

Comments on closure of Bromfield Post Office and Village Store

14 July 2020

These are the unedited comments I have received through email and social media since the announcement of closure. I don't have permission to share all names and I have taken the straightforward option under GDPR of keeping all comments anonymous. I also include the statement from Ludlow Farmshop.

Andy Boddington, Chair Bromfield Parish Council

Statement by Jon Edwards, Managing Director of Ludlow Farmshop

This has been a decision that we have not arrived at lightly, in fact my predecessor was looking at the viability of the post Office 6 years ago. In a nutshell, for as long as we have operated the Post Office it has made a loss, not a small loss that can be absorbed into the rest of the company but a significant one. Each year the Earl of Plymouth trustees has funded this loss, however over the last 4 years this has increased dramatically.

A number of factors have impacted on this, the living wage has increased our salary bill, the commission we get from the Post Office services does not cover 1 member of staff and due to safety factors we have needed to eliminate lone working practices and put another staff member in there each day. The sales during this time have not grown.

We discussed with the Post Office the potential for relocating to the farm shop but were told by that it would be at our cost, this again was significant. Each option we explored brought us back to the same conclusion which is there is not enough business in the area to support the Post Office in order to allow it to break even. In actual fact, to give you some idea of how much this is behind where it needs to be, we would need to increase sales by 130% just to break even....this is not a fanciful estimation but a hard fact meaning the Post Office proposition is no longer realistic and neither are the continued losses.

I mentioned at the start of my reply that the trustees have funded the losses, this would quite possibly still be the case today, however after closing two thirds of our business, The Clive and Ludlow Kitchen due to Covid 19, and with no early indication that sales in the Clive and Ludlow Kitchen will get back to the kind of levels needed to balance our books when we do reopen, then the Post Office losses only make a difficult trading situation much worse.

We are not looking to make any compulsory redundancies and hope to move the staff into other parts of the business.

I am truly sorry for all those regular customers who do use the service, but I am sure that most people will understand that no business can afford to, or in fact be expected to take significant losses, especially in today's economic climate.

Letter to Jon Edwards

I was dismayed to learn of the planned closure of Bromfield Village Shop and Post Office - it came as a complete surprise. The enterprise has become a central part of the local community and I know that

people have come to depend on it for the various functions that it provides. It really is an essential service.

Our family has used it on a regular basis ever since the Food Centre opened. We have posted parcels, bought stamps, obtained cash, ordered and collected foreign currency, paid in cheques for our own banks (particularly important nowadays, since so many South Shropshire branches have closed in recent years), bought newspapers, cards, presents and miscellaneous minor shopping that saves us having to go right into Ludlow. We've used it for our dry cleaning, and we've bought books, guides and maps for the local area.

We then go on into the main shop and café and spend more money there too, often using Ludlow Kitchen for meeting friends, family get-togethers and business discussions.

It has always surprised me that the Food Centre, now Farm Shop, hasn't made more of the Post Office and given it more publicity and promotion. Your website makes passing reference to it and there is a photo, as well as details, Of Caroline (who, along with her colleagues, has provided such wonderful and helpful service) but there is now only a brief statement about helping 'with all your postal and banking requirements' - and, of course, the plans for closure. A Google search for Ludlow Farmshop brings up all the other departments, including the independent Plant Centre, but there is no sign of the Post Office.

Last year's re-branding focused almost entirely on food and farming, sadly neglecting the idea of providing a service to the local community as well. Local people have become key participants in your enterprise, enjoying coffee and food in the café, as well as shopping for quality food and other provisions. We like your emphasis on local suppliers, on locally grown and prepared produce and on a smaller carbon footprint. Surely the post office has the potential to be a key element of this service to your community as well as to tourists and passing trade. I don't recall having seen Post Office and Village Shop featuring on your signage along the A49. I may be wrong. Those of us who discover it value it, but it has been understated over the years and it could help bring in more customers to your main site and hence more revenue.

I presume that you have alternative plans for the space currently occupied by the Post Office. I also presume that you analyse profit and loss for each element of your business as separate cost centres. Surely it is possible to cross subsidise a potential loss-making element by one that is more successful financially. This would certainly impress the local community, many of whom were somewhat surprised to see the scale and cost of your rebranding exercise, carried out by a high-end national company. However there have been many positive elements about the rebranding, including the new Clive Arms. The post office does not seem to have been included within this project - a missed opportunity, some might say. However your plans did refer to customers 'gaining the best experience possible while shopping in store' and our personal experience is that the ability to 'pop to the post office' while using the other facilities is a major benefit.

It is entirely possible that customers like ourselves, who will now be forced to go into Ludlow in order to use postal and banking services, will no longer have breakfast/coffee/lunch in Ludlow Kitchen but, having paid for parking, will take advantage of the other cafés in town and will use alternative butchers, greengrocers and delicatessens there instead of the Farm Shop.

I do hope that you and the other Directors will reconsider your plans and take on board the feelings of the local community, who would like to remain real partners in your enterprise, an enterprise that has brought many other benefits and opportunities to us all. A recent example is the way that, during the last four months, we have been able to do most of our weekly food shopping through your contactless collection scheme, staffed by your impressive Clive Arms personnel.

The maintenance of services to rural communities is a particularly important issue for Shropshire. We have seen closures of pubs, small shops, bank branches and post offices, along with all the challenges of providing bus services. The queues at the post offices in Ludlow and Craven Arms are challenging at the best of times. The strapline of the Ludlow Farmshop loyalty scheme (of which we have been members since its inception) is Loyal to Local — surely this should be reciprocal.

I look forward to your comments — and to hearing that your plans can be changed, to the benefit of us all.

Comments received by the parish council and on social media

1. Awful. Does the PO run a mobile van service like some banks do for rural areas - NatWest does that I think
2. Bromfield Post Office is a REAL ADVANTAGE to us. Living in Ludlow, we can easily drop in to avoid queues at Ludlow Post Office and to be able to PARK EASILY if we have big PARCELS to carry. WHY. actually, is it in danger of closing??? If it is because of low footfall, that would be largely explained by the LACK OF SIGNAGE....!! Many people who visit 'The Clive' or the Farmshop and Garden Centre and Cafe are just NOT AWARE OF THE EXISTENCE OF THE EXCELLENT LITTLE POST OFFICE WHICH IS HIDDEN AWAY FROM VIEW. We just hope there can be a chance of keeping it open. Surely the Farmshop complex would welcome it's being there as many of us who do know about it also pop into the cafe, farmshop and garden shop whilst we are there.
3. Can I record my concern at the proposal to close Bromfield Post Office. I visit the post office and shop frequently from my home in Stanton Lacy parish and find it of great benefit. I am of an age where it is difficult for me to carry parcels through Ludlow town to the main post office and I benefit greatly from the facility of being able to park close to the shop in Bromfield. Likewise it is a great advantage for me to access cash and pay in cheques since my bank HSBC closed its branch in Ludlow indicating I would have the facility of banking through the post office.. It may be unfashionable in these commercially driven times to mention the personal attention given by the post office staff at Bromfield but their helpfulness at every visit provides customer service at a much higher level than anywhere else in Ludlow. I would urge Plymouth estates to continue to maintain the service and am happy for this communication to be passed to the estate manager. I have spent considerable sums in the Food centre/farm shop over the years and I don't think I have ever not visited the farm shop and spent money when it has been necessary to go to the post office. If the post office is closed that will directly impact on my visits to the farm shop and the garden centre. I conclude that Bromfield parish itself will be deprived of a considerable asset should the closure proceed.
4. I always use this one, as people have said, easy parking lovely staff.

5. I am also a Ludlow user of this brilliant service, but it cannot be thought of as a charity...it is a business.
6. I am sorry about the possible closure of the Bromfield Post Office. In the days when my husband could still get into the car we often used to go there in preference to Tower Street. Then we would have lunch or coffee in the food Centre to justify using the car. It was always an efficient and pleasant experience.
7. I met with Jon Edwards this morning re closure of post office and shop. Unfortunately there does not appear to be a reprieve to their decision as financial loss is too great. The company were prepared to move post office to the Farm Shop but there was no support towards cost of move from Post Office. Hope parish council will be able to offer a solution.
8. I think there would be quite a few people who would willingly help, or run a campaign or whatever might be necessary. Not just old and frail people love this post office - a lot of people that I know use it instead of the one in Ludlow centre because the service they provide is infinitely better.
9. I write to you because of your position as our local county councillor and chair of Bromfield Parish Council. I would like to bring this notice, which has recently been circulated, to your attention although you may already be aware of this decision. Though I appreciate that these are very difficult times for businesses I think this would be a huge loss to the Bromfield community. The shop provides Post Office services and importantly banking facilities as well as newspapers and a shop and for a parish which has an elderly and very elderly population living in mainly non-owner occupied housing it is a most important asset. You will be aware that there is no village hall or community centre in Bromfield but at least the P.O./shop has provided somewhere where the local people can gain local information and services. Public transport is negligible and although Ludlow is nearby It is difficult to access unless you have use of a car (and then can find a parking space). I would very grateful if there is time for this to be raised at the next Parish or indeed County Council meeting.
10. It is always busy, can't understand why it's closing?
11. Many people use Bromfield p.o. In preference to craven arms including myself. Also customers from Ludlow. The staff are very knowledgeable and professional. Many people have already expressed their severe disappointment at the proposed closure when going into the shop - people collecting newspapers, dry cleaning buying stamps etc. I shall personally be writing to the general manager of the food centre who has put details on the post office/ shop web site of the proposed closure. I shall also write to the Plymouth Estate management. This is a retrograde step, on their part. Gone are the days when the big estates in this county were philanthropic towards their tenants. In the past some were not but the last EARL of Plymouth cared about his workers: he took an interest in them and their families. These days more village shops are re- appearing not closing. Why cannot the Plymouth estates with its hugely popular farm shop attracting customers from all over the county plus visitors who will soon be coming again for the Bromfield experience, support one of the last village amenities left??
12. Move the Post Office Counter into The Farmshop?
13. Put it into the farm shop

14. Sad news. It at least the estate tried a decade ago to include such in its redevelopment plans
15. Such a shame
16. That would be a loss as it's also the only PO with easy and plentiful parking (ie not in town)
17. That's sad. I use it instead of the one in Ludlow. So much better
18. That's terrible news
19. This is really sad news. The staff are superb and it is so good to be able to park easily and use the P.O. Really a great loss to the area.
20. To The Parish Council. I would like record my concerns and opposition to the above closure, which I understand is down to Earl of Plymouth Estate (Holdings) and not the Post Office. This is a rural amenity, of which there are very few, in this area. I would put forward that, as such, it should not be viewed as a stand alone money making enterprise but as service to the community. Many customers travel to use this post office due, in no means part, to the exceptional staff who should be regarded as an asset in themselves to any company.
21. What a great loss every week I visit that lovely store and post office with such great obliging staff. Do wish it could be saved such a loss
22. Why is it earmarked for closure? It is convenient with excellent and friendly service. We often use the Farm Shop at the same time as visiting the PO. Our relatively frequent purchases may decrease if the PO closes.