

**Objection to the Proposed
Closure of East Craigs
Post Office, Bughtlin Market,
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 East Craigs branch on Boughtlin Market. This post office is located within the East Craigs ward and Edinburgh West parliamentary constituency. 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 East Craigs Post Office just as we did when the branch was last put forward for closure in 2000. We are surprised and dismayed that in such a short period of time, Post Office Ltd, despite being convinced of the merits of keeping the branch open four years ago, have chosen to come forward again with a proposal for closure. We believe the arguments put forward to keep the branch open are as valid now as they were then.

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 closures has been put forward. The improvements at receiving branches, where improvements are being 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. East Craigs Post Office – Customer base and Surrounding Community

East Craigs Post Office is located in the main shopping district used by people living not only in East Craigs and Bughtlin but also in northern Craigmount. It forms part of a small shopping precinct which also includes a supermarket, church, a busy doctor's surgery and dental practice, primary school and pharmacy. The post office is therefore an important part of the local and quite distinct community.

In its current location, the post office is usefully placed for people to use whilst going about their other daily or weekly routines and is conveniently situated directly opposite the terminus of the regular 31 bus service. With considerable parking available, it is also very practical for those people dependant on cars for transportation.

There are sets of elderly sheltered accommodation in the immediate area around the post office – Stuart Square and North Bughtlin Place. As a result, there are a considerable number of elderly people, who depend greatly on the East Craigs branch. There is also one set of sheltered accommodation specifically for disabled people on Craigmount Brae. One of the local housing associations provides housing for people with brain injuries in the North Bughtlin area. There are also a large number of local wheelchair users and the current disabled access at East Craigs post office is greatly appreciated.

The East Craigs area also includes a considerable amount of current and former housing association housing. There are many young families and a significant number of young and middle aged people on low incomes and in receipt of state benefits.

This is just the kind of community that needs and deserves it own post office. Since the announcement by Post Office Ltd of its proposal to close the East Craigs 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.

3. Public Meeting 31st August 2004

Following the announcement by Post Office Ltd of its proposal to close the East Craigs branch, John Barrett MP organised a public meeting on 31st August 2004 at the East Craigs Church Centre for local residents to get more information and ask questions. This was chaired by Margaret Smith MSP and attended by Councillor Robert Aldridge. We are grateful to Andy Bayfield and Julie Morrison 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 East Craigs 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 East Craigs branch. These are Duart Crescent, Barnton 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.

Duart Crescent (1st receiving branch).

We note from the Post Office Ltd supporting documents that the supposed walking distance between East Craigs and Duart Crescent post offices is 0.29 miles. However, our own investigations show that the straight line distance between the branches is 0.35 miles. We do not understand how it is possible for people to take a shorter distance than a straight line and believe this is evidence of mistakes by Post Office Ltd in calculating their distances in this consultation and adds further evidence to our claim that these proposals are based on flawed information.

We recognise the acknowledgement by Post Office Ltd that there is no connecting bus route between the East Craigs and Duart Crescent post

offices. East Craigs customers without cars and wishing to use Duart Crescent would therefore have to walk the route between the two branches.

Whilst we realise that the distance between the branches is not large, we believe there are hazards involved in each of the possible routes that could be walked between East Craigs and Duart Crescent. All routes would involve the use of quiet, narrow, pedestrian lanes close to wooded areas. We are deeply concerned about the potential for robbery of those pensioners who have just received their money at the post office and who are travelling back to East Craigs.

Similarly, all routes involve the crossing of Craigmount Avenue North, which is increasingly being used by rat-running traffic and where there is no pedestrian crossing. These issues, combined with the unevenness of some parts of the paths, make it extremely difficult for those post office customers in wheelchairs and motored scooters to travel between the two branches.

The walk also involves the crossing of Drum Brae North, a busy main road and whilst we acknowledge the presence of a pedestrian crossing, we also recognise the deep concern of our elderly and disabled constituents in having to cross this road twice to get their money and return home.

We were surprised at the lack of appreciation from Post Office Ltd as to the difficulty associated with walking between East Craigs and Duart Crescent. We therefore welcome the commitment by Andy Bayfield at the East Craigs public meeting to walk from a point deep in East Craigs to Duart Crescent post office to see first hand the problems involved with this journey. We look forward to hearing him report on the conclusions from this activity.

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 surprised to find that Post Office Ltd believe Duart Crescent has the capacity to take on the custom from East Craigs post office.

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

We note the impossibility of manoeuvring a wheelchair into the Duart Crescent branch, let alone turning it or two wheelchairs passing each other. This would undoubtedly cause problems for those wheelchair bound customers from East Craigs.

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 East Craigs customers.

Barnton Post Office (2nd Receiving Branch)

The supporting documents make mention of the 24 bus service which supposedly connects the East Craigs and Barnton post offices. Anyone from East Craigs wanting to get the 24 bus has to walk, in some cases along roads with no pavements, to a main road completely outside of the East Craigs estate. This is about a half mile walk. Then to get to the bus stop to catch the 24 bus, they must cross the busy Maybury Road, a dual carriageway with traffic travelling over 60 mph, without the availability of **any** pedestrian crossing. Then and only then is it possible to get the half hourly bus service down to Barnton.

We are shocked to find that Post Office Ltd expect non-car users in East Craigs, especially the elderly and disabled, to undertake what is nothing short of a life threatening journey to Barnton post office. We find it extraordinary that this has, in seriousness, been presented to our constituents and believe it brings into question the claim that Post Office Ltd staff investigated the journey between these two branches. We do not believe Barnton post office is a realistic receiving branch for East Craigs.

Corstorphine Post Office (3rd Receiving Branch)

We are surprised at the inclusion of Corstorphine Post Office as a receiving branch. Firstly, there is a considerable distance to this post office, with no on street parking facilities. Whilst the 31 bus service does connect this branch with East Craigs, 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 East Craigs post office has been presented.

5. “Save East Craigs Post Office” Petition

Attached with this submission is a petition entitled “Save East Craigs Post Office”. This petition states “we the undersigned believe East Craigs Post Office is an important part of the local community and must not be closed”. The petition is signed by 397 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 East Craigs Post Office.

6. Conclusion

East Craigs Post Office was successfully saved from closure 4 years ago after a concerted community campaign. We had hoped the decision then by Post Office Ltd to keep the branch open showed their acceptance of the clear need of the community for a local post office branch. The latest proposal by Post Office Ltd to close East Craigs Post Office has therefore caused a great deal of distress and anger to many of our constituents.

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 East Craigs can reasonably be expected to move their custom to branches at Duart Crescent, Barnton and Corstorphine.

We believe that closing the East Craigs post office will have a damaging impact on the local community and many of the most vulnerable people we represent. For this reason and the reasons given above, we oppose the proposed closure of East Craigs 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.

