



Yoxford Parish Council

1 Park Place
Old High Rd
Yoxford
Suffolk
IP17 3HN

The Rt. Hon. Dr Thérèse Coffey, MP for Suffolk Coastal

March 13th 2024

Dear Dr Coffey

Significant reduction to outreach Post Office services in Suffolk Coastal constituency

On behalf of Yoxford Parish Council, I write to you regarding Post Office Ltd.'s plan to reduce its outreach service in the village. As I understand it from colleagues in other parishes nearby, you are aware already of the issue, and will be meeting with Kevin Hollinrake to discuss this with him. I hope that this letter and its appendix will be of use to you in those discussions and bring additional strength to the arguments to continue the provision as it is.

Following discussion at Yoxford Parish Council's meeting last week, I include a briefing document as appendix to this letter which details the Parish Council's concerns about, and objections to, the proposed severely reduced service.

In summary, its opposition to the plans, and request for your intervention are based on the following:

1. That important opportunities for social connection between members of an isolated rural community are being sacrificed in the name of relatively small financial saving.
2. The fact that Yoxford Parish Council, along with the other villages affected, has been given no reason for replacement of the service when our understanding is that the incoming Saxmundham postmaster wishes it to continue
3. The complete absence of consultation, until after the notification of a unilateral decision was issued.
4. That, in Yoxford Parish Council's opinion, a mobile van is totally unsuitable as a replacement for the current indoor venue.

Please see the attached document for detailed reasons behind these objections.

We hope that you are able to bring pressure on the Post Office to revoke its decision.

With my thanks for what you're able to do.

Yours sincerely

Trudy Charles

Parish Clerk to Yoxford Parish Council

c.c. Kevin Hollinrake MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the Department for Business

Enc. Appendix 1: Yoxford Outreach Post Office Services. Reasons for Yoxford Parish Council's objections to the plans

Appendix 1: Yoxford Outreach Post Office Services

Reasons for Yoxford Parish Council's objections to the plans

We do not agree that a change to the service is necessary.

1. From Department of Transport data (2019), Yoxford (and nearby Kelsale) is the most isolated place to live in Suffolk and the ninth in the entire UK. Opportunities to build social connection are therefore even more important. In its current form, the Post Office Outreach Service provides just those opportunities. It's not just about buying a stamp or sending a parcel but checking in with other members of the community in a warm, safe and welcoming environment. We know that for some, this may be the only human contact they have that day. To reduce the service to one hour per week, from a van in the Village Hall car park takes this away completely. In these current difficult times, it seems that Post Office Ltd. is sacrificing its humanity in the name of small financial saving.
2. Despite a request for it, Post Office Ltd has not provided any reason for its decision to reduce the outreach service from four and a half hours (across two days) to one hour per week.
3. The incoming postmaster wishes to continue the outreach service.
4. The closure of the indoor provision may result in the redundancy a member of staff and a reduced income for the incoming postmaster.
5. The quality of service for the convenience and comfort of customers cannot be maintained.
6. The current safe access for all cannot be replicated in the mobile vehicle.
7. There has been no opportunity for meaningful consultation.

Unsuitability of the vehicle

1. We understand that the van can only accommodate one customer at a time, meaning that at busy times queuing would take place outdoors in all weather conditions. Furthermore, we've been informed that there is no weather cover and so this suggests that Post Office Ltd is happy for customers to wait outside in any weather. This is both neglectful and cruel and is not responding to the needs of access to all.
2. With the closure, in May 2024, of Barclays Bank PLC in Leiston, the post office is likely to be relied upon even more for banking, hence there may be longer queues in the very limited time the van will be available.
3. Access is via steps, with wheelchair access available only via a tail-lift deployed by the PO staff member.
4. Wheelchair users would have to wait outside for the tail-lift to be deployed by the PO staff member.
5. Older customers and those with mobility issues or walking aids would find the steps daunting. A request that the Post Office visits on a day when volunteers from the village can support residents, was rejected on the grounds of van route planning.



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Late communication from Post Office Ltd.

1. We were contacted by the retiring Post Master at Saxmundham who informed us of his retirement and that Post Office Ltd. was changing the provision. No formal notification was received until Yoxford Parish Council contacted the Network Provision Lead for further information.
2. The notification implies that there is no alternative to the proposals, despite the fact that Post Office Ltd itself made the decision to remove the outreaches from the Saxmundham postmaster's franchise.

Additional Information

1. The outreach Post Office in Yoxford dates from 2015, when Dr Coffey was instrumental in securing the outreach provision after a year without any service following the permanent closure of the previous service.
2. It is housed in the Small Hall of Yoxford Village Hall.
3. There is ample car parking, including a disabled bay close to the entrance.
4. The infrastructure such as wi-fi and other connections, was installed by Post Office Ltd. and is kept locked and inaccessible to anyone else.
5. The space is heated with customer seating available if needed, and there is plenty of space to queue in a comfortable and dry environment.
6. Yoxford Village Hall pays for all heating and lighting with no charge to Post Office Ltd. nor the local Saxmundham branch.
7. Yoxford Village Hall makes no hire/venue charge to Post Office Ltd. nor the Saxmundham branch.
8. Current provision is across two days and totals four and a half hours each per week: Monday 1.30 – 3.30pm, and Wednesday 9.30am – 12 noon.
9. The PO staff member unloads the necessary electronic equipment from the PO car and connects it via the dedicated sockets. This takes no more than 10 minutes either end of the session.
10. Yoxford Post Office is well-supported.
11. Having such a long-serving staff member means provision of a professional but personal service, with the current staff member discreetly supporting customers who have hearing and sight difficulties, and those with cognition and/or mobility problems.

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