

**A response to:**

**Network Change Programme  
Middlemore Road Post Office**

**30 July 2008**

**Submission to Post Office Ltd**

by Richard Burden MP, Lynne Jones MP,  
Cllr Randal Brew, Norma Boyd, Barbara Coleman,  
Stan Andrews and Terry McGoewn

This is a response by Richard Burden MP, Lynne Jones MP, Cllr Randal Brew, Norma Boyd, Barbara Coleman, Stan Andrews and Terry McGoewn to Post Office Ltd's public consultation on the Network Change Programme Area Plan Proposal for Birmingham, Coventry and Warwickshire. This response looks specifically at Post Office Ltd's proposal to close Middlemore Road Post Office in Northfield.

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## **Middlemore Road Post Office** **2 Middlemore Road, Northfield, Birmingham, B31 3UP**

### **1 Introduction**

This is a submission by:

- Richard Burden, MP for Northfield;
- Lynne Jones, MP for Selly Oak;
- Councillor Randal Brew, Chair of Northfield Constituency Committee;
- Norma Boyd, Middlemore Road Resident and Chair of Northfield Flood Action Group;
- Barbara Coleman, local resident and member of Northfield Flood Action Group;
- Stan Andrews, resident of Middlemore Sheltered Housing complex and Vice Chair of Area Sheltered Housing Board; and,
- Terry McGeown, sub postmaster at Middlemore Road Post Office.

This submission is made in response to Post Office Ltd's (POL) public consultation on the Network Change Programme Area Plan Proposal for Birmingham, Coventry and Warwickshire.

This response looks specifically at POL's proposal to close Middlemore Road Post Office in Northfield.

We believe that POL should reconsider this proposal to close Middlemore Road Post Office for the following reasons.

### **2 Population served by Middlemore Road Post Office**

In its Branch Access Report, Post Office Ltd (POL) describe the population age profile within 1 mile of Middlemore Road post office as:

Population: 34,457

Population aged 0-15: 21%

Population aged 16-retired: 59%

Population retired: 19%

Households with 1 or more car: 64%

Although this may be an accurate description of the 1 mile radius around the post office, it is only of limited use in describing the customer profile of Middlemore Road and the dependence of those with limited mobility on the post office remaining open.

We have undertaken two surveys over the past month as follows:

1. A postal survey of 1122 residents in Middlemore Road itself, in Wychall Road and in 20 other roads off Wychall Road. 258 questionnaires were returned from this survey.
2. A face to face survey of 413 customers of Middlemore Road Post Office, carried out on six days over a two week period during July 2008.

The results of these surveys are included in Appendices A and B. Some of the key findings include:

- 49% of customers from the deprived Wychall Road area, who previously used the Wychall Road Post Office which was closed by Post Office Ltd during the 2004 Urban Reinvention Programme, switched to Middlemore Road Post Office. A further 11% use both Middlemore Road and The Green Post Office in Kings Norton.
- 24% of these respondents said they use Middlemore Road Post Office for pension or benefit collection.
- 43% of customers using Middlemore Road Post Office during the two week survey period were aged over 60.
- 63% of customers surveyed walked to the Post Office.
- 35% of customers surveyed have a disability.
- 6% arrived by wheelchair / scooter.
- 14% of customers surveyed had brought children with them. 86% of these children were aged under 11.
- 60% of customers surveyed use Middlemore Road Post Office for the Post Office Card Account.
- 49% use the Post Office for other financial services including pensions and benefits paid by means other than POCA.
- 62 % of the customers surveyed use the Post Office on a weekly basis.

It should also be noted that Middlemore Road Post Office is located within 250 metres of the Middlemore Road Sheltered Housing Scheme. This scheme is home to 43 residents, over ten of whom require the aid of a zimmer frame, wheelchair, or other mobility aid.

All of this suggests that the population figures used by POL in its Branch Access Report do not reflect the customer profile of those using Middlemore Road Post Office. It also understates both the vulnerability and limited mobility of many of the customers involved.

### **3 The alternatives suggested by Post Office Ltd**

POL suggests West Heath and Tessall post offices as alternatives for Middlemore Road customers.

- Alternative 1, Tessall, is situated on the opposite side of the A38 dual carriageway and thus within an entirely separate neighbourhood to Middlemore Road.
- Alternative 2 is West Heath, with the nearest bus stop being located on Fairfax Road, which is away from the main Alvechurch Road / West Heath shopping centre and experiences problems with anti social behaviour in the area.

However, the customer survey casts doubt on POL's assumptions about where Middlemore Road customers would go to for post office services if the branch closes.

15% of customers surveyed directly did indeed believe they may go to West Heath as an alternative. However, only 1% thought they would use Tessall. 24% suggested that they would travel to the post office in the centre of Northfield. 55% said they either did not know which alternative post office they could get to or they questioned whether they could in practice travel to any alternative post office in the Northfield area.

### **4 Accessibility, disability and mobility**

In the light of Middlemore Road Post Office's customer profile, the results above are not surprising.

A high percentage of people with mobility problems depend on Middlemore Road Post Office. The main two alternative branches given in the Branch Access Report would present significant challenges to customers with mobility problems:

- Both branches would require pedestrians to negotiate hills and to cross over busy roads.
- West Heath Post Office has a step entrance.
- Disabled access to the buses serving these branches cannot be guaranteed. Indeed, even where some buses are designed to be accessible to people with disabilities, the condition of roads and height of pavements in the area makes such accessibility more theoretical than real.

These problems are graphically highlighted in a DVD, which is supplied with this evidence and shows a real life example of a local resident in a wheelchair trying to get to Tessall Post Office from Middlemore Road and back again.

Although West Heath Post Office is in the opposite direction from Tessall, it still presents significant challenges to people with mobility problems.

In practice, customers are more likely to try to use the main Post Office in Northfield High Street as an alternative to Middlemore Road rather than Tessall. However, getting the bus to the centre of Northfield would present a similar challenge for people with disabilities.

Many of the problems experienced by people with disabilities will also be experienced by parents with children in buggies.

## **5 Queues at Northfield and West Heath**

The migration of significant numbers of customers from Middlemore to Northfield and West Heath would also present significant difficulties beyond the mobility issues mentioned above.

The franchised Northfield Crown Post Office serves the main shopping centre for the entire Northfield area. It already experiences lengthy queues at different times of the day – an issue which Richard Burden MP has already taken up with POL a year or more ago. A major regeneration of the central Northfield shopping area has also commenced following the construction of the Northfield Relief Road. It is likely that this brings with it the potential for greater footfall in the main Northfield Post Office, particularly if the new products being promoted by POL are marketed imaginatively in the area. This will, of course, be welcome. However, the benefits could be undermined if the central Northfield Post Office experiences even lengthier queues arising from the inappropriate closure of local branches under the Network Change programme.

It should be noted that longer queues are also likely to be a problem at West Heath Post Office if Middlemore Road post office closes, particularly if POL also goes ahead with its proposal to close The Green Post Office in Kings Norton. When Redditch Road Post Office closed under the Urban Reinvention programme in 2004, the biggest single concentration of customers living in that area will have migrated to The Green and to West Heath for local post office services. If The Green and Middlemore Road also now close, the problem of queuing at West Heath will only get worse.

The need for POL to consider the impact of queuing on access to post offices in urban areas, rather than simply distance, has been raised by Richard Burden MP both directly with Ministers and in debates in the House of Commons on Network Change. Ministers have confirmed that it is in order for POL to consider the impact of queuing when considering its proposals under Network Change.



## 6 Conclusion

The survey results suggest that Post Office Ltd has not taken full account of the real customer profile of Middlemore Road Post Office, which is not adequately reflected in the population figures being used by POL.

The high proportion of older customers, as well as those using the post office on foot, in wheelchairs or pushing buggies, indicate that Middlemore Road Post Office provides a service to the community that would not be replaced in practice in the event of closure. The alternative branches listed are simply not as accessible as POL hopes and the DVD evidence underlines the reality if a wheelchair user from the Middlemore Road area were to try to get to Tessall Post Office. Problems would also be experienced with journeys to West Heath Post Office where there is step access, and to the main post office in Northfield High Street. Problems with queuing at Northfield and West Heath are also likely to be exacerbated.

We therefore believe Post Office Ltd should reconsider its proposal to close Middlemore Road Post Office.

## Appendix A Postal survey results

Below are the results of a postal survey of 1122 residents in Middlemore Road, Wychall Road and in 20 other roads off Wychall Road. 258 questionnaires were returned from this survey.

This survey was carried out by Lynne Jones MP and Richard Burden MP in July 2008.

<b>Total number of returned questionnaires</b>	<b>258</b>
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<b>1. Do you use a local Post Office regularly?</b>		
No	28	11%
Stamps	116	47%
Bill Payment	85	35%
Parcels	90	37%
Pension/Benefit Collection	59	24%
Banking	38	16%
Mailing Recorded/Special Delivery Items	24	10%
Foreign Currency Exchange	16	7%
Car Tax	16	7%
Postal Orders	10	4%
Passport	7	3%
Premium Bonds	3	2%
Disabled Blue Badge	2	1%
Driver's Licence	2	1%
TV Licence	1	1%
Fishing Licence	1	1%

<b>2. I used Wychall Road Post Office regularly before it was closed</b>		
	<b>127</b>	<b>52%</b>
Wychall Road	30	12%
Middlemore Road	21	9%
Club View	13	5%
Pensford Road	12	5%
Vardon Way	12	5%
Farlow Road	11	4%
Chaddesley Road	8	3%
Chip Close	7	3%
Ingoldsby Road	6	2%
Spoon Drive	6	2%
Hood Grove	1	1%
Lakehouse Grove	5	1%
Longfellow Road	3	1%
Middlefield Road	2	1%

Overbury Road	4	1%
West Croft Grove	2	1%
Witley Road	2	1%
No address supplied	1	1%

<b>3. I did not use Wychall Road Post Office regularly before it was closed</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>30%</b>
Middlemore Road	38	16%
Vardon Way	12	5%
Longfellow Road	8	3%
Overbury Road	8	3%
West Croft Grove	3	3%
Wychall Road	7	2%
Chaddesley Road	2	1%
Chip Close	3	1%
Club View	2	1%
Farlow Road	3	1%
Hood Grove	1	1%
Ingoldsby Road	4	1%
Oddingley Road	2	1%
Pensford Road	4	1%
Spoon Drive	1	1%
No address supplied	2	1%
Lakehouse Grove		
Middlefield Road		
Witley Road		

<b>4. I now regularly use...</b>		
Middlemore Road	118	49%
Cotteridge	31	13%
Both Middlemore Road and The Green	28	11%
Northfield	23	9%
The Green	22	9%
Alvechurch Road West Heath	4	1%
Heath Road	5	1%
Bournville	1	1%
New Road, Rubery	1	1%
Gospel Lane, Solihull	1	1%
Selly Oak	1	1%
City Centre	1	1%
Cofton	1	1%

## Appendix B Customer survey results

Below are the results of a face to face survey of customers of Middlemore Road Post Office.

This survey was carried out on six days over a two week period during July 2008.

413 customers participated in the survey – of these 12 were 'spoilt' and so 401 were analysed.

<b>Total number of customers surveyed</b>	<b>401</b>
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<b>1. What road do you live on?</b>		
Abbey Dale Rd	8	2%
Arnold Grove, Aldersmead Rd, Adstone Rd, Aversley Rd	7	2%
Bowood Crescent, Bayford Ave, Badsey Close, Bristol Rd, Baron Rd, Barnsdale Crescent, Batheaston Close	17	4.5%
Church Hill	17	4.5%
Coleys Lane	14	3%
Corley Ave	8	2%
Cressage Ave, Chesterfield Close	10	2.5%
Central Ave, Crabtree Close	6	1.5%
Chaddesley Rd, Conifer Drive, Copse Close, Cumption Rd, Chip Close, Cofton Rd, Charlgrove Ave, Clee Rd	8	2%
Downcroft Grove, Eastville, Elsworth Rd, Ivyhouse Grove	4	1%
Farlow Rd	6	1.5%
Fairfax, Fairfield Close, Fordrough	4	1%
Harpers Rd	8	2%
Grimly Rd, Greenslade Croft, Hawkesley Crescent	8	2%
Hole Lane, Heathlands Grove, Hazelcroft, Hollow Croft, harbuck Close	8	2%
Kelvin Rd, Kinlet Ave	7	2%
Longfellow Rd, Lakehouse Grove, Longhurst Rd, Longbridge Lane, Longgreen	8	2%
Middlemore Road	54	13.5%
Moorpark, Mill Lane, Mill Walk, Meadowhill Rd	10	2.5%
Norton Close	4	1%
Norman Rd	4	1%
New Meadow Close	4	1%
Overbury Rd	12	3%
Oakridge Rd	4	1%
Orwell Drive, Oldmoat, Old Bank Top, Openfield Close	5	1%
Pensford Rd	6	1.5%
Pamela Rd, Purslow Close, Pineview, Portrush Ave	9	2%

Quarry Lane	10	2.5%
Rea Valley	5	1%
Roundabout, Rednal Rd, Redhill Rd	4	1%
Staplelodge Rd	12	3%
Spinney Close	10	2.5%
Station Rd	10	2.5%
Stapenhall Rd	9	2%
Spoon Drive, South Rd, Sedgebourne Way, Sevenacres	7	2%
Tall Ave, Turves Green	10	2.5%
Vineyard Rd, Varlins Way	4	1%
West Heath Rd	17	4%
Woodlands Rd	8	2%
Wychall Rd	14	3.5%
Willets Rd	11	3%
Winchester Gardens	4	1%
Westcroft Grove, Wolmsley Way, Whitley Grove, Watkins Gardens	6	1.5%

## 2. What age are you?

Under 25	28	7%
25 – 59	202	50%
60 and over	171	43%

## 3. What is your mode of travel?

Bus	11	3%
Car	100	25%
Cycle	9	2%
Train	4	1%
Walking	253	63%
Wheelchair / scooter	24	6%

## 4. Have you brought children with you today?

Yes	56	14%
No	345	86%

## 5. If so, what are their ages?

4 and under	32	57%
5 – 11	16	29%
12 – 16	8	14%

## 6. Do you have a disability that restricts your ability to get around?

Yes	141	35%
No	260	65%

<b>7. What services do you use at the post office?</b>		
Post Office Card Account	240	60%
Other financial services	198	49%
Stamps and postage	292	73%
Other services	64	16%

<b>8. How often do you use the post office?</b>		
Daily	112	28%
Weekly	251	62%
Fortnightly	28	7%
Monthly	7	2%
Not often	3	1%

<b>9. If you can't use this post office, which alternative would you use?</b>		
Cotteridge	12	3%
Don't know / won't be able to travel	221	55%
Hawkesley / Heath Rd / Longbridge / Sunbury Rd	8	2%
Northfield	94	24%
Tessall Lane	5	1%
West Heath	61	15%

## **Appendix C DVD**

Enclosed with this submission is a DVD which shows a real life example of a local resident in a wheelchair trying to get to Tessall Post Office from Middlemore Road and back again.