

SCOTLAND BARN, STOKE BY NAYLAND, CO6 4QG

Mr. Jim Fitzpatrick, MP
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State
Department of Trade and Industry
1 Victoria Street
London SW1H 0ET

20th June 2007

I write to thank you for giving my colleagues and me the time last week to express our concerns about the proposed closure of so many post offices in rural areas. The decision to raise the petition originated with a local environmental group, the Village Green Teams, whose members are struggling to understand how we will be able to sustain a cohesive community, and reduce our carbon footprint, if this crucial facility is removed.

We very much appreciate the sympathetic hearing you gave to our anxieties, which inevitably concentrated on evidence from the community in which we live, though it must be clear that many others share our fears and confusion. I would like to summarise what these are (not all of which we had time to elaborate during our meeting):-

- 1). Within a five-mile area we have already lost two out of four local post offices. Any further closure would cause great hardship to the community, particularly to the elderly and to young mothers and children, to local businesses (including an increasing number run from home), and to the primary and middle schools in Stoke by Nayland.
- 2). Currently Stoke by Nayland post office serves around 400 people a week. There is a demand for the restoration of services that have been removed (and whose loss has rendered the post office less viable). We also believe both the domestic and business community would be strengthened and carbon footprinting reduced by adding to the range of postal, financial and other administrative functions available locally.
- 3). If the Stoke by Nayland post office is closed we presume that the nearest survivor would be Nayland. For those who walk this would entail a 4-mile round trip along a narrow unrestricted road with no pavements, no footpaths across surrounding fields and a steep hill up to Stoke by Nayland at the end of the journey. The other options would be an infrequent bus service, which would involve a minimum three-hour round trip or (for those who have one) resorting to the car and adding post miles.
- 4). If the post office is closed usage of the sole shop in Stoke by Nayland, in which it is housed, would certainly decline. The worst, and we fear the most likely, outcome would be closure, turning this community into a deprived rural area. (The situation at Polstead may be different because the post office is housed in a community shop and I understand the manager and representative from Babergh District Council will write to you separately about the implications in this and similar cases).

5). For small businesses in our area the post office is vital for banking, for posting time-sensitive goods and paper work, and for deliveries. The present early-morning delivery, which is by bicycle, is essential (the alternative, which happens when the local postwoman is off, is delivery by van which arrives during the afternoon, thus precluding same-day response). Outreach post offices will not meet these needs..

6). The East of England plan, *Investing in Communities*, aims to eliminate the deprivation of struggling communities, plus help for SMEs. The EEDA plan envisages many more houses and business developments, some of which are already spreading along the corridor between Colchester and Sudbury, increasing the need for a workable infrastructure including post offices. Closing Stoke by Nayland post office would run counter to EEDA plans.

7). Stoke by Nayland is in a prominent part of the Stour valley, generally known as Constable country. Its shop and post office serve the many tourists and other visitors to this designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

In addition to these specific local problems, which we know must be replicated in many other rural communities, we are concerned that the proposed closure of so many post offices is in direct conflict with several of the Government's stated aims, including:-

- The reduction of social exclusion and general strengthening of communities.
- The support of local shops and foodwebs
- The diversification of employment in rural areas
- The underpinning of small businesses
- The sustainability of the environment and reduction of carbon footprint
- The development of infrastructure to support local tourism.

We left with you a summary of comments from petitioners which illustrate many of the issues raised in this letter. Signatures are still being added but when we close the petition we would like to take up your offer to submit the original documents for inclusion on the record. If there is any further information you would like to receive from us to elaborate the points we have made, we shall be very pleased to respond.

Thank you again for your consideration,

Yours sincerely

Carol Lindsay Smith

c.c. Eddy Alcock, Suffolk County Cllr.
Richard Cave & Sue Wigglesworth , Babergh District Cllrs
Adrian & Monique Macdonald, Post Office, Stoke by Nayland
Tim Yeo, MP
James Bishop & John Prescott, for Green Teams P.O. campaign.