

Swavesey Parish Council

Notes from Public Meeting

Post Office Re-location Proposal

Held at The Memorial Hall, 7.00pm, on Weds 13th May 2015

PRESENT

Mr M Johnston – Chairman of the Parish Council

Notes taken by Mrs L Miller – Clerk to the Parish Council

Mrs L Tarling, Public Affairs Manager – South East Region, Post Office Ltd

Parishioners: approximately 120 members of the public were present

Mr Martin Johnston, Chairman of the Parish Council opened the meeting and welcomed everyone. Mrs Tarling from the Post Office was introduced, who was attending to hear residents comments with regard to the proposed relocation of the Post Office from Market St to CostCutter, Middlewatch and to answer questions.

Item

1 TO RECEIVE APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Various residents of the village

Mrs Heidi Allen, MP for South Cambridgeshire

2 Swavesey Post Office, Market Street

Proposed move to new premises and branch modernisation

New location: CostCutter Store, 80 Middlewatch, Swavesey

Consultation open from 26th March to 21st May.

Proposed month of change July/August 2015

Mrs Tarling thanked the Chairman for inviting her to attend and gave a background on the reasons for the proposal, which is part of the Post Office's national network modernisation programme with 4,000 branches modernised to-date.

Mrs Tarling added that Post Office Ltd is committed to maintaining Post Office services and as the Post Mistress in Swavesey had notified the Post Office that she wished to leave, Post Office Ltd (PO) advertised for a new Post Master and the CostCutter Shop applied. No decision has yet been made with regard to the relocation; this will be made after all of the comments have been reviewed after 21st May.

The consultation is asking for comments on how suitable and easy to get to the proposed location is; how easy the premises are to get into and their accessibility; concerns over the location; suggestions to make it better; community issues which could be affected by the proposed move and things you like about the proposed change, plus any other comments.

The Chairman asked how many comments had been received to-date. Mrs Tarling confirmed over 200.

The Chairman asked the meeting for a show of hands on:

How many people are in favour of the proposed move: No hands raised

How many people are against the proposed move: Everyone raised their hands

The Chairman asked for questions and comments to Mrs Tarling.

- 1) Many concerns but principle is issue of parking outside of CostCutters. Shop is very close to Gibraltar Lane junction, visibility and safety are a great concern. The Village College is just inside Gibraltar Lane and safety of students is a concern. Has the PO taking this into account?

Mrs Tarling replied that this concern has been raised in many of the responses received and will be taken into consideration.

- 2) The PO states that modernisation will enhance the community. How is this when staff are likely to lose their jobs if the branch moves?

- 3) Concern raised over the security of the premises, as the existing branch has had security problems in the past.

Mrs Tarling replied that the PO operates an open plan environment, as do many other banks and building societies, which have no screens and takes security seriously.

- 4) Quotation from that day's Cambridge News read out:

"Will Russell, Regional Manager has previously said: "We understand how important having a Post Office is to residents in Swavesey and we are confident that this new modern Post Office service will meet the needs of the local community and secure services for the future."

Does this mean the decision has already been made to relocate?

Mrs Tarling replied that the decision has not been made.

- 5) Why is this relocation being proposed?

Mrs Tarling replied that with 11,500 branches, 11,300 are franchises, often within retail outlets. The Post Master will own the premises and employ the staff; this gives longevity of service, a service provided by the building's owner.

- 6) Why did our Post Mistress resign?

Mrs Tarling stated she could not comment on personal circumstances.

- 7) If 4,000 branches have been modernised/relocated how many asked to and how many did not?

Mrs Tarling replied that some Post Masters took refurbishment funding offered and modernised their buildings and others resigned and the PO branch was relocated.

- 8) If the Swavesey Post Mistress hadn't resigned what would have happened to the branch?

Mrs Tarling replied that the PO has been consulting with the Post Mistress on this for some time, the process being do you wish to stay and modernise or do you wish to leave. The Post Mistress decided to leave.

- 9) Concern raised over safety outside of the CostCutters, the resident had had her car hit by another vehicle whilst parked there.

- 10) It was questioned as to how the Post Mistress was asked about modernising or leaving. Mrs Tarling replied that the Post Mistress could have attended this meeting but chose not to, other Post Masters have attended meetings and spoken to those present.

- 11) Could someone else buy the existing branch premises and then take on the PO Service?
Mrs Tarling replied this would have been an option if the Post Mistress wished to sell her property when the PO business was put up for sale.
- 12) Where is the post for the village to be sorted if the service moves to CostCutter?
Mrs Tarling explained that Royal Mail is separate from the PO so she could not answer. That question will be answered after the consultation when the future of PO branch is decided and is not relevant to the PO decision.
- 13) Comment made that all Cambs post is currently sorted in Peterborough.
- 14) Was the only applicant the CostCutter store? If the village does not wish the branch to move, what will happen?
Mrs Tarling replied that the PO needs to know the relevant issues, ie suitability of the proposed location and a decision will be made.
- 15) Is it possible the village would lose the PO if the majority of the responses are against the move?
Mrs Tarling replied that if the PO decides not to move the branch, they will go back to the Post Mistress to ask what she wishes to do.
The Chairman urged the PO to talk to the Post Mistress again, as the village believed she would wish to continue running the business in Market St.
Mrs Tarling added that the PO has to go through the due process. If the PO decides not to proceed it will then ask the Post Mistress again what she wishes to do.
- 16) Does the PO branch have to move within half a mile of the existing branch?
Mrs Tarling replied no, that initially they look within half a mile but not solely.
- 17) Comment made that businesses in and around Market St all use the PO and all walk to/from. If the branch moved to CostCutter businesses would have to arrange for staff to use cars and drive/to from the new location, creating additional and unnecessary traffic in the village. There are 20+ businesses in and around Market St.
Mrs Tarling noted this.
- 18) Question asked about staffing and training.
Mrs Tarling replied that POs in retail outlets help both businesses, as the PO opens the same hours as the shop. Staff will be trained for PO transactions as well as for the retail business.
Mrs Tarling added that the PO wishes to increase opening hours. PO use is declining therefore new and additional opening hours are required.
The Chairman added that the PO should seriously consider the community use of its branches, this is very important.
- 19) Comment made that if footfall through a PO branch is important, footfall is likely to fall if the branch moves from Market St.
Market St branch always in use, it is very rare there isn't a customer in there. The PO should not consider just generalities but should look at the specifics of each branch. Why do we need Sunday opening hours?
Mrs Tarling replied that today the PO considers longer opening hours very important.

- 20) Comment made re the Particular Baptist Chapel car park, next door to the CostCutter and that there are already lots of problems re parked vehicles blocking the car park entrance. Safety is a big concern, often it is very difficult to see when exiting the carpark due to parked vehicles and there have been near misses.
Mrs Tarling noted the concerns.
- 21) It was understood that some PO services will be lost if the branch moves.
Mrs Tarling replied that 95% of services will still be available.
- 22) How many responses have you received in favour of the additional opening hours?
Mrs Tarling replied that not all of the replies have been read, but some responses often do comment in favour. The PO needs to be more relevant to the whole community today, with new services, Amazon deliveries being an example.
- 23) Comment made that everything proposed for the new location could be carried out at the existing location, so why move? Also it was understood that cash paying-in would be lost, so why move?
Mrs Tarling replied that the PO wishes to speed up transaction time and use automated services. A paper-based transaction is lengthy with lengthy background completion, therefore paper-based paying-in will stop. Cash paying-in would still be available via an account swipe card.
The Chairman reiterated that loss of local services is an issue for a community.
Mrs Tarling added that the PO has to become more efficient to keep going.
- 24) Will there be a separate till for PO business?
Yes
- 25) What about staff? Will staff lose their jobs
Mrs Tarling replied that the PO owner will be responsible for recruiting staff. There is an opportunity for existing staff to move.
- 26) This consultation only gives one option. Did the PO look at any other premises, as safety on Middlewatch is a big issue?
Mrs Tarling replied that the PO requires a business and premises for new branches. The PO did advertise on its website.
The meeting replied that not everyone looks on the PO website, why was the advertisement not displayed in the community or in the branch?
Mrs Tarling replied that the PO advertises on its website.
- 27) Comment made about why does the PO need to engage with young people? As a young person I rarely go into the PO.
Mrs Tarling replied that the PO wishes to encourage young people to use the PO, for banking, online shopping delivery/collection, travel money card, foreign exchange.
- 28) Will parcels still be held for collection? Will there be a problem with storing parcels at the new location?
Yes parcels will be still be held for collection. No problem re storing parcels. International parcels over 2kg will not be able to be sent, but all others will.

- 29) Is planning permission required for the change of business from retail to PO?
No it is not required.

Mrs Tarling thanked everyone for their comments.

The Chairman thanked everyone for attending and again urged the PO to go back and talk again to the Post Mistress in the village about the future of the Market St branch.

The Parish would be considering its response to the consultation at its meeting on 18th May.

There being no further business, the meeting was declared closed at 8.00pm

DRAFT