

LOWICK PARISH COUNCIL

An extra-ordinary meeting of Lowick Parish Council was held on Monday 4th August 2008 at 7.30 p.m. in the Village Hall

Present: J A Huddart, PD Calder, Ms M Harker, Mrs S Graham, Mrs MA Bell, SA Mather, W Perks, NW Dickinson, Councillor D Wilson, County Councillor RJD Watkin, Dr Claire Mills, Ms Anne Marie Trevelyan and members of the public

1. The Chairman welcomed everyone, made introductions and opened the meeting
2. Apologies of absence were received from A Fairbairn
3. Proposed Post Office Closure - the Chairman explained that the main purpose of the meeting was to discuss the proposed closure of the Post Office and to see what action could be taken to fight this proposal. Following a meeting with representatives of Post Office Limited, which was attended by both Borough and Parish Councillors, Berwick Borough Council have formulated a reply to Post Office Limited on behalf of Lowick, Norham and Milfield.

Dr Claire Mills, Sir Alan Beith's senior researcher, has been speaking to Post Office Limited and asked if they had any cases where the community had come up with a strong argument to keep a Post Office open, the reply was No. She urged as many people as possible to write to Post Office Limited and explain how the closure would affect their life, the inconvenience of the van and anything else relevant to their situation. She also said she had asked why no rural bodies/Parish Councils had been consulted and was told that the Post Office did not have time to find out what they thought.

Anne Marie Trevelyan, representing the Conservative Party, reiterated Dr Mills' view. She had spoken to Adrian Wells, who is responsible for the closure decisions, but could obtain no information from him to justify the closure. She also urged everyone to write a personal letter as a petition only counts as one submission.

Questions were asked about obtaining information from the Post Office under the Freedom of Information Act, AM Trevelyan has asked for such information and been turned down. Both the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats have approached the Minister responsible for Post Offices for information but in the parliamentary recess it is difficult to access ministers.

Various suggestions were put forward to gain publicity and it was decided that BBC and ITV would be contacted and a protest march organised.

Discussion followed with regard to the proposed outreach service which is the most expensive alternative of the services which could be offered but the only one offered to Lowick. Only 18 months ago Post Office Limited indicated that if Lowick Post Office went to shorter hours it would save them from the threat of closure.

Concern was expressed as to the long term viability of the outreach service. Dr Mills said Post Office Limited had told her it was very successful in Cumbria.

Privacy for those using the outreach service was also a concern, many older people say their PIN number out loud as it is the way they can remember it, this would obviously compromise security as anyone in the queue would hear the number, also carers are no longer allowed to use their patient's PIN numbers. There was also a weight limit on parcels the outreach service could take

Questions were asked about the White Swan car park and the very uneven ground, whose insurance would cover any injury sustained

Peter Curwen, Lowick sub-postmaster, said that the closure would not threaten the shop but there would probably be the loss of a job. Councillor D Wilson said he had brought the subject of rate relief for the affected Post Offices at the last Council meeting and it had been a unanimous decision that these shops would get rate relief, County Councillor RJD Watkin said this relief would be taken over by the Unitary Authority in 2009

Plan of Action

- Letter from the Parish Council
- Everyone urged to write and to get as many people as possible to write, the address was made available at the end of the meeting
- Dr Mills and AM Trevelyan were to contact BBC/ITV to try and get some publicity.

The Chairman thanked everyone for attending, and explained that the Parish Council had some further business to attend to. Most people decided to leave the meeting at this point

4. Planning Applications

- Application No: 08/B/0564 : Full Planning Application : Erection of 1 no agricultural dwelling : East Holburn Farm, Holburn Village, Berwick-upon-Tweed. It was agreed that it was an attractive building but everyone was mindful of the fact there was already a farmhouse at the farm. NW Dickinson thought the building was a good idea.
- Application No: 08/B/0563 : Full Planning Application : Erection of agricultural building : East Holburn Farm, Holburn. There were no comments to make regarding this application.

5. Boundary Commission Review

It was agreed to bring the September meeting forward to 11th September to discuss this in time for the Parish Council response by 15th September. It was also agreed to bring the October meeting forward to 9th October.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 9.15 p.m.

11th September 2008