

Post Office Network Change Programme
Area Plan Proposal Cambridgeshire, Hertfordshire,
Bedfordshire and South Lincolnshire

Formal consultation response on behalf of
Impington Parish Council

Mrs A J Young
Clerk to the Council
Parish Office
New Road
Impington
Cambridge
CB24 9LU

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Impington Post Office: serving local business and the community

Summary

Impington Parish Council supports the continued operation of Impington Post Office.

It recognises that the Post Office must go through a process of review to determine which post offices are viable and should continue to be supported and that this necessarily must be a standard process in which specific local conditions cannot be addressed. However now that it is in the consultation phase it believes that the specifics of individual post offices should be considered.

The Parish Council believes that Impington Post Office should not be closed despite this being the conclusion of Post Office's review. It believes that by its nature this review could not take into account important local conditions. These are:

- The other local post office at Histon which has been identified does not have sufficient capacity to take on the business which would transfer from Impington;
- There are problems related to disabled access to Histon Post Office;
- Impington Post Office provides a significant service to local businesses which would be lost to the Post Office if this post office were to close; and
- This community is active, thriving and growing. Impington Post Office can expect to see its business increase in the coming years.

It is clear that closing Impington Post Office will be damaging to the community, businesses and people of Impington and to the overall business of the Post Office.

Impington Parish Council strongly urges the Post Office to carefully consider local conditions as explained below and to reverse its recommendation to close the post office in Impington.

Note that many of the businesses and local residents below are in fact in Histon but they are closer to and users of Impington Post Office. For this reason Histon Parish Council fully supports this submission.

Four points for the Post Office to consider

1 There is inadequate alternative provision

The main (and only convenient) alternative provision for the current Impington Post Office customer base is Histon Post Office. The other alternatives suggested by the Post Office are not realistic being separated from Impington by the A14 and being sufficiently distant as to need an extra journey, probably by car.

Histon Post Office is a popular and well run local facility. However it is limited both by its size and its location.

On paper Histon Post Office is larger than the one in Impington. It has 3 serving positions compared to 2 at Impington. However the 3rd serving position is not currently in use and to bring it into use would require a rearrangement of the retail space in the post office with a knock-on effect on trade.

Histon Post Office is busy and there are often queues which can reach back and obstruct access through the main door. Without a 3rd serving position it could not

handle the extra traffic. However with a 3rd serving position it would lose retail space. Furthermore many customers use Impington Post Office today simply because Histon is too busy.

2 There is inadequate alternative accessibility

Impington PO has parking immediately outside and clear and easy disabled access. Histon PO has a disabled ramp but no parking outside. There is limited parking 'near by'.

There is parking by The Green which is about 60m distant. There is a road, albeit minor, to cross; the pavement is narrow and currently in a poor state of repair.

There are 2 spaces across the High Street which are closer but there is no controlled crossing. There is such a crossing down the High Street which would involve a round trip of over 100m.

Both the parking at The Green and the parking across High Street are heavily used both by local shoppers and also by parents with children at the nearby Junior School.

Histon Post Office is located at a busy and constrained junction and the route to it from Impington Post Office uses Station Road, a busy 'rat run' with poor pedestrian provision. A recent survey by the County Council in connection with the Safer Routes to School initiative was critical of both Station Road and of its junction with the High Street where Histon Post Office is located. The pathways for pedestrians and wheelchair and electric mobility scooter users have challenges and significant difficulties; many elderly residents tell us they consider them unsafe and will not use them.

Although there is a ramp for access to Histon Post Office and an automatic door it is often busy and queues in the post office can block access and leaving wheel chair users in a dangerous situation. Once inside floor space is constrained and wheelchair use is difficult if not impossible.

Note that there are one existing and two new sheltered housing development in Histon which are close to and easily served by Impington Post Office. Residents of these developments will find use of Histon Post Office to be a challenge by comparison with Impington Post Office.

There is no direct public transport between Histon and Impington Post Offices. There is a connecting bus service but this takes a circuitous route through the villages and does not provide a convenient alternative for an Impington resident who would otherwise use Impington Post Office.

3 Use by local businesses has not been appreciated

Most local businesses (with the very few exceptions where national policy constrains them in replying) have supported our request to support the campaign for maintenance of the facility that they use.

Impington Post Office has parking outside and is used by businesses on the local business park as a focus for their postal services both for counter business, which the Post Office has recognised in its analysis, and for franked mail drop off, which it has not. Even those businesses which have direct collection of post use Impington Post Office as a nearby contingency arrangement should the collection van be late or should they have mail after the collection van has visited.

The post master estimates that one third of Impington Post Office's counter business is business related. This can be expected to be high value meaning that a significantly higher proportion of its turnover is business related. Such business would not simply move to another post office. It might simply move to another provider.

Furthermore over four hundred people are employed in these nearby offices in above average remuneration positions. These people use the post office for their personal business and the post master opens throughout the day, the previous post master closed at lunch times, to respond to this demand.

Histon Post Office, without convenient parking and being much further away, is not considered adequate and many businesses tell us (and via the survey petition forms from these businesses they tell the Post Office) that they would switch postal supplier if Impington Post Office were to close. Furthermore local employers need to attract staff and the availability of a post office within walking distance is significant in this regard. There is no other facility (bank etc.) within walking distance of these offices for cash services: if they had to drive the business would be with local banks with their own car parks, again reducing overall business for Post Office Ltd.

4 There has been insufficient thought about the future

The case for closure is based on historic data, data that may only reflect the business to Post Office Counters Limited and not the Post Office overall. And this data cannot reflect the recent improving trend under the current post master's management and the prospects for further substantial growth.

Within a year the Cambridge Guided Busway will be open with the Histon and Impington Bus stop close to the Impington Post Office. It is anticipated that many of the current employees on the site who currently travel to work by car will change to using the Guided Bus. These people will walk by the post office to and from work and, not being in their cars, will be far more likely to use the facilities they pass.

Furthermore it is anticipated that Cambridgeshire County Council will implement some form of congestion charging in Cambridge. Histon and Impington fall outside the expected charging zone; this will provide more incentive for businesses to move (one such has already moved, quoting this as a reason) to and to increase their business activities in Histon and Impington

Employees of businesses close to Impington Post Office are no different to employees elsewhere many can be expected to be operating 'ebay businesses' to supplement their income. These people post their parcels at Impington Post Office even if they have bought the postage on-line. With the recent trend in economic conditions, and with colleagues seeing the opportunity, these new businesses will grow. Having a local post office to which they can walk from their offices is a key enabler for starting such businesses; closing the post office would reduce the numbers doing so and again damage the Post Office's total business even if the business transactions are not credited to the local post office because of the way that the Post Office and Post Office Counters run their accounts.

Impington is designated as a Rural Centre in the Local Development Framework of South Cambridgeshire District Council, approved by HM Government. In such centres development, residential and commercial, is not constrained. With the desperate need for housing and employment opportunities in the Cambridge sub

region, it is clear that significant expansion in both will occur in the natural catchment area of the Impington Post Office.

Impington Post Office must be considered in the future context: no one drives a car by only looking in the rear view mirror, and in the same way business decisions need to be based in the future, not solely the past.

It is clear that Impington Post Office's existence is a business generator for other parts of the Post Office's businesses. In the same way as the Beeching closure of branch lines significantly reduced the traffic and viability of the remaining lines, so does closure of the sub post offices. Because of its proximity to a business park this is particularly true (much more so than for a typical village post office) for Impington Post Office. There is no evidence of this being considered in the proposal to close Impington Post Office.

Local political and community support

All local councillors (Parish, District and County) and the local MP oppose the closing of Impington Post Office. Naturally they have serious concerns about the impact on the community, but also all believe that this closure is not in the best interests of the Post Office. It is clear to them that the impact of closure will remove, permanently, business from other parts of the Post Office, and also will not enable Post Office Limited and Post Office Counters Limited to benefit from the clearly foreseeable future increase in business through the Impington Post Office.

Local people and businesses have been quick to register their support for Impington Post Office. Well over 1000 people have signed petitions including over 200 from local businesses. 36 businesses have explicitly signed letters of support.

We strongly urge that the closure threat is completely removed. A two year stay of execution will enable the future potential to be evaluated and demonstrated.

National Audit Office

The National Audit Office is currently undertaking a Value for Money study in which it is looking at the Post Office closure program. It is aiming to complete this study and to report its findings in the Spring of 2009. It would appear appropriate for the Post Office to delay any intended closures, including that of Impington Post Office, until that report is published.

Call to action

Impington Parish Council (together with Histon Parish Council) stands ready to support the Post Office to review the responses to its consultation about the proposed closure of Impington Post Office. It will provide resource to gather data if this is needed.

It recognises that the Post Office has tough decisions to make but wants to see these decisions, and especially the one about Impington Post Office, based on a full appreciation of local conditions, social, demographic and economic. It trusts that the Post Office will proceed with such a final evaluation and looks forward to seeing the results of it.

Should the closure proceed

The community, and its elected representatives, do not support the closure of

Impington Post Office. However, should this proceed, we ask that:

- the third serving position at Histon Post Office is brought into operation;
- improvements are made to facilitate access by wheelchair and mobility scooter users; and
- provision is considered for a partner service either at the existing Post Office or at some other location close by.