

**Objection to the Proposed
Closure of Clermiston
Post Office, Parkgrove Street,
Edinburgh.**

From



John Barrett
Member of Parliament for Edinburgh West



Margaret Smith
**Member of Scottish Parliament for Edinburgh
West**



Robert Aldridge
Edinburgh City Councillor for East Craigs ward.

1. Introduction

On 22nd July 2004, Post Office Ltd announced their proposal to close 20 post offices in Edinburgh. This list included the Clermiston branch on Parkgrove Street. This post office is located within the Edinburgh West parliamentary constituency and close to the East Craigs council ward. As a result, we represent the vast majority of the people who use and depend on this post office.

We object to the closure of Clermiston Post Office and were genuinely surprised when it was published as part of the list of proposed closures. We believe there are many local circumstances which mean this branch should remain open.

We wish to state from the outset our belief that this entire Network Reinvention process is flawed at the most basic of levels. It is clear that Post Office Ltd have not conducted the promised review of the entire post office network in Edinburgh. We agree with the concerns expressed by Postwatch Scotland over the fact Post Office Ltd have only chosen branches for closure from those where the sub-postmaster has signalled their wish to leave the network and receive the compensation package. Whilst we recognise the difficulty involved with compulsory closures, we do not believe it possible for Post Office Ltd to have conducted the promised strategic review of post office provision in Edinburgh when they have stuck rigidly to this narrow policy.

Furthermore, we note the recent concerns raised by the House of Commons Trade & Industry Select Committee in their recent report on Urban Network Reinvention. We particularly concur with their conclusion in Paragraph 54 of their Report, which says -

“Overall, we are concerned that Post Office Ltd has approached the formulation of Area Plans as drawing up lists of proposed closures for particular areas and actions to be taken in respect of migration of customers to remaining branches. This is a very restricted view of a programme called Network Reinvention. We are disappointed that Post Office Ltd has not used the Area Plan process to publish positive proposals to create a sustainable local post office network in different areas, with proposed closures being only one, albeit important, part of the plan, and has not sought to involve local communities pro-actively in drawing up the plan. We do not believe this is in keeping with the spirit of assurances either given to the Committee by Post Office Ltd in the summer of 2003 or those given by Ministers in response to Parliamentary Questions in the Autumn of last year.”

We believe the Select Committee's concerns are validated by what has been presented for Edinburgh. Rather than producing a package of measures to create a sustainable post office network for the City, only a package of post office has been put forward. The improvements at receiving branches, where improvements are even planned, fail to respond adequately to the stress of closing nearby post office branches. Our concern is strengthened by the additional Select Committee conclusion in Paragraph 63 of their report, which states -

“the allocation of investment grants and the subsequent upgrades to receiving post offices has not kept pace with post office closures”

We also believe the improvements presented at receiving branches completely fail to create the sustainable post office network that we all wish to see.

On this basis alone, we believe Post Office Ltd should withdraw their Urban Network Reinvention plans for Edinburgh as quickly as possible, so that a full strategic review, involving relevant stakeholders, can be conducted and a complete package for a sustainable post office network presented for consultation.

2. Clermiston Post Office – Customer base and Surrounding Community

Clermiston Post Office is geographically sited in the centre of the Parkgrove community and sits opposite Clermiston Primary School on Parkgrove Street.

The post office serves both the Parkgrove and Clermiston communities, as well as some residents from Barnton Park. The vast majority of Parkgrove and Clermiston is current or former council housing. There are a considerable number of elderly people in these communities, including an old people’s home on Parkgrove Terrace, which houses 40 senior citizens. There is also a considerable number of young and middle aged people on low incomes and in receipt of state benefits. All of these people depend enormously on the Clermiston post office branch. Many of them have told us they will find it difficult to travel further a field.

Since the announcement by Post Office Ltd of its proposal to close the Clermiston branch, we have been inundated with letters, e-mails and telephone messages from people concerned about the impact on them personally and the overall community.

We believe Clermiston and Parkgrove is just the kind of community that needs and deserves its own post office. Clermiston is this year celebrating its 50 year anniversary and we find it unfortunate that during this important event and at a time of celebration, the community faces the loss of such a key service.

The post office is currently part of a series of units that make up a small, but important shopping esplanade on Parkgrove Street. This includes a hairdresser, a newsagent and a pharmacy. These shops are a vital resource for local people. There is direct on street parking, which is particularly useful for those people dependant on the car for transportation. The position of the shops is also useful for parents dropping or collecting their young children from the primary school opposite.

We are deeply concerned about the knock on effects of closing Clermiston Post Office and forcing residents to take their custom further a field. Many of

the neighbouring shop/outlet managers are rightly worried that the closure of Clermiston Post Office will reduce their passing and regular customer base and could risk the viability of their businesses.

We believe that the closure of Clermiston Post Office would, in itself, have a considerable negative effect on the local community. However, closing this branch could set off a chain reaction of shop/outlet closures on Parkgrove Street. Such a turn of events for this community would be disastrous.

3. Public Meeting 30th August 2004

Following the announcement by Post Office Ltd of its proposal to close the Clermiston branch, John Barrett MP organised a public meeting on 30th August 2004 at Clermiston Primary School. This was chaired by Margaret Smith MSP and was to allow local residents to get more information and ask questions. We are grateful to Andy Bayfield and Graham Laird from Post Office Ltd for attending this meeting, making a presentation and answering questions from the floor.

Approximately 100 local residents attended this meeting. It was particularly interesting to hear from a number of residents who said it had been the first time they had felt so strongly about an issue to come along to a public meeting.

From the contributions from residents at the meeting, the representatives from Post Office Ltd should have been left in no doubt as to deep concern in the area over the threatened closure of the Clermiston branch. Many of the points made at that meeting have been included in this submission although we recognise that a considerable number of residents have made formal objections in their own right.

4. Receiving Branches

Three receiving branches have been put forward as alternatives to the Clermiston branch. These are Barnton, Duart Crescent and Corstorphine, with reasoning supplied in a supporting document presented to us.

We do not believe that any of these branches are realistic alternatives and were surprised to learn that Post Office Ltd came to the opposite conclusion, despite staff having investigated the geography of the local area and the public transport available.

Barnton (1st receiving branch).

We have no doubt that someone unfamiliar with West Edinburgh and looking at a map would see little problem with residents in Clermiston and Parkgrove

being expected to use Barnton Post Office. However, in reality, the journey between the Clermiston and Barnton branches is far from straightforward.

We recognise that many of our constituents are, for reasons of disability, unable to use public transport. This is why the current location of Clermiston Post Office is so useful. For these people, the only way of travelling to the post office is by walking. In the case of Barnton Post Office, this would involve crossing the Queensferry Road, one of, if not the busiest road in West Edinburgh. Traffic, including heavy good vehicles, use this road on an almost 24 hour basis with speeds approaching and in some cases surpassing 60mph. Whilst we appreciate there is a pedestrian crossing, we still also appreciate the deep unease of elderly and disabled people in having to cross a road used by four lanes (and nearer to the Barnton roundabout five or six lanes) worth of traffic.

We recognise the availability of the 41 bus from the junction of Queensferry Road and Parkgrove Street to Whitehouse Road. However, this would still involve the crossing of Whitehouse Road to get to Barnton Post Office, which is also an extremely busy road.

Whether residents are walking along the road or waiting for the bus, we are very concerned about the exposure of our elderly and disabled constituents to the pollution produced by the immense traffic on Queensferry Road. We were surprised that no mention was made of this in the supporting documents.

We acknowledge that the geographical distance between Barnton and Parkgrove is not large. However, the considerable problems in crossing roads with heavy traffic, the danger in walking along pavements beside these roads and the danger to people's health in doing so does not make Barnton Post Office an appropriate receiving branch for Clermiston customers.

Duart Crescent (2nd receiving branch).

We recognise that for those in Clermiston and close to a 26 bus stop, it is easy to travel to Duart Crescent. However, for those closer to Queensferry Road, the only option is much less frequent (half hourly) 32 bus service. We note that on the return journey from Duart Crescent down to Parkgrove would require people to cross Queensferry Road. The concerns raised earlier on this issue are equally applicable here.

Again, because of the number of people who are unable to use public transport, we recognise that the only option for some people is walking. Walking the journey between Parkgrove and Duart Crescent would involve passing over the Drum Brae hill. This is one of the steepest hills in West Edinburgh with a gradient approaching one in seven. Those choosing to walk through the Clermiston Estate would also be faced with very steep hills. This can be a difficult exercise, even for the most able bodied of people. For the elderly and disabled, this is simply impossible.

We must also disagree with the argument in the supporting documents that “no busy roads have to be crossed” for those walking between these branches. For anyone walking from Clermiston or Parkgrove to Duart Crescent, they must cross Drum Brae Drive which is a busy road, used by cars and buses.

Duart Crescent is a small and already very busy post office. Due to the large number of pensioners and benefit recipients located in and around Drum Brae, it is not unusual for Duart Crescent to have customers queuing out of the front door. We were surprising to find that Post Office Ltd believe Duart Crescent has the capacity to take on the custom from Clermiston post office.

We note that Duart Crescent has also been put forward as a receiving branch for the proposed closure of East Craigs Post Office. This compounds our deep concern of the ability of the Duart Crescent branch to act as a receiving branch.

We are disappointed at the list of improvements put forward for Duart Crescent Post office. The supporting documents make mention of the fact a handrail will be installed along with ‘an external bell push’. The documents go on to say that the sub-postmaster will install ‘an improved fascia and lozenge’. Whilst we welcome these improvements, they fall far short of what customers have the right to expect. Post Office Ltd has offered nothing to increase the capacity at Duart Crescent to allow the branch to deal properly with the increased customer base arising from any post office closure at East Craigs and Clermiston.

Because of the difficulty in getting to Duart Crescent, the lack of capacity already evident at this branch and the failure by Post Office Ltd to publish proper proposals to help Duart Crescent increase capacity, we do not believe Duart Crescent Post Office is a realistic receiving branch for Clermiston customers.

Corstorphine Post Office (3rd Receiving Branch)

We are surprised at the inclusion of Corstorphine Post Office as a receiving branch. Firstly, the 32 bus service on Queensferry Road does not go anywhere close to Corstorphine Post Office. Furthermore, although the 26 bus service does connect parts of Clermiston with this branch, such a trip would involve residents passing the front door of the St. John’s Road post office, a branch that is not listed as a receiving branch. We have been told by Graham Laird of Post Office Ltd that the reason for this is the computer modelling package used for the Urban Reinvention Network process.

We are astonished that this obvious error, where Corstorphine Post Office has been included as a receiving branch but not St. John’s Road post office, was not picked up before plans were published. We believe

this is typical of the flawed basis on which the proposal to close Clermiston post office has been presented.

5. “Save Clermiston Post Office” Petition

Attached with this submission is a petition entitled “Save Clermiston Post Office”. This petition states “we the undersigned believe Clermiston Post Office is an important part of the local community and must not be closed”. The petition is signed by 309 individuals.

We note that it is standard practice for Post Office Ltd to count a petition as one formal objection. We believe this practice to be wrong and request that each individual signature be counted as one objection to the closure of Clermiston Post Office.

6. Conclusion

We believe that Clermiston Post Office is an important, and for some people, absolutely vital local service. We would have expected that anyone looking at the make up of the immediate community would come to the instant conclusion that closing this post office will have a considerable negative effect.

We believe Post Office Ltd has failed to properly investigate the area and that this failure is shown by many flawed conclusions in the supporting documents. We disagree profoundly with the conclusions by Post Office Ltd that customers at Clermiston can reasonably be expected to move their custom to branches at Duart Crescent, Barnton and Corstorphine.

This is a community that has, in the last few years, suffered the threat of loss of a number of key services. We are deeply concerned at the potential knock on effects of closing the local post office branch and the requirement for local people to travel outside of their local community for key services. For this reason and the reasons given above, we oppose the proposed closure of Clermiston post office and request that Post Office Ltd withdraw the proposal as soon as possible.

John Barrett MP
Member of Parliament for Edinburgh West

Margaret Smith MSP

Member of the Scottish Parliament for Edinburgh West

Councillor Robert Aldridge
Edinburgh City Councillor for East Craigs Ward.

