



Mr John Hemming MP
Member of Parliament for Birmingham, Yardley

Dear Mr Hemming

**Acocks Green Crown Post Office® branch
1100 Warwick Road, Acocks Green, Birmingham, B27 6BG**

Decision - move to new premises & branch modernisation

I'm writing to confirm that we will be proceeding with our proposal to move the above Post Office to 1131 Warwick Road, Acocks Green, Birmingham, B27 6RA, where it will be operated by ZCO Ltd.

The change is being made as part of a programme of transformation designed to maintain and modernise the Post Office network, creating a network of branches that are commercially sustainable. We believe that for Acocks Green Post Office, transferring the operation of the service to a carefully selected third party who will run it alongside their retail business, provides the best way to retain this branch so it can continue to serve its community.

During the public consultation period we received around 35 representations from members of the public and local representatives, including several community groups. Additionally we held a customer forum on 22 October, to tell customers about our plans and answer any questions. Along with representatives from Post Office Ltd and ZCO Ltd, attendees included customers, members of existing staff working at Acocks Green Post Office, Councillors John O'Shea and Roger Harmer and Julia Larden for the Acocks Green Focus Group. We also accepted an invitation to attend a Ward Committee meeting on 29 October; other attendees included Councillors John O'Shea and Stuart Stacey, Ms Larden and several members of the public.

Although not submitted directly into the local consultation process, we were also made aware of a 573 signature petition which raised a number of objections to the proposal, which was handed in at the House of Commons by John Hemming MP.

The feedback we received related to a range of areas including whether six Post Office serving positions would be sufficient, the width of the pavement outside the proposed new premises was felt to be too narrow, the lack of a canopy at the entrance to the proposed new premises. These comments were taken into account along with all other relevant factors when making our decision. Concern was also expressed about the suitability of potential new operator, ZCO Ltd, and whether this might impact the future security of the service.

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As part of the consultation process, Post Office Ltd meets with the independent statutory consumer watchdog, which in Great Britain is Citizens Advice, to review all the consultation responses and to ensure all relevant feedback is taken into account in finalising our plans. Under the review and escalation process that exists between both parties, there were further detailed discussions and significant additional analysis of the relevant local factors raised during consultation undertaken around the feedback received, particularly the number of serving positions and access to the proposed new location.

We believe that based on current and future predicted business levels, six serving positions coupled with the significantly longer opening hours and the staffing arrangements the operator has shared with us will be sufficient to meet customer demand. We will continue to work with the operator to make sure that customer service is maintained and will closely monitor the new branch once it opens, to make sure that current and future customer demands and high service standards are met. We will review these aspects with Citizens Advice through an intensive period of mystery shopping during the three months after the branch has opened.

Turning to the new location we know that the Post Office plays an important part in the lives of customers, including our elderly and disabled customers and we want to make branches as accessible as possible. Following customer feedback on the pavement width, we contacted Birmingham City Council's Highway Engineer dealing with the 'Smart Network, Smarter Choices' scheme who confirmed that the current pavement width is sufficient for purpose. We were also informed by the Council as part of this scheme that they are reducing the width of the road carriageway directly outside of and opposite the new location. The pavement on the opposite side of the road will be widened and will see the introduction of disabled parking bays. The existing pedestrian crossing which is within 15m of the proposed site and approximately 75m from the existing Acocks Green Post Office will remain.

Whilst we believe the pavement to be in good repair, the Smart scheme will bring enhancements including high quality paved footways, street furniture and dropped kerbs at strategic points. The approved scheme will see the introduction of a taxi rank outside the proposed premises with bus stops close by; which will make it easier for customers travelling by these means to access the Post Office, once it's relocated.

Additionally, whilst it does not impact our decision to proceed with the proposed relocation of the Post Office, we are aware that the council is reviewing whether the taxi rank and bus stops should be moved to the left (if viewed from the front of the premises) to allow a "before 10am" protected loading bay and "after 10am" parking bays (one hour, no return within one hour) which, if approved will further support shopper car parking.

ZCO Ltd will make sure customer access both into and within the store will meet Post Office Ltd's own accessibility standards and all applicable legislation. There is an internal ramp at the entrance providing step free access and automatic entrance doors will be fitted before the Post Office moves. Externally the store front will include Post Office signage, as well as a service menu and opening hour's board.

The new premises will be fully refurbished to incorporate a modern Post Office branch and ZCO Ltd's independent confectionery and news shopping, which has recently been confirmed as a WHSmith Local offer. The Post Office area will be located in its own designated area to the right of the store and towards the rear half. There will be directional signage from the entrance door through to the new Post Office area. Both the entrance area and shopping aisles will be kept free of obstructions and there will be sufficient space for Post Office customers to move around within the store, including wheelchair users, so they can reach the Post Office area without hindrance.

The Post Office counter will be built to Post Office specifications, including having lighting that meets industry standards, low level counters, PIN pads and hearing loops. There will be adequate space for people to wait for service and customer seating will also be provided.

The new branch will have one traditional style, floor to ceiling screened serving position and four open plan positions. Open plan serving positions are successfully used across our Post Office network, as an alternative to the more traditional style positions. There is still a partitioned screen but this is lower, helping to provide for a more personal service and discreet conversations when needed.

A further Post Office serving point will be located at the retail till, where customers can access a wide range of Post Office products and services without having to join the main Post Office queue and also throughout the extended shop opening hours, providing even more convenience for our customers. We are also pleased to confirm that, subject to planning permission, an external cash machine will be installed meaning personal banking and Post Office® card account customers will have free access to their cash 24 hours a day. Some customers were concerned at not having an external canopy for protection from the weather and we hope they are reassured that being able to access Post Office services from 07:00, the provision of customer seating and an external cash machine, means this will no longer be necessary.

We and our operator also recognise the introduction of a Post Office till point at the retail till will be new to many customers. To make sure that customers know all about where it is, what they can do there and when it's available meeter greeters will also be on hand as needed whilst the new service settles in, to help customers get used to the new branch.

To help people know about our extensive range of financial products, including savings and insurances, there will be a financial services area and information literature will also be available for customers to take away with them. Our website and specialist customer helplines also provide information on what's available and how to make a purchase.

Although the decision who runs a Post Office service is one for us to make and not in itself subject to local public consultation, we want customers to have confidence that the operation of the service will be in safe hands. We recognise that ZCO Ltd is not a name people will be familiar with and during the consultation period a number of questions were asked about their background and experience.

The team behind ZCO Ltd is extremely experienced in all of the key aspects involved in the day to day running of a Post Office, from staffing through to operational matters. Under the trading name of Potent Solutions they have been helping us to maintain a service for customers at individual Post Office locations across the UK, in what are often difficult circumstances, for many years.

Please be reassured that we have a robust recruitment process and no appointments are made unless we are entirely satisfied that the applicant has met all of our stringent criteria, including having a sound business plan, and assures us that they have the appropriate mechanisms in place so they are in the best possible position to achieve commercial sustainability for their business and secure the long-term viability of the Post Office. Potential operators are also subject to stringent financial and security checks. We are satisfied that ZCO Ltd has delivered all of the qualities and requirements we demand.

ZCO Ltd has also satisfied us of their commitment to providing excellent customer service. Any person employed to work in Acocks Green Post Office will be trained to the highest Post Office standards, which includes classroom and on-site training. And it doesn't stop there. Just as with branches we run ourselves, the branch will receive on-going training on products and services, as well as general operational and service related matters. Post Office area managers will work with ZCO Ltd and the branch team to provide support, in the same way they already do in existing Post Office branches operated by us or other retail partners.

In respect of people working at the existing branch, we have a strong track record of supporting our people through change. There will be no compulsory redundancies and our staff have several options available to them. We will do all that we can to find a solution that works for each individual – whether that is to transfer to our new operator under TUPE (the Transfer of Undertakings Protection of Employment) regulations and which they have the legal right to do; to look for redeployment elsewhere in the Post Office; or they may wish to leave the business and we have agreed terms in place to manage that process.

I am confident that the new branch will be suitably located and that ZCO Ltd will continue to meet customer needs and deliver an excellent service, whilst helping to provide future sustainability for the branch and maintaining a Post Office presence in Acocks Green. The current branch will close at 17:30 on 11 March 2015, with the new branch opening at 09:00 on 12 March 2015. From 13 March onwards, the new branch will open from 07:00 Monday to Saturday. Further details of the new branch are provided at the end of this letter.





You can also find a copy of this letter on our website at postofficeviews.co.uk. When entering the website you will be asked to enter the code for this branch: **00220199**.

Yours sincerely



Neil Corrick
Franchise Project Manager

How to contact us:

-  postofficeviews.co.uk
-  comments@postoffice.co.uk
-  Customer Helpline: 08457 22 33 44
Textphone: 08457 22 33 55
-  FREEPOST Your Comments

We've published our final plan on-line, to see it scan here.

If you don't have a QR code scanner on your phone, you can find one in your app store.



Please note this is the full address to use and no further address details are required.

This communication process has been agreed with the independent statutory consumer watchdog, which in Great Britain is Citizens Advice and Citizens Advice Scotland, and in Northern Ireland, the Consumer Council, and is being carried out in line with our Code of Practice for changes to the Post Office network, which we have agreed with them. If you'd like copies of the Code they are available in branch, or by contacting us or on our website at: www.postoffice.co.uk/transforming-post-office. If you think that the process has not been properly followed and wish to make a complaint, then please write to us or email us via the contact details included in our posters and letters and let us know why. We'll examine your complaint and respond to you as soon as we can. We will provide you with the relevant contact points for the consumer watchdog, so if you are still not satisfied when you have received our response, you can ask them for their assistance.

Post Office Ltd can provide information and receive comments (where appropriate) in alternative formats, for example, to assist the visually impaired. To obtain further specific information, please contact the Customer Helpline on 08457 22 33 44.

Acocks Green Post Office information sheet

Address	<p align="center">1131 Warwick Road Acocks Green Birmingham B27 6RA</p>														
Opening hours	<table border="1" data-bbox="767 322 1137 591"> <tr><td>Mon</td><td>08:30 - 18:00</td></tr> <tr><td>Tue</td><td>08:30 - 18:00</td></tr> <tr><td>Wed</td><td>08:30 - 18:00</td></tr> <tr><td>Thu</td><td>08:30 - 18:00</td></tr> <tr><td>Fri</td><td>08:30 - 18:00</td></tr> <tr><td>Sat</td><td>08:30 - 18:00</td></tr> <tr><td>Sun</td><td>Closed</td></tr> </table>	Mon	08:30 - 18:00	Tue	08:30 - 18:00	Wed	08:30 - 18:00	Thu	08:30 - 18:00	Fri	08:30 - 18:00	Sat	08:30 - 18:00	Sun	Closed
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Sun	Closed														
Opening times of Post Office service at retail counter	<table border="1" data-bbox="722 667 1182 745"> <tr><td>Mon - Sat</td><td>07:00 - 19:00</td></tr> <tr><td>Sun</td><td>Closed</td></tr> </table>	Mon - Sat	07:00 - 19:00	Sun	Closed										
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Sun	Closed														
Products & Services	<p>The same wide range of products and services will still be available with the exception of Digital Application Services for the Home Office, which are offered at Solihull and Birmingham Post Offices.</p> <p>Subject to planning permission there will be an external, free of charge, cash machine.</p>														
Serving positions	<p>There will be six serving positions in total, which will be made up of one screened, four open plan and a Post Office serving point at the retail counter (the total number of serving positions has been based on current and future predicted business levels),</p>														
Additional facilities	<p>A financial services area for discussions around our extensive range of financial and telephony services.</p>														
Access & facilities	<p>The existing internal ramp will be modified to ensure that it fully complies with Post Office Ltd's accessibility standards and all applicable legislation. An automatic entrance door will be installed. A low level serving counter, low level writing desks and hearing loops will be available at the new premises.</p>														
How far away is it?	<p>75 metres away from the current branch, along level terrain.</p>														
Transport & parking	<p>There is limited free parking for one hour on the service road in Warwick Road within approx. 80 metres of the new premises. A pay and a display car park located nearby in Station Road within approx. 150 metres.</p> <p>As the new Post Office will be located close by customers can still use the same bus services, with the nearest bus stop located within approx. 110 metres of the current premises and 40 metres of the new premises.</p> <p>For customers requiring Digital Application Services for the Home Office, National Express, West Midlands operate regular direct bus services which run from Acocks Green to within 500 metres of Solihull Post Office and 900 metres of Birmingham Post Office.</p>														
Retail	<p align="center">WHSmith Local</p>														
Date of move	<p align="center">12 March 2015</p>														