

**Kelson House
Plud Street
Wedmore
Somerset
BS28 4BH**

**01934 440639
tessa.in.touch@gmail.com**

23rd February 2016

Dear Paula,

Rethink, reverse, remain please

I am writing with regard to the planned closure of the Post Office in Wells Market Place and to present my petition which, in the short time it has been live, has attracted 750 signatures on my website alone. Paper petitions are still arriving and the number of signatures will be counted, after which I will forward all the relevant information to you.

For your information, the petition calls on Post Office Limited to

“halt its planned closure of its branch in Wells Market Place, and to work with Wells City Council, Mendip District Council and local residents and businesses; to remain in its City centre premises which are convenient and accessible” and can be found here:
http://www.tessamunt.org.uk/wells_post_office

I would strongly urge you to rethink and reverse your plan to relocate Wells Post Office.

Firstly, the Market Place has always been the heart of the City and the current building is well-suited to hosting the Post Office, an essential lifeline for rural communities such as ours. You say that you wish to offer a ‘main’ Post Office service in Wells; local customers would contend that the Market Place is exactly the place for that service. The Market Place location offers a hub for everyone from eBay entrepreneurs posting packages, to those who choose letters and cards to keep in touch with relatives in other parts of the world, and everyone in-between. Many thousands of people, both local and visitors, come to our well-known markets on Wednesdays and Saturdays throughout the year, benefiting adjacent shops and your Post Office from passing trade, as I’m sure your balance sheets will show.

Secondly, the South West has the most elderly (and most wise!) demographic in the entire country and Wells itself has one of the larger concentrations of senior citizens in the South West. As a consequence, accessibility is a major factor for your customers. The Post Office is increasingly important as it also offers banking and other financial services for those in rural communities such as ours. Additionally, there is parking for the disabled and less mobile in close proximity to the current Post Office premises.

Thirdly, it seems that this move is completely unnecessary since Wells City Council, the Landlord of the current Market Place building, originally offered Post Office Limited a longer lease, which you rejected. The City Council, was expecting - and still is keen - to negotiate a lease renewal in the normal way upon the expiry of the lease in the summer and has indicated it would be willing and able – as before - to assist your business with a reasonable rent. In its statement, the City Council says it:

“... has always sought to enable the business in the Market Place to continue. The council has been careful to negotiate lease renewals directly with the Post Office, specifically in order to ensure that the premises remains in that usage.”

What is a shock and a surprise is the absence of courtesy shown to your current Landlord, which has been nothing but reasonable in its past dealings with Post Office Limited, in failing during the last two months even to contact the City Council to inform and explain what you were considering.

From correspondence with your team, it must be anticipated that Post Office Limited will shift blame for its wish to terminate the lease and your proposed move to another premises onto the current Postmaster's wish to leave the role, which would be unfair and unacceptable. To many who use the Post Office in Wells Market Place, the obvious solution would be for Post Office Limited to seek a new Postmaster, from the existing team or from outside, to convert the branch to a new business model and to develop the business into the future – with the full support of the City Council as Landlord.

I understand the Spar shop on Tucker Street has been identified as your “successful applicant” for a new Post Office site. It is not clear how alternative sites were identified; whether an advert was placed; a bidding process undertaken; or, indeed, whether the Spar shop operators, Appleby Westward, was approached by Post Office Limited in the first instance, or vice versa as you suggested in your press release. Consulting on a ‘fait accompli’ does not constitute fair consultation in its fullest sense; your use of six questions biased toward the “new location” fails to enable locals to express their views fully on the matter.

Regardless, your choice of the Spar shop has been condemned as wholly unsuitable for a number of reasons – not least the fact that it is sited on a very busy road between two complex junctions and in close proximity to the entrance to a large supermarket.

Tucker Street, with its necessary parking provision for residents' cars, can be hazardous for pedestrians. The pavement outside the Spar shop is narrow, a point which has been made by several users of mobility scooters and wheelchairs. Similarly, the shop itself is narrow and difficult to negotiate. There are often queues at the Post Office's current premises, but the wide pavements in Wells Market Place facilitate much safer access and waiting areas for customers.

Since the locus of Wells' retail businesses is primarily in the Market Place, Sadler Street and the High Street, the Tucker Street location is both unsuitable and more difficult to reach, and the difficulties with parking will discourage those who attempt to ‘drop in’ for occasional use of Post Office services, which can only damage the business itself.

In rural communities, and here in Somerset especially, we are already disadvantaged by a lack of services. The reduction of capacity and increase in inconvenience and risk should the Post Office be withdrawn from the Market Place will lead to very real difficulties for those in all communities served by Wells.

I would welcome the opportunity to meet you at your earliest convenience to discuss the future of Wells Post Office and look forward to hearing from you. In the meantime, I would urge you to rethink your plans, reverse your decision and remain in the Market Place in Wells.

I look forward to your reply and would like to thank you in advance for your attention to this matter.

Kind regards,

Tessa Munt
Former MP for Wells