



Huw Merriman MP

Update on Heathfield Post Office – 28 August 2015

Temporary Portacabin

This solution has arrived in Mill Lane car park but is not on a stable base. Post Office Ltd's surveyors aim to view and fix this issue this week. BT have advised that a new telegraph pole will need to be fitted for the portabin to go on-line and this could take until the end of September to install; they also have a 'planning process' to complete. I am writing to my dedicated MP contact at BT to speed this up - it seems in need of prioritising. I have also asked the Post Office Ltd to use their commercial buying power to speed BT up.

Previous Post Office location/Lease

It is still not entirely clear but it would appear that the Freeholder (owner) of this shop is based in Ireland, and that the leaseholder may be Sainsbury's who may have sub-let again to the occupier. At the meeting, it was explained that Post Office Ltd do not lease premises directly for Post Office services when branches are run by a Postmaster; the requirement is for the Postmaster to obtain a lease. Post Office Ltd then provide a contract for Post Office services to the Postmaster who gets paid for the transactions undertaken at the branch.

All of this means that we need an individual or company to get a new lease to the existing or new premises. In an attempt to salvage operations at this unit, we have suggested to Post Office Ltd that they push Sainsbury's to take over the lease to the former Post Office to keep it near to Sainsbury's custom. Since the meeting, Post Office Ltd have attempted to contact Sainsbury's senior management without success. I will now try to contact them. If Sainsbury's have already sub-let to the previous occupier, we would need this party to agree to sub-let to a new postmaster.

This is all very complicated hence I will write to each party and ask them to think of the greater good, consider their community, and come together to fix this legal situation.

In terms of the Post Office equipment on the current site, Post Office Ltd have been seeking permission to gain access to remove the equipment and this has now been provided, so the equipment will be removed shortly.



Huw Merriman MP

Alternative premises for a temporary Post Office service

Royal Mail were contacted to ask whether use of the sorting office would be possible. Royal Mail have just confirmed that due to an increase in mail items, especially higher numbers of larger parcels there would not be sufficient space to operate a Post Office from the premises alongside their business. The counter is also now used for Royal Mail customers collecting mail and parcels and they have advised that there would be space constraints. I am going to contact Royal Mail and ask them to think again. Whilst these are separate businesses, I would hope they could see the need to cover this emergency (being in linked businesses).

Applications for the Post Office service (long term permanent location)

This is as vital as finding a store to operate from. Post Office Ltd have two applicants progressing through their recruitment process. When they have more than one applicant they try and ensure that their applications progress simultaneously through this process. Various documents need to be provided by the applicant in addition to a business plan and security checks being completed before they are both interviewed. Any new applicants who wish to apply at this stage would need to submit their application and any supporting documents very quickly so that Post Office Ltd can progress as soon as possible.

Conclusion

As you can see, there is work going into finding a solution but the complexities of the legal position mean that we continue to bang our heads against a brick wall. It feels as if every time we think of a new solution, another wall comes up for us to tackle. As the Post Office Ltd sub-let much of their operation and act in the private arena, we cannot just go in to a private premises and commandeer a unit. We will continue to keep banging - it will come down if we all try hard enough. I remain committed to finding a solution and using Parliament to campaign to change the arena which caused this poor situation to occur.