

Immediate Release

15th December 2006

Labour's Post Office Cuts Will Hit the Vulnerable the Hardest

Mid Sussex MP, Nicholas Soames, today reacted with grave concern at Government plans to close 2,500 Post Offices across the country, on top of the 4,000 already shut since 1999.

The cuts will start next summer. In Mid Sussex this could potentially mean the closure of a number of Post Offices.

Nicholas Soames said: "Post Offices are the lifeblood of our community but their future is now under real threat. These cuts will hit the vulnerable and the elderly the hardest. Labour Ministers need to recognise that if the local Post Office closes, often the last shop in the vicinity closes as well, and a van for a couple of hours a week is no replacement for a Post Office open full time."

Conservatives have called for Sub-Post Offices to be given greater freedoms to offer a wider range of commercial products and are pushing for more Post Offices to be 'one stop shops' for central government services.

Notes

Recently Nicholas Soames conducted a survey amongst his local postmasters – results attached

The Government made a statement on 14 December 2006 launching a consultation on its plans for the Post Office network. It calls for major cuts in the number of Post Offices. The overwhelming majority of the remaining Post Office network are sub-post offices run by private businessmen and women. The Government plan states:

"We will provide support for a restructuring of the network with up to 2,500 closures within that framework which will maintain a national network. Subpostmasters leaving the network under the restructuring programme will be compensated.

We expect that Post Office Ltd will implement this process over an 18 month period from summer 2007” (DTI, The Post Office Network, December 2006, p.6).

<http://www.dti.gov.uk/consultations/page36024.html>

CONSERVATIVE POLICY

Giving Sub-Post Offices greater freedoms to offer services

Conservatives would rewrite Sub-Postmasters' contracts, allowing them to provide a greater range of products and services, including private mail services.

- The long-term future of the network will be best secured if the Post Office is opened up to new markets and new customers.
- Just as many pubs that were tied to one brewery are now free houses, so Post Offices should be released from their ties and made able to offer a broader range of services.

Using Post Offices as 'one stop shops'

Conservatives will investigate a scheme whereby people who have concerns about a range of Government services can use their local Post Office as a kind of 'Government GP'. Trained staff in Post Offices could then advise on a range of matters, including tax returns, pension entitlements, the opening hours of local pharmacies, how to apply for a disabled parking badge, and the like.

- The Government has looked at this idea on a number of occasions. There have been a number of plans and pilot schemes aimed at using Post Offices as a 'one stop shop' for accessing a wide range of information and services from Government and related bodies.
- Despite their good intentions the Government have achieved little more on this than a small handful of pilot projects.

