



Don't Rip the
Heart out of
Rippingale

Rippingale Post Office

**Submission to Post
Office Ltd. National
Consultation Team**

RIPPINGALE POST OFFICE



Submission to Post Office Ltd
National Consultation Team

Prepared by Friends of Ripplingale Post Office
(FORPO)

8 November 2007

Friends of Rippingale Post Office (FORPO)

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**RIPPINGALE POST OFFICE
SUBMISSION TO POST OFFICE LTD NATIONAL CONSULTATION TEAM
MANAGEMENT SUMMARY**

1. Introduction

The attached submission has been compiled by a group known as Friends of Rippingale Post Office (FORPO). Its purpose is to persuade Post Office Ltd. to reconsider its proposal to replace the current post office in Rippingale with Outreach services.

2. Structure of Document

The document has been compiled in the form of a detailed report (13 pages) with a large number of enclosures, which are designed to indicate the level of support for the submission, and the strength of feeling against PO Ltd's proposal.

The submission details, in 7 sections, details of the village, its population, and the shop/post office, of which the consultation team might not be aware; issues which arise from the proposal, many of which form the basis of our challenge; and a summary of the support for our cause received from many different, but influential areas.

3. Issues subject to Challenge

We challenge many issues arising from the proposal but the following are the main areas:

1. Of course our main challenge is to the inadequacy of the Outreach services proposed for Rippingale. We demonstrate how none of the proposed schemes will provide an adequate service for the village.
2. We challenge the way in which the "consultation" has been carried out. In fact we use the word "sham", and point out where the intentions 2006 National Consultation Document and the 2007 MoU with Postwatch have not been followed.
3. We examine the various criteria used to make the decision, and they way those criteria have been applied, and demonstrate the inadequate way in which the exercise has been approached.
4. We stress the fact that the social consequences of the decision have been ignored, and detail what these will entail.
5. We challenge the decision to close Rippingale post office as against the case for others in the area.
6. We heavily criticise Post office Ltd for refusing to provide information on the trading figures used to arrive at the decision, or to allow us to make a business case.

4. The Submission

We submit that the way in which the Post Office Ltd proposal has been arrived at is flawed in many areas, not only in the final decision, but in the actual data used, the way in which it has been used, and the total disregard for its social consequences. In particular, we submit that the use of one months figures (being a month prior to the change of ownership) as a basis on which to assess the future of the post office is totally flawed, and that more recent, longer term figures should be used.

5. We request that the National Consultation reconsider their proposal and, if necessary, submit the case for "further review".

**To Mark Partington
Post Office National Consultation Team**

PROPOSED CHANGES TO POST OFFICE AT 5 MIDDLE STREET RIPPINGALE

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. This document has been produced and presented by the Friends of Rippingale Post Office (FORPO), being a group formed by villagers of Rippingale to challenge the proposals for closure of the village Post Office and replacement by Outreach services. The views expressed in this document are supported by the inhabitants of Rippingale, and of surrounding villages, which rely on the Rippingale Post Office services.
- 1.2. Although many have responded individually, this document is a compilation of views canvassed from villagers in response to the six-week consultation period offered by Post Office Ltd. It has to be said that the document reflects the real anger of the villagers at the way in which Government policy and the implementation by Post Office Ltd are being carried out.
- 1.3. In the following pages, not only do we show that none of the proposed Outreach services will remotely meet the needs of Rippingale, but also we demonstrate the dire effects on community life resulting from the closure of the Post Office.

2. RIPPINGALE AND ADJACENT PARISHES

2.1. Rippingale:

The rural Parish of Rippingale lies 5.5 miles North of Bourne to the East of the A15, in Lincolnshire. It comprises the village of Rippingale and some outlying houses and farms. To date, the village has been reasonably well served with facilities having a shop/post office; a doctor's surgery; a hairdresser; a garage; a public house; a village hall; and a church. However, over the past two years it has lost its petrol station, Methodist church, and, most recently, its primary school. The village hosts about 30 other businesses, including 5 farms.

2.2 Adjacent Parishes:

The Parishes of Kirkby Underwood, Aslackby, Dunsby, and Dowsby have small populations without many of the facilities of Rippingale. In particular, they have no shop or Post Office, and rely heavily on Rippingale for many of their services. Residents of all these villages support the views expressed in this document.

2.3. Geography and Economy:

- 2.3.1 The area covered by Rippingale and the above listed parishes is strictly rural and dominated by large farms and associated businesses. Hence the road network is sparse and comprises many B class roads, with the one A road being single carriageway. The villages are well spaced, varying between 1 and 7 miles apart. The following table details the distances involved between villages and the nearest town of Bourne.

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	Rippingale	Dunsby	Dowsby	Aslackby	Kirkby Underwood	Bourne	Morton
Rippingale	-	1.25	2.0	2.25	1.8	5.5	3.2
Dunsby	1.25	-	1.0	4.5	3.0	4.75	2.25
Dowsby	2.0	1.0	-	3.75	3.8	7.0	4.5
Aslackby	2.25	4.5	3.75	-	2.25	7.0	5.2
Kirkby Underwood	1.8	3.0	3.8	2.25	-	5.75	3.75

It should be noted that the A15 which links all these villages to Morton and Bourne is classed as one the most dangerous roads in Lincolnshire.

2.3.2 Rippingale is not just a sleepy village full of commuters. It is very much a busy farming village with 5 large farms within its boundary. The village has a thriving public house with a well-respected restaurant, and various other businesses, many connected to farming and wildlife. Two larger businesses connected with the motor trade operate on the edge of the village. In recent years the village has expanded with the influx of new residents, many of whom are retired or commute to Peterborough, Grantham and Stamford. We discuss the population distribution in paragraph 2.4. The situation in the surrounding villages is similar to that of Rippingale, containing large farms and associated businesses.

2.4. Population Distribution

The total population of Rippingale is a mix of the following groups:-

- long term residents of Rippingale whose families have lived in the village for several generations – many associated with the farms in the area, or other local businesses;
- residents, many of whom are families with children, who have moved into new housing developments in the village over the past 10/15 years, and who commute to employment in towns such as Peterborough and Grantham; and
- residents who are retired.

The following table (based on the last national census, updated to 2007 from SKDC records, and adjusted for any known differences, indicates the proportion of retired people, the percentage of children, and the percentage of those known to have limiting, long –term illnesses.

	Rippingale	Dunsby	Dowsby	Aslackby	Kirkby Underwood
Total Population	969	141	171	259	229
% of children	24	27	14	22	19
% of adult pop. retired	34.1	21.4	23.2	20.1	17
% of total pop. with limiting illness	20	16.3	23.2	11.5	15.5

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From this table it can be seen, clearly, that:-

- the population, particularly of Rippingale, has problems with mobility, and has great need for locally provided services;
- Rippingale has a much higher number of retired residents than other adjacent villages due to having the convenience of a post office and local shop; and
- the population of Rippingale has increased by 15.7% since the national census in 2001

The increase in population in all the villages is due to the additional houses being built, and this shows no sign of abating. A current proposal for Rippingale would involve the building of 140 additional houses. This trend could be accelerated under the new Government policy on building on greenfield sites.

2.5. Public Transport and Access to other Facilities

2.5.1 Rippingale and its adjacent villages are poorly served by public transport. In fact the services are so poor as to be virtually unusable for fulfilling day-to-day requirements. The following table shows the total services available:-

	Rippingale	Dunsby	Dowsby	Aslackby	Kirkby Underwood
Bourne (5.5 miles)	1 bus Thurs only	3 Buses Thurs only	1 Thurs only	Nil	Nil
Grantham (17miles)	2 buses daily	nil	2 buses daily	2 buses daily	1 per week

2.5.2 Service to Bourne:

This once-per-week service to Bourne is purely for visits to the small market in Bourne town centre. The service is of no use whatsoever in providing for the daily needs of the village residents.

2.5.3 Service to Grantham

It can be seen from the timetable at Enclosure 3 that, although there are two buses per day to Grantham, the distance is large and the time taken is well over an hour in each direction. This means returning almost immediately or staying in the towns for a whole day. This is of little use for day-to-day requirements, particularly for retired people who cannot drive and those residents with limited mobility. This service does pass through Billingborough village (5 miles from Rippingale) but a visit to the Post Office would involve a 3-hour wait for the return service.

3. VILLAGE POST OFFICE/ SHOP

3.1 Recent History

The village shop has been in existence for many years (believed to be since 1896), but the most relevant period is from the early 1970's from which the shop became run-down, as did the post office. The shop stocks were low and with little choice. The reduction in

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turnover was reflected in the post office takings, as residents who were forced to go elsewhere for their shopping requirements, also used other post offices. At this time, however, there was a regular bus service into Bourne from Rippingale, making it possible for some older residents to use the alternative facilities.

3.2 Current Situation

In 2005 the shop was sold and was completely refurbished in 2006. The opening hours were vastly increased and the shop was fully stocked with a wide variety of produce at competitive prices. This resulted in a large increase in turnover, and a consequent large increase in the use of the post office. This progress has continued at an even faster rate since the current owner took over. Before refurbishment the weekly turnover was about £1000 per week; currently the turnover is averaging £6500 per week. The number of customer visits is averaging 1700 per week and it is estimated that half of these use the post office and store during the same visit. A major factor in the continuing increase in turnover is the further change to the opening hours, since the current owner took over the business. They are now 06.00/20.00 Mon/Sat and 08.00-20.00 Sun. The post office hours now coincide with those of the shop.

3.3 Needs of Residents

The residents of Rippingale and adjacent villages need the shop and post office. Whereas younger, mobile residents may be able to meet their needs using alternative locations, older and less mobile residents can not. Replacement of the post office with inadequate Outreach services would force many mobile residents to meet post office needs in other towns, and consequently carry out their shopping requirements at the same time. This would obviously affect the turnover of the village shop and endanger its existence. The village post office is essential to Rippingale to meet the day to day needs of all residents, the particular needs of local businesses, and the special needs of old and immobile members of the community.

4. POST OFFICE PROPOSALS

- 4.1. Post Office Ltd. has proposed closure of Rippingale Post office from January 2008, and its replacement with an Outreach Service of 13 hours per week. It has offered a six-week consultation period purely with regard to the type of Outreach Service required, with no offer of an appeal against a final closure decision. This document seeks to show that none of the Outreach services suggested would meet the needs of this village, and forms the basis for a “further review” (as outlined in the MoU between Post Office Ltd and Postwatch). It has to be noted that no detailed Outreach proposals have been formally made by Post Office Ltd, only those given verbally to the sub-postmaster.

5. CRITERIA USED TO DETERMINE CLOSURE

- 5.1 This is an area of some concern, in that there has been no clear information as to exactly what criteria have been used in arriving at the closure decision. Even at our meeting on 5 November you seemed unable to clarify the situation. In addition, Post Office Ltd and Postwatch have been unwilling, or maybe unable, to release the data used, for each criterion considered. Therefore, we have used all the information available to us, including the December 2006 National Consultation Document, and the 2007 Memorandum of Understanding between Post Office Ltd. and Postwatch, to determine the major criteria which appear to have been used.

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5.2 According to the 2006 National Consultation Document they are:-

- accessibility. The document lays down the minimum access requirements for post office services;
- over-provision and non-viable branches. The document states: “rationalisation will principally affect a combination of least-used branches and non-commercial branches in areas of over-provision where people can find alternative branches nearby”, and
- the willingness of sub-postmasters to leave the network.

5.3 From our meeting with you on 5 November it appears that you have interpreted the first criterion basically in accordance with the National Consultation Document, but your use of the detailed criteria is open to scrutiny. Your interpretation of the second criterion appears to be:-

- weekly total of post office customers;
- cost to Post Office Ltd; and
- size of business (of which you gave no clear definition of the meaning).

The third criterion which appears in the National Consultation Document seems to have been ignored. Additionally, the Rippingale sub-postmaster states that he was told, during PO Ltd’s pre-announcement visit, that another factor was potential housing development.

5.4 It can be seen that there is utter confusion as to the exact criteria used. At our meeting you and your colleague appeared vague on this issue. This is certainly contrary to the intention of the National Consultation Document.

5.5 In the following paragraphs we will examine each of these areas in order to challenge the closure decision and the Outreach proposals. It has to be stressed that Post Office Ltd has refused to produce the detailed data used to make the decision, so FORPO has been forced to collect its own data on which to base its challenge.

6. ISSUES ARISING FROM AND CHALLENGE TO CLOSURE PROPOSALS

6.1 “Consultation” Exercises

6.1.1 The word “consultation” is in inverted commas to highlight our view that the process has been a sham, designed to support decisions already made. The residents of Rippingale and adjacent villages have serious concerns, verging on anger, at the way in which the so-called consultations have been carried out. It appears that the system has been manipulated in order to arrive at a pre-determined conclusion. The reluctance to produce data, highlighted in paragraph 5, only goes to support our views. We accept that you have now assured us that the final decision on closure has not been made, and that our representations will be considered before a decision is reached. However, the impression given by your consultation publications, and actions taken at meetings with the sub-postmaster, demonstrates an appalling lack of awareness and sensitivity on behalf of the consultation team.

6.1.2 The poster stating the proposed changes to Rippingale post office, states that the closure is the result of the completion of a national public consultation exercise. We have found no evidence of anyone in this area, at any level, being consulted on the potential consequences of closure of Rippingale Post Office. It appears that the so-called consultation was based purely on the Government policy, and the acceptance of that

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policy by organisations which considered it on a countrywide basis. The overall closure plan has not been put out for public consultation.

- 6.1.3 For the current stage of the consultation process the publications, and the actions of your team, gave the impression that the closure decision has been made, and that we are merely asked to state our preference for an Outreach system. We are now satisfied with your undertaking for a reconsideration of the closure, but we are concerned at being asked to choose an outreach system when:-

there has been no consultation as to the adequacy of any Outreach system for Rippingale and adjacent villages, or as to the consequences of the proposed closure for the community as a whole.

The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between Post Office Ltd and Postwatch clearly indicates that Parish Councils are to be included in the list of consultees, but this appears to be after the final decision has been made. We cannot comprehend why approaches could not have been made to the Parish Council with regard to either the National Consultation Exercise, or the proposed closure, at an early stage. We find this whole process totally unacceptable, hence the production of this document, supported by the clear anger displayed by residents in their protests through the media.

- 6.1.4 Three particular actions of Post office Ltd., with particular reference to Rippingale, confirm our view of the cynical way in which the consultation has been carried out:

- Post Office Ltd made it clear when meeting with the sub-postmaster in August that they had already made their decision over one month before the so-called public consultation was due to start. You (Mark Partington) reinforced this decision when you visited the store about two weeks later. Post Office Ltd. also made it clear that the decision was for compulsory closure with no appeal.
- Post Office Ltd informed the sub-postmaster that the consultation exercise was solely to determine which type of Outreach service was preferred, not to discuss closure of the branch.
- The above actions were emphasised by introducing him to potential Outreach partners in September, indicating the real aim of putting pressure on sub-postmasters to maintain services but slash their income by 90%.

- 6.1.5 The clumsy and incompetent way in which this exercise has been carried out is illustrated by the fact that the closure notices given to villagers says that Folkingham PO would be our next nearest PO. However, Folkingham is also marked for closure and Rippingale is given as their next nearest PO. Such a basic error provides an indication of the degree of care taken over the preparation and use of data in the closure plan.

6.2 Data Used to Support Closure

- 6.2.1 We have already stated (paragraph 5.1) that Post Office Ltd has refused to provide the turnover and cost data on which the closure decision was based. Our information leads us to believe that such data was based on a period when the shop and post office changed ownership and underwent complete refurbishment. Paragraph 3 has dealt with this situation in some detail, but it has to be emphasised that the turnover of the shop has increased dramatically since refurbishment and the change to the current owner. The

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turnover now averages £6500 per week, with the number of customer visits averaging 1700. It is estimated that more than half these customers use the post office services, giving an estimated number of post office customers of more than 800 per week.

- 6.2.2 We are concerned at the state of confusion even as to the trading period used by PO Ltd to make their decision. The network change advisors state that the figures used are from April 06 to April 07 but you (Mark Partington) told the sub-postmaster that the figures included May-July 07. This, again, casts doubt on the competence of the whole exercise. At our meeting on 5 November you then told us that the period used was the single month of May 2007 (being the month before the current owner took over the business). This merely adds to our concern as to the competence with which this whole exercise has been carried out. However, we accepted your assurance, at that meeting, that a more recent trading period would be examined.
- 6.2.3 The current trading pattern is in no way indicative of a post office serving a small, remote community. It ridicules the Post Office's figure, given verbally to the postmaster, that he had less than 400 customers per week. The figures also fail to recognise that there are about 30 businesses in the area which regularly use Rippingale post office, and also fail to take into account the number of transactions undertaken, rather than the number of customers. It seems irresponsible to close a business that is clearly on the increase, and already surpasses PO Ltd's own data by a significant margin. It appears that Post Office Ltd has no real interest in growth and solutions to future profitability.

6.3 Accessibility

6.3.1 Geography

- 6.3.1.1 The table in paragraph 2.3.1 gives the distance involved between villages and the nearest town of Bourne. The location of the nearest full-time post offices, under the current proposal would be Morton (3.2 miles), Billingborough (5 miles) and Bourne 5.5 miles. These are the options which would be open to residents of Rippingale needing services not provided by the Outreach system, or at times when Outreach is not available. (see para 6.4 re the inadequacy of the proposed Outreach service.). All these locations are beyond the 3-mile limit set out in the Government policy document. A recent response to a letter to Postwatch stated the distances are as the crow flies, not post office to post office. This again demonstrates the stupidity of the assessment by Post office Ltd. In no published document is that fact stated, and to use it makes nonsense of assessing accessibility. Who is able to fly directly from one PO to the next – maybe Post Office Ltd managers have some God-given gift that we are not aware of! We note the Government response to an e-petition on the subject which states:-

“Post Office Ltd. will need to take into account local factors affecting ease of access, such as local geography.....”.

- 6.3.1.2 Paragraph 2.4 deals with the population distribution of the affected villages, but it must be stated here that 34% of the residents of Rippingale are retired and many cannot drive. The road to the nearest PO in Morton is one of the most dangerous roads in Lincolnshire, with narrow verges and no pavements for the whole distance into Morton village. Such a walk is not possible for anyone, let alone senior citizens. There is no useable bus service (see paragraph 6.3.2) and there are no suitable cross-country footpaths. The impracticality of this journey was highlighted by the protest march to Morton by 100 residents (see paragraph 7.6)

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6.3.2 Public Transport

6.3.2.1 The table at 2.5.1 details the bus services available to the village. It can be seen from that table and the timetables enclosed that the services are totally unusable as access to alternative PO services. Even with an improved service, the cost of fares to the places listed would be beyond the reach of those requiring the service. With the high percentage of senior citizens and people with limited mobility, the proposed PO services would be an unmitigated disaster, giving them problems which are totally unacceptable and unnecessary. We cannot imagine that the Government ever envisaged a village of the size of Rippingale being placed in such an impractical situation.

6.4 **Use of an Outreach System**

6.4.1 It appears that we cannot appeal against a final decision to close Rippingale post office, but we are now assured that the proposal will be reconsidered in the light of this document, and it may be subject to “further review”. Therefore, we need to consider which type of Outreach Service would best suit Rippingale. The answer is simple – NONE.

6.4.2 13 Hours of Outreach Service

6.4.2.1 This proposal is nonsense, the time allocated, in itself, being totally inadequate for the needs of Rippingale. This is a total of 780 minutes to serve over 800 customers (our minimum figure). Assuming that they all come in perfect order, that means serving one customer per minute. Even using PO Ltd’s own figures of 400 customers that would mean one customer every two minutes. This means that:-

- queues would be the norm;
- many customers would not be able to get the service they require at the time it is needed; and
- businesses would certainly not be prepared to endure the inconvenience of such a service, and be forced to increase their cost and time consumed in using other post offices.

6.4.3 Services provided by Outreach

6.4.3.1 We are asked to state which service will satisfy the needs of Rippingale, but nowhere is there any detail of the actual postal services available. Even at our meeting on 5 November, you were unable to give us the necessary details. We understand, from the Post office Ltd. website, that the Mobile and Hosted systems will provide “core” services whilst the Partner and Home systems will provide reduced services. We have had no information as to what “core” and “reduced” actually means. Does “core” include all the services currently provided? Any reduction in services would be totally unacceptable, so that immediately rules out the Partner and Home systems. Even if we were to consider a Partner system, the only possible location would be the Bull Inn, where the owner has categorically stated that she has no interest in setting up such an operation.

6.4.3.2 This leaves the Mobile and Hosted systems providing “core” services. Even if these provide the current services in full, they are unacceptable for the reasons stated in 6.4.2. The Mobile service is also unsuitable for the many residents of the village. Any queuing could involve people waiting outside the unit in inclement weather, which is

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unacceptable, particularly for the older residents. Mobile units are notoriously unreliable on timing, and delays could increase the likelihood of customers waiting in the open. We would certainly not be in favour of such a system. However, we understand, from our meeting with you, that this service is now to be withdrawn.

6.4.3.3 From the approaches already made to the sub-postmaster, it appears Post Office Ltd. would prefer that the current shop should host the reduced service. What is proposed is an insult to the current owner, in that he is being asked to provide the service, or having someone else provide it in his shop, whilst being paid a pittance for the privilege. This seems to be expecting him to provide the service almost on a voluntary basis, and is rejected outright.

6.4.3.4 The provision of a Hosted service in other village locations is also unacceptable. The only possible location would be the village hall, and this is unsuitable for the following reasons:-

- The design of the hall is such that there is nowhere suitable to carry out such an operation without great disruption to other hall activities.
- To provide 13 hours of service would involve the heating and lighting being provided for 15/ 20 hours per week, almost doubling the heating costs of the hall.
- To open the hall for the times needed would involve extra staff costs, and it has to be born in mind that the costs of running the hall are found totally from voluntary fund raising.
- It would be impossible to provide adequate security, both within the building and in transit, and the residents would certainly oppose any permanent alterations to the hall.

We do not consider that the village residents or its businesses should be expected to subsidise the Post Office in providing services that are already funded from taxation.

6.4.3.5 We have provided sample profiles (at enclosure 4) of various residents demonstrating the effect the proposals will have on them.

6.4.4 Therefore it remains only to reiterate that the residents of Rippingale and adjacent villages find the Outreach proposals totally inadequate for a community of this size and reject them completely.

6.5 Effect on Village Shop

6.5.1 A major concern for the residents of Rippingale is the knock-on effect of the PO closure on the village shop. We have already touched on this in paragraph 3.3. However, this is a major issue which has not even been considered by Post Office Ltd. The inadequate service to be provided by Outreach will inevitably result in those residents who can drive visiting the Post Office in Bourne or other neighbouring towns, increasing the tendency to carry out other shopping at the same time. The ultimate effect will be the lack of viability of the village shop. Such a loss will have a dire effect on a community with such a large proportion of retired residents. At our meeting on 5 November you admitted that closure produced a 60% migration to other offices. Therefore, it is not unreasonable

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to expect similar migration of business from the shop which, simply, could not survive such a loss.

6.5.2 In its Summary of Government Proposals (part of the national consultation document), the DTI states that “.....Post Office Ltd will implement this process.....giving priority to protecting vulnerable communities in villages”. We have seen no evidence of any intention to implement this policy as regards Rippingale. Age Concern has expressed its fears to the Government that ill-thought-out closures could leave vulnerable people even more isolated and struggling to access essential services. Closure of the shop would certainly create such a situation in Rippingale, with dire consequences for its old people and those without transport.

6.5.3 The village shop and post office forms the focal point of the community, especially for the old and those with no transport. The proposals being made would destroy what has been built up, particularly over the past two years, and change the very way of life of the village community. We are sure that this was not the intention behind the Government’s policy.

6.6 Decision as to which PO’s to Close

6.6.1 We question strongly the decision to close Rippingale post office as against other post offices in the area. Using the PO Ltd. criteria (as far as we have been able to establish them) we cannot understand the decisions reached. However, we were concerned to learn, at our meeting with you, of the method used to consider the criteria. You informed us that this involved the use of points allocated for each criterion, without any weightings being used or even considered. This failing clearly demonstrates why the social consequences of the proposals have been virtually ignored, and casts serious doubts on the competency of the whole exercise.

6.6.2 The way that the points system has been used is highlighted by the fact that Pointon post office is to remain open. On the basis of accessibility, we question as to why Pointon Post Office is remaining when only 1.5 miles from the Billingborough PO. Pointon has a population of less than 500 people with far fewer businesses than Rippingale and easier access to shops in Billingborough. For Pointon to remain at the expense of Rippingale makes no sense whatsoever, and is totally unacceptable to the residents of Rippingale. At our meeting on 5 November you stated that Pointon will survive because it costs you virtually nothing, thus making the point that cost (and not efficiency or accessibility) overrides all other considerations.

6.6.3 A similar argument can be made regarding Morton Post office. It is accepted that Morton is a larger village covering a wider area than Rippingale, and probably meets the turnover criteria set by PO Ltd. However, Morton is only 2 miles from Bourne with an hourly bus service, and a road with a footpath. The effect of closure, or the provision of an Outreach service, for Morton, would have nothing like the effect on that community, than it will on Rippingale.

6.6.4 The DTI National Consultation Document, Section 2, paragraph 2.8 states that the 800 smallest post offices serve just 16 people per week and 1600 branches serve less than 20 customer per day. It also states that more than half the network serves less than 500 customers each week. Surely, the Government target can be met without closing a branch which clearly now exceeds 500 customers per week. In addition the following statement can be found in paragraph 5.10 of the document:-

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“Wherever possible we expect them to match closures with offices where the subpostmaster has indicated his or her willingness to retire from, or leave, the business.”

We have seen no evidence in the plan of this taking priority. In fact, you admitted, at our meeting, that those policies had not been followed. Therefore, the terms of the DTI National Consultation Document have not been met and Post office Ltd appears to have created the closure plan with flagrant disregard to that document.

6.7 Effect on Senior Citizens and Non- Drivers

6.7.1 Paragraph 2.4 describes the population distribution in Rippingale and clearly shows the problem that Rippingale has with the mobility of its residents. With a much older than average population (34% retired) and a large number of residents with mobility problems the effect of changing to Outreach services and the likelihood of losing the shop become obvious. The whole question of sustainability of the village comes into question. A similar situation, but not as severe exists in the adjacent villages.

6.7.2 The village also has a large number of non-drivers (not quantifiable) who rely greatly on the village shop and Post office for day to day necessities. This includes many families where the wage-earner is away all day and those left at home have no means of transport. The loss of the Post office and shop would create an almost impossible situation. It may be asked as to why such families would live in a village in the first place. However, it has to be remembered that many came to a village with a school, shop, and Post office, but the situation is changing quickly, and without any consideration for such residents.

6.8 Future Development of the Village

6.8.1 In planning terms Rippingale is one of 15 villages classed as “sustainable” and as such is open for consideration for further housing development. We have already mentioned, in paragraph 2.4, that there is a proposal for the building of 140 houses. Should the village lose the post office and shop, the village will no longer fall into the sustainable category, and there will be no further major development.

6.9 Effect on the Environment

6.9.1 The inevitable increase in the use of cars, as a result of these proposals will greatly increase the carbon footprint of those involved. If such an increase is reflected around the whole country the effect on the environment will be substantial, and contrary to Government environmental policy.

7. SUPPORT FOR THE CAMPAIGN

7.1 We think that the media coverage of our campaign to save our Post Office has been sufficient for you to appreciate the support we have. However, we consider it beneficial to list and describe the support in the following paragraphs.

7.2 Local Petition

We have received fantastic support, not only from local residents but also from people from other surrounding villages. The enclosed petition (Enclosure 1) contains over 1100 signatures which represents a very high percentage of people living in the Rippingale and the affected adjacent villages.

7.3 E- Petition

Our petition on the Government web-site now contains over 700 signatures and continues to grow. A copy of the petition and its list of signatories is at Enclosure 2.

7.4 Local Political and Council Support

7.4.1 Our local MP, Quentin Davies, has supported us throughout the campaign and has earmarked Rippingale as one of the only three closure campaigns that he is willing to support. He addressed a public meeting in the village of 250 residents at the start of the campaign . He supported us vigorously at the meeting on 5 November. A copy of his letters to Post Office Ltd and some village residents are at enclosure 5.1 .

7.4.2 Nick Boles, the newly-appointed Conservative candidate for this area, also gave his support at the public meeting, and joined us on the protest march to Morton. He has written a strongly worded letter to Post Office Ltd., a copy of which is at enclosure 5.3.

7.4.3 Councillor Hill, Leader of Lincolnshire County Council, has given vigorous support to our campaign and also joined our public meeting and protest march. He also gave strong support at our meeting on 5 November. A letter of support is at enclosure 5.2

7.4.4 Peter Morris of the Liberal Democrats has demonstrated his support by the letter at enclosure 5.4

7.5 Media Coverage

7.5.1 We have attracted extensive television and newspaper coverage over the campaign so far, demonstrating the widespread interest in our plight. Examples of the press coverage are given at enclosure 6.

7.6 Protest March

7.6.1 This has so far been the event which has really demonstrated the strength of feeling against the Post Office proposals. The March was not just to show the impossibility of walking to the next nearest Post office in Morton, but to demonstrate just how strongly people of all ages felt about the potential closure. It was supported by 100 residents including many pensioners, ladies with children in push chairs, and people with limited mobility on electric scooters. This was all on a weekday when many others were at work and, therefore, were unable to join the 3-mile march.

8. CONCLUSION

8.1 In this document we have laid out our case against the Post Office Ltd proposals for Rippingale and the adjacent villages. We have tried to make a case which we consider is just and fair to the residents of those villages. We can understand that Post Office Ltd. is bound by Government policy and must implement that policy in a way that satisfies the commercial and financial needs of its organisation and that of the Government.

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8.2 However, a Government's prime responsibility is to its citizens, not only in respect of financial prudence but also in respect of their welfare. We consider that Post Office Ltd, acting on behalf of the Government, has not fulfilled that welfare requirement by:-

- failing to carry out an adequate national consultation exercise at a level which would have revealed the welfare problems of rural communities at an early stage, and before a closure plan was evolved;
- carrying out a local consultation exercise which provides insufficient and misleading information to those involved, and also provides inadequate time for proper submissions;
- failing to use an assessment system which would give the required weight to the social consequences, resulting in a lack of appreciation of the catastrophic effect many closures will have on rural communities, particularly with regard to the old and infirm;
- failing to apply its own criteria for closure, particularly in respect of geography and accessibility; and
- failing to comply with the National Consultation Document with regard to voluntary closures, and the closure of small, part-time offices.

8.3 Post Office Ltd has also failed in its responsibility for financial prudence by:-

- spending millions on extravagant television advertising (showing total insensitivity by screening such adverts at a time of severe public anger at the closure programme);
- paying extortionate fees to consultants to carry out the closure programme; and
- paying a bonus to the Director General which would have kept Rippingale Post office open for the next 40 years.

8.4 The situation being created in Rippingale has arisen because of the above failures by Post Office Ltd., which has been recognised by many influential supporters of our campaign. Therefore, we ask on behalf of the residents of Rippingale and adjacent villages for a complete review of our situation and a reconsideration of the closure proposal.