

# MANAGING THE CLOSURE OF THE VILLAGE POST OFFICE



## **Post Office Ltd's Network Change Programme**

In May 2008 the final plan for the future of the Post Office Network in Oxfordshire was published. As a result, post offices in the rural villages of Ardington, Begbroke, Childrey, Combe, Crowmarsh, Farmoor, Fyfield, Iffley, Long Wittenham, Lower Wolvercote, Stanton St John, Upton, Wootton by Woodstock and Wytham will close this summer. Post Offices in the villages of Chadlington, Enstone, Great Rollright, Great Tew and Tackley will close to be replaced by a reduced "Outreach" service.

## **What effect will these changes have?**

For many people living in the affected villages these changes may cause great inconvenience. Some will find it necessary to travel outside the village to post parcels, pay bills and access cash. For people without access to transport it will be particularly distressing and make accessing post office services difficult, and even impossible, without help.

Local people view both the post office and the village shop as social hubs providing a focal point for village life and an important information centre. Closure of the post office may also mean a loss of social contact and a reason to walk round the village, particularly for elderly people.

There is also some concern that if the closed post office was also part of the village shop, then the financial viability of the shop may now be under threat. Clearly, this will depend on individual circumstances, but shopkeepers may need to look to diversify and extend other areas of their business to recoup the loss of income from Post Office Ltd.

## **What can local people do if their post office closes?**

There are a number of actions that can be taken to minimise the negative effects of the post office closures, both by individuals and by community groups. Local needs will vary, but below are some suggestions that you may find useful. It would be helpful first of all to consult with:

- the shopkeeper (where applicable)
- the outgoing sub postmaster who may be willing to advise you on who will be most disadvantaged by the post office closure.
  
- **Look at alternative ways to provide the key services** currently provided by Post Office Ltd: eg. cash facility at a local shop; bill payment through Pay Point; establish a collection point for parcels at the pub or shop. However, be aware that, as is fairly standard practice in business contracts, the outgoing sub postmaster will have had to sign an agreement with Post Office Ltd not to introduce any alternative "rival" services into the shop for the first year after the closure of the post office. The shopkeeper may wish to be helpful and accommodating, but may legally be unable to act in the short-term

- **Organise a voluntary car scheme or minibus** to take those without private transport to the nearest post office. ORCC's Community Transport Advisers, Alix Michaelis and Emily Lewis, can provide information and support on how this can be done. Email: [alix.michaelis@oxonrcc.org.uk](mailto:alix.michaelis@oxonrcc.org.uk) [emily.lewis@oxonrcc.org.uk](mailto:emily.lewis@oxonrcc.org.uk)
- **Provide an alternative** opportunity for people to socialise eg coffee morning in the village hall. ORCC's Community Development Workers, Anton Nath and Aimee Evans, can provide information and support on how this can be done. Email: [anton.nath@oxonrcc.org.uk](mailto:anton.nath@oxonrcc.org.uk); [aimee.evans@oxonrcc.org.uk](mailto:aimee.evans@oxonrcc.org.uk)
- **Provide community internet facilities** to enable people without access to or confidence to use a computer to pay bills and obtain information on-line. This could be available in the Village Hall or even the shop and would need to be provided in conjunction with support from an IT-confident volunteer. Investigate linking such a facility with activities likely to attract or already involve the people you have identified as being most disadvantaged by the loss of the post office.
- **Commit to supporting your local shop** – strong local support is vital to ensure that the shop is not lost too. Don't leave it to others to shop locally and then wonder why the shop is not doing well. Decide to buy 10 things or spend £10 (or more) per week in the village shop and do so consistently. Look for special offers, local produce or specialist products that are not available in the supermarkets.
- **Support the local shop at village events** – if you are organising a social or fundraising event for the village, purchase refreshment supplies etc through the local shop rather than the supermarket. Offer advertising space in the programme or promotional opportunities for the shop at the event.
- **Drum up support in the community** – run regular features in the village newsletter or encourage the shopkeeper to write a column. Make people aware of how important their support is for the sustainability of all local businesses and how lucky they are to have a village shop!
- **Be environmentally aware** - shopping locally means that you can buy 'little and often' to reduce the amount of fresh food that is thrown away. Also, don't forget how much the trip to the supermarket actually costs in fuel and parking fees.
- **If the worst happens and your village shop also closes despite your community's efforts to support it, consider opening a community owned shop.** The ORCC's Village Shops Development Worker, Jane Barker, works with local groups seeking to establish community owned stores. She is also available to respond to requests by shopkeepers for advice on retail business development. Email: [jane.barker@oxonrcc.org.uk](mailto:jane.barker@oxonrcc.org.uk)

ORCC's contact telephone number is 01865 883488

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