



Dear Customer

**Dartford Post Office®
19 Hythe Street, Dartford, DA1 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 19-21 High Street, Dartford, DA1 1DT, 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 closure on 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 which were fully taken into account, along with all other relevant factors, in making our decision. A summary of the key issues raised during 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 Dartford.

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: 002014.

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: 6 February 2019

Consultation ended: 20 March 2019

Consultation responses

- 462 responses from customers and local representatives

Customer forum event

Held on 19 March 2019 attended by 8 members of the public.

Key issues raised

- Access to the new location
- Security
- Transport and Parking
- Access within WHSmith
- Customer service
- Range of products and services
- Staffing
- Impact on the local community and rationale for the move

Response to issues raised

Access 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 into account whether there were any particular local road traffic issues that may negatively impact accessibility.

When making these types of decisions we take access to the Post Office very seriously and we've taken into account that on market days this part of the High Street is busier with shoppers, including outside WHSmith. The market traders are required to comply with the relevant traffic and pedestrian regulations and although the market stalls will be located in the pedestrianised area, we are satisfied that these measures mean that access to the store will not be compromised.

Security

Concerns were raised around security outside WHS. The security of any new branch is one of the many aspects we consider before progressing to consultation. Our security team review and profile the branch location before a decision is made. We take the safety of customers very seriously and in this respect, we take every physical precaution, within our branches, to provide a safe and secure environment.

Transport and Parking

The new site is located approximately 170 metres away from the current branch, along mostly level terrain. For customers using their own transport there is a pay and display car park on Market Place with approximately 30 spaces and 9 designated disabled bays approximately 56m away. For customers who wish to park in the Orchard Shopping Centre car park there is a step free access between the car park and WHSmith. There are also disabled parking bays on Suffolk Road.

We recognise that as the WHSmith store is within a pedestrianised area there are no bus stops or parking spaces directly outside the premises. For those using public transport the nearest bus stop is approximately 160m from the new location and there are two loading bays on Market Place which can be used as a drop off points.

Access within WHSmith

The branch will operate from a newly built dedicated open plan Post Office area located to the rear 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 is via a slight incline and new automatic doors will be installed at the entrance to the new premises.

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 and customer seating will also be provided.

Customer service

There will be three counter serving positions, which has been based on current and forecast future business levels; two open plan positions and one traditional screened position 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 extended opening and closing times from Mondays to Saturdays, providing customers with more flexibility around their visits. We will continue to monitor service demand in the area, 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 DVLA Photocard Driving Licence renewal, Security Industry Authority (SIA) licence application services and a cash machine. The nearest alternative branch providing DVLA Photocard Driving Licence renewal and Security Industry Authority (SIA) licence application services and an external cash machine at a Post Office branch can be found approximately 4 miles away at Erith Post Office, 89 High Street, Erith, Kent, DA8 1QY. 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 the extended opening hours.

The Home Office recently awarded the contract to provide the UK Visa and Immigration Biometric Enrolment Service to another supplier. Roll out to the new provider commenced in November 2018 and this service will cease in all branches later this year. Therefore, the Biometric Enrolment Service will not be available in the new branch.

Staffing

It's pleasing to hear of the high regard for our existing staff. 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 Dartford 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.

Impact on the local community and rationale for the change

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

Appendix B

Dartford Post Office information sheet															
Address	WHSmith 19-21 High Street Dartford DA1 1DT														
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>10:00 – 14:00</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	10:00 – 14:00
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Products & Services	A wide range of services will still be available at the branch, with the exception of DVLA Photocard Driving Licence renewal, Security Industry Authority (SIA) licence application services and a cash machine.														
Serving positions	There will be three serving positions in total; one screened and two 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 proposed premises is via a slight incline, and new automatic doors will be installed at the entrance. Low level serving counters, a low level writing desk and hearing loops will be available.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Parking</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Pay and display car park on Market Place, with approximately 30 spaces and 9 designated disabled bays approximately 56 metres away.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Buses</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Public transport available to and from the surrounding areas.</p>														
Route	Approximately 170 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.