00 – 17:30
		Wed	09:00 – 17:30			Wed	09:00 – 17:30
		Thu	09:00 – 17:30			Thu	09:00 – 17:30
		Fri	09:00 – 17:30			Fri	09:00 – 17:30
		Sat	09:00 – 12:30			Sat	09:00 – 17:30
		Sun	Closed			Sun	11:00 – 15:00
	Products & Services	A wide range of services would still be available at the branch, with the exception of a cash machine.					
Serving positions	There would 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 and 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 would be available.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Parking</b></p> <p>There are several car parks in the vicinity of the proposed premises:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Cornmill Shopping Centre car park, pay on exit with 400 spaces and designated disabled bays on level one approximately 170 metres away.</li><li>• 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.</li></ul> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Buses</b></p> <p>Public transport available to and from the surrounding areas.</p>						
Distance	Approximately 170 metres away from the current branch, along varied terrain.						
Retail	Cards and stationery.						
Local Public Consultation starts	24 April 2019						
Local Public Consultation ends	5 June 2019						
Proposed month of Change	September 2019						

**To get this information in a different format, for example, in larger print, audio or braille 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**  
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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.