

<b>Title of Report:</b>	<b>Tesco Express Store – Northfield Rd Thatcham- Proposed Post Office Closure</b>	<b>Item 5(b)(i)</b>
<b>Report to be considered by:</b>	Executive	
<b>Forward Plan Ref:</b>	N/A	

<b>Corporate Plan Priority:</b>	CP10 – Creating attractive and vibrant town centres
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**Purpose of Report:** To respond to a petition by 1,596 Thatcham residents opposed to the proposed closure of the Northfield Road Post Office.

**Recommended Action:** To note the action taken by Officers.

**Reason for decision to be taken:** Loss of essential local service

**List of other options considered:** N/A

**Key background documentation:** None

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## Supporting Information

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### 1. Background

- 1.1 Tesco have acquired T & S Stores Ltd which was a business of about 870 small stores in the UK, usually trading under the Brand name of One Stop, Day & Night, Dillons. Some 330 of these stores contained a sub post office. Most of these can be retained, but 40 are to close because the refurbished store will concentrate on food; typically meats, dairy products, frozen goods, fruit and vegetable products and as such is not, they claim, a suitable business environment for a sub post office. Tesco call these 'Express Stores'. Tesco also say that in areas where it makes commercial sense to retain a different type of store to the Express Store, that is one that will continue to sell newspapers, books, magazines etc, then it will be appropriate to retain the sub post office.
- 1.2 Tesco have stated that in all cases of post office closure they are in discussions with Post Office Counters Ltd to see if there is an alternative facility, or store nearby, that could accommodate the post office. A representative from Tesco has confirmed that to be the situation in Thatcham.
- 1.3 The Council only learned of the closure following media speculation.
- 1.4 Both the District Council and the Thatcham Town Council have written separately to Tesco, complaining about the decision to close the post-office.
- 1.5 Additionally the District Council has asked Tesco to agree to attend a meeting with the Northfield Store's local community and their elected representatives. A copy of the letter is attached to this report.
- 1.6 The District Council has consistently opposed post-office closures throughout West Berkshire, which have increasingly been taking place in urban areas in line with the restructuring of the Royal Mail in the wake of its financial position. As with all closures the Council re-enforces that local post-offices are a lifeline for many residents, in particular, the elderly, the infirm and mothers with young children. The nearest alternative post-office to Northfield Rd is in Thatcham Town Centre, a distance of about half a mile.
- 1.7 In recent years, some services traditionally provided by post offices can now be readily accessed elsewhere. In some cases, therefore the Council's position on closures has been weakened by the fact that due to changing working patterns and/or peoples' life style, particularly in smaller rural communities, there has not been sufficient local support to make the sub post office viable. As a consequence closure inevitably followed irrespective of the impact on some parts of our community.
- 1.8 However, that is not the case here. Northfield Rd Post Office would seem to have a strong customer base and it would appear that there is a viable post-office at Northfield Rd, evidenced by a petition signed by 1596 residents opposing the closure. This re-enforces the Council's request to Tesco for a local consultative meeting.
- 1.9 A copy of TESCO's reply is attached to this report; they have refused to attend a public meeting, but have said that they would be prepared to support the relocation of the Post Office to another premises. This is not considered to be a viable option, no other suitable location exists in the vicinity.

**2. Action proposed.**

- 2.1 The Council has limited powers in this situation, but will continue to oppose the closure and will try to enter into negotiations with TESCO to see if some other arrangement can be made to retain the sub post office in or adjacent to the TESCO Express store.

**Appendices**

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Appendix A - Copy of letter from Chief Executive to Tesco and TESCO's reply dated 20 May 2004.

**Consultation Responses**

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**Local Stakeholders:** Thatcham Town Council; Thatcham Residents; West Berkshire Post Watch; Royal Mail

**Officers Consulted:** Chief Executive; Nick Carter; Stephen Smyth

**Trade Union:** N/a