



Dear Customer

Simonside Post Office®
19 Binchester Street, South Shields, NE34 9AR

Local public consultation decision

We are writing to confirm that following a period of local public consultation and review we have made the decision to proceed with the move of the above Post Office into 97-99 Wenlock Road, South Shields, NE34 9BD.

We 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 feedback 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 layout and location of 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 the local community.

The new branch is scheduled to open, at 97-99 Wenlock Road, on Monday 09 December 2019. If there are any unforeseen schedule changes which mean this date changes, posters will be displayed to let customers know.

This information is also available on the Post Office Consultation Hub at:
postofficeviews.co.uk

We're carrying out this notification in line with our Principles of Community Engagement. A copy is available at the end of this letter.

Yours faithfully

Kenny Lamont

Kenny Lamont
Change Area Manager

postofficeviews.co.uk

comments@postoffice.co.uk

FREEPOST Your Comments

Post Office Limited is committed to protecting your privacy. Information about how we do this can be found on our website at postoffice.co.uk/privacy

Appendix A

Response to Local Public Consultation

Consultation started 11 October 2019

Consultation ended 22 November 2019

Consultation responses

- 02 responses from customers and local representatives

Key issues raised

- Access
- Parking
- Privacy
- Staff Training/Security

Response to issues raised

Access

It's clear that the Post Office plays an important part in the lives of customers, particularly to older and disabled customers and we want to make our services as accessible as we possibly can. The new branch currently has a step at the entrance, however a bell and signage would be installed at the entrance and a portable ramp would be available on request. The Postmaster is looking to install a permanent ramp, this would be subject to planning permission.

Internally the new branch will be in line with Post Office specifications, making sure there is sufficient space for the Post Office service to operate alongside the retail offer. We will be working closely with the new operator on the internal layout and some fixtures and fittings will be re-aligned or removed to make sure there is clear access into the premises, ensuring the entrance, aisles and the waiting area are kept free from obstructions and adequate room is provided for customers and a wheelchair to move around without difficulty.

Parking

While I have considered the concerns raised about parking in the area surrounding the new location, it is fair to say that this is a problem faced generally in many locations nationwide. As I am sure you will understand the availability of parking spaces is outside the direct control of Post Office Limited. However I have conducted a further review of parking and I can confirm there is roadside parking available nearby. I am therefore satisfied that parking at the new branch will continue to meet the needs of customers using the Post Office. In terms of pedestrian access to the new location, there are well maintained pavements, with dropped kerbs along the route from the current site.

Privacy

Although the local style format is a different way of offering Post Office services, it does not compromise the professional service standards that we provide at all of our branches. We will also be working closely with the new operator to make sure an appropriate level of privacy is provided for Post Office customers. For example, we discuss issues like queue layout and asking customers to stand back from the counter whilst they are waiting for service or handing a receipt that contains any financial information face down. Open plan working also lends itself to more discreet conversations as customers don't have to raise their voice to be heard.

Staff Training/Security

Although the local style format is a more modern way of offering Post Office services, it in no way compromises the professional service standards that we aim to provide at all of our branches. The staff training approaches used are of the same high standard as those undertaken in all our branches. This includes respecting customer confidentiality and adhering to the stringent security procedures which will be put in place to protect staff and customers. Additionally, any staff that will handle Post Office transactions will also have completed compliance training for a number of areas, including Data Protection and Mail Handling.

Appendix B

Simonside Post Office information sheet															
Address	97-99 Wenlock Road South Shields NE34 9BD														
Opening hours	<table><tr><td>Mon</td><td>09:00 – 21:00</td></tr><tr><td>Tue</td><td>09:00 – 21:00</td></tr><tr><td>Wed</td><td>09:00 – 21:00</td></tr><tr><td>Thu</td><td>09:00 – 21:00</td></tr><tr><td>Fri</td><td>09:00 – 21:00</td></tr><tr><td>Sat</td><td>09:00 – 21:00</td></tr><tr><td>Sun</td><td>09:00 – 21:00</td></tr></table>	Mon	09:00 – 21:00	Tue	09:00 – 21:00	Wed	09:00 – 21:00	Thu	09:00 – 21:00	Fri	09:00 – 21:00	Sat	09:00 – 21:00	Sun	09:00 – 21:00
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Fri	09:00 – 21:00														
Sat	09:00 – 21:00														
Sun	09:00 – 21:00														
Distance	Within 70 metres of the previous branch, along varied terrain.														
Products & Services	A wide range of products and services will still be available.														
Serving positions	There will be one serving position provided for use at the retail counter and available during shop opening hours.														
Accessibility	<p>Access and facilities</p> <p>Currently there is a step at the entrance to the new premises, however a bell and signage would be installed at the entrance and a portable ramp would be available on request. The Postmaster is looking to install a permanent ramp, this would be subject to planning permission.</p> <p>Internally, there would be a hearing loop.</p> <p>Parking</p> <p>Roadside parking is available nearby.</p>														
Retail	Convenience store														
Date of opening	Monday 09 December 2019														

To get this information in a different format, for example, in larger print, audio or braille call 03457 22 33 44 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.