



**News from
Sally Keeble MP
Northampton**

Working for you in Northampton and Westminster

MP'S REPORT SLATES PROPOSED POST OFFICE CLOSURES

Sally Keeble MP has sent a report to Royal Mail slating the proposals to close four post offices in her constituency.

The report, sent in to the Royal Mail's consultation on the post office closures, said that the closures would especially hit the elderly, disabled and most vulnerable.

Among the people who responded to her consultation were many frail pensioners, including an 89 year old pensioner who is registered blind, and could only manage to get to her local post office for her pension. Many people said they used the post office to get out money and pay their bills.

The MP said that Royal Mail had failed to use accurate information when drawing up its plans for the post offices. It did not use accurate population figures, as it did not take account of new residential developments planned around some of the post offices. It did not take account the number of elderly and disadvantaged people living close to some of the post offices,

“The post offices are used for much more than just buying stamps and sending letters and parcels. For many elderly and disabled people the post office is their lifeline – it is where they get their pension and pay their bills. Royal Mail has not taken all the accurate and relevant information into account. I hope that they will look at the information in this report, see the heartfelt response of the public, and think again about their proposals.”

The report was based on a two-stage consultation with residents living in the area of Broadmead Avenue, Boothville, Brookside and Kingsley Road. A copy of the report is also attached.

**For more information please contact:
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Northampton North Post Offices

Results of community consultation by Sally Keeble MP

1. Introduction

There has been great opposition to the proposed closure of post offices in Northampton North – especially for older people, people with disabilities and those without transport. People have sent in personalised letters and forms setting out the use that they make of the offices, and it is diverse. They use them for financial as well as postal services. In addition for some people the ability to get money and shop in the same local centre is important if people do not have transport. Four post offices in Northampton North have been proposed for closure:

Broadmead Avenue; Boothville; Brookside; Kingsley

This paper looks at three aspects of each of the post offices:

- i) population projections
- ii) socio demographic features of the local community
- i) responses from public

The consultation that I undertook had two stages. Firstly people were able to sign a cut-out coupon on a leaflet to send it in and register their opposition. They were then sent a detailed questionnaire to fill in to provide more information about the way they use their local post office and what the closures would mean to them.

2. Broadmead Avenue Post Office

This is the Post Office with the highest level of usage of the four post offices earmarked for closure, and the one that the local community was most vocal in opposing the proposed closure. There was very strong opposition to the closure from the entire community – older people and young parents - and they were very quick to write in setting out their views. The proposed closure of this post office needs to be considered in conjunction with the proposed closure of Boothville. The two post offices serve a section of my constituency that is bounded by two major roads – Kettering Road on one side and Booth Lane on the other. The closure of both of these post offices would leave one entire segment of the constituency without a post office.

2.1. Population projections

Given the importance and popularity of this Post Office, it is of particular concern that there were mistakes made in the population projections for the area. Royal Mail had not taken into account the proposals for new housing in the area – it appears that Royal Mail was not given these figures by the local authorities. There are proposals for two substantial new housing developments on Grange Road on former school sites. Both are for family housing, and both fall into the catchment area of the Broadmead Avenue post office. These figures should be taken into account in the final decision on the future of Broadmead Avenue. Given the current usage of Broadmead Avenue Post office, which is almost at what would be accepted to be a sustainable level, the extra business that would be expected from the new housing estates should ensure the long term viability of this post office. It should therefore be removed from the list earmarked for closure.

2.1. Socio-demographic features of the area

Eastfield, which is served by the Broadmead Avenue post office, is recognised to be one of the most disadvantaged areas in Northampton. There are two aspects of the community which make it especially reliant on the post office. One is the number of pensioners in the area, who use the post office. The other is the number of parents with young children, and also a significant number of people excluded from the labour market. It is worth noting that there are also a substantial number of pensioners and living in the vicinity of Boothville post office.

2.3. Responses from the public

Two hundred and five people filled in and returned coupons, and 95 people sent in detailed questionnaires. Some of the key responses on these questionnaires were:

- People were asked about their last visit to the post office. Most of them gave dates in the same or the previous week. Some also said that they used the post office more than once a week.
- Collecting pensions was given most frequently as the main reason for using the post office. This was mentioned by 36 people. A large number of people also mentioned that they withdrew money from the post office, and used it to pay their bills, as well as buying stamps, posting parcels etc. What was very clear was that the post office was very important for the respondents for its financial services.
- When asked about why this post office was important, most people said because they could not easily get to another one, because it served people who were elderly and disabled, and also they were very positive about the people running the post office. Some people said that if the post office closed it would be the end of the little shopping centre.
- People were asked which post office they would use if this one shut, and the responses were very varied indeed. Some people said the town centre, some said the post office in Bushland Road, Kingsley Park Terrace or Coppice Drive, and a lot said that they didn't know. People said they did not know how they would be able to get to the other post offices, some said that they were worried about having to wait in queues if the post offices got more crowded.
- Most of the respondents were pensioners or working age people who did not have cars.

Some of the comments made were from a couple who said the Broadmead Avenue post office "Is five minutes walk away and we are both over 80 and not in good health. Mrs K is 82 and has parkinsons, and Mr K is 86 and has parkinsons but is able to drive small distances. Mrs K is unable to walk and is housebound Mr K has to look after her and does all the shopping etc."

And another man wrote, "The post office is important to us, the elderly. This is because a lot of us are unable to walk very far, and the alternatives are too far away. The offices left open will obviously get busier, so queues will form, and the people unable to walk far will have more problems, because they can't stand for long. I am 73 years old, and am on the waiting list for a knee replacement. I have a car at the moment, but can't afford to run it very often."

3. Boothville Post office

Boothville Post Office has also had a high level of support from the local community.

3.1. Population projections

There are proposals for some new housing in the Thorpeville area that would add to the population using the post office at Boothville. There are also proposals for a substantial new housing estate close to the post office at Coppice Drive, in Parklands, which would increase the pressure on what would probably be the alternative post office for people in parts of Boothville. It seems that these figures of new housing have not been provided to Royal Mail, and therefore have not been taken into account in calculating the customer base for this post office.

3.2. Socio demographic profile

There is a substantial pensioner community in the Boothville area. In addition the post office is used by some businesses from the Moulton Park and Round Spinney estates.

3.3. Responses from the public

Seventy-three people filled in return coupons, and 34 of them completed detailed questionnaires. Some of the main points they made were:

- Most of the people who responded were pensioners, and used the post office to get their pensions. However, some people said that the post office served an important community function as a meeting point that provided a focus for the community. Most said they had used the post office within the past week.
- Again, people gave very varied responses as to their alternative post office. Some said the Coppice Drive post office, some said the shopping centre at Weston Favell, some said they would go right into town. For many people the issue of getting to alternatives was a real problem. This was partly because of the problems of public transport which has been a disputed issue for many people. Royal Mail's document gives a high level of frequency of local bus services – this is far from the reality. People also felt there was no alternative in walking distance. One respondent cited the uphill walk to Coppice Drive. Another woman wrote “I am 89 years old and registered blind. I can walk to the post office and the staff know me there. Other post offices are too far away and I would not know the staff.”

4. Lumbertubs (Brookside) post office in Billing Brook Road

This Post office is on a main road close with reasonable access, which is an important aspect when considering the alternatives. The postmaster has recently made considerable investment in the post office so that there is a good counter area which is attractive and accessible.

4.1. Population projections

There is a substantial housing estate planned quite close to the post office in Billing Brook Road on the site of a former school. Whilst this housing estate is close to the Weston Favell shopping centre, some people might prefer to use a local shop than a major shopping centre for postal services, and therefore this new population should be considered when assessing the viability of the Billing Brook Road post office.

4.2. Socio-demographic profile of community

The local community is one of the most disadvantaged in Northampton, and is also quite isolated. Close to the post office is a row of sheltered housing, two primary schools and some flats where people have some pressing social needs.

4.3. Response from the public

The main points people made were;

- Most people said they had used the post office in the previous week. Most of the people who replied to the questionnaire were pensioners, although a substantial number of them pointed to the high number of families with young children in the area who used the post office.
- A number of people expressed very strong support for the local shop in which the post office is located. They said they were worried that if the post office went, then the viability of the shop might be threatened which would be a real problem to them.
- Most people said identified Weston Favell as their alternative post office. However, they had a lot of criticisms of it. A number of people said it was too far to walk – one person said it would involve a 30 minute walk. Others said that they would have difficulty getting into it, especially if they were disabled. The post office at Weston Favell shopping centre is inside the Tesco extra. This means people have to get up to the first floor, either by lift or escalator, which is difficult and also involves some steps. They have to get into the Tesco, and then right down to one end of the shop. A number of the respondents were concerned that the Tesco post office already has substantial queues,. The Tesco post office is not signposted from the road – unless you know the area, you don't know it is there.

5. Kingsley Road Post office

Fewer people responded to leaflets and questionnaires about this post office.

The local community also suffers a number of disadvantages, and in particular there are a substantial number of older people. The alternative post office is at Kingsley Park Terrace, which provides restricted facilities. The other alternative, at Kingsthorpe, already has to deal with the extra customers displaced as a result of the closure of the St Davids post office, and there can be problems with long queues.