



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

2 November 2023

Mr Nick Reid  
Chief Executive  
Post Office  
Finsbury Dials  
20 Finsbury Street  
London  
EC2Y 9AQ

Dear Mr Reid,

Following my letter to you on 8 September 2023 I am becoming increasingly concerned by the lack of progress with the search for a new permanent Postmaster, and a new permanent Post Office site in Edenbridge. The Post Office Public Affairs team have continued to keep me up to date but progress has been slow and is now unsatisfactory.

As was detailed in my previous letter, it is unacceptable that Edenbridge and surrounding villages are now facing the prospect of not having an easily accessible permanent Post Office during the Christmas period. Today is the final day Post Office facilities are available with Paydens closing. The Post Office should have sorted alternative provision out beforehand.

In a Post Office email of 6 July 2023 the Post Office made clear that *"Paydens are due to close in November, so we still have time to progress the Edenbridge applicants and relocate with out a break in service. This assumes there are no unforeseen issues that might cause a delay"*. For months I have worked with you to try and accelerate this process.

Even when a permanent Post Office wasn't looking likely to be secured by today's date, I asked about temporary provision. You will be aware we worked successfully with Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council to do this with Tonbridge Castle last year, and I would have expected to do likewise in Edenbridge.

Failure of the Post Office to secure any alternative provision has left staff, residents, businesses and anyone visiting Edenbridge and the surrounding villages without any service. For a town like Edenbridge, this is unacceptable.

The geography of Edenbridge means it is isolated. Neither the Uckfield Line or Tonbridge-Redhill Line run regular trains throughout the hour. Bus services are limited and have been scaled back in recent years. Road connections are poor due to a number of low bridges on the approach to the town. It is some distance from towns which are larger, such as Sevenoaks, Tonbridge, Tunbridge Wells and East Grinstead. The nearest Post Office is over four miles away, which is clearly inaccessible for anyone without access to a car. Consequently Edenbridge relies much more than many other towns on having facilities available for local residents.

We now are completely unclear about what happens next. Post Office representatives are aware that I have contacted a number of local organisations about suitable alternative provision, since there was no evidence of a proactive approach being taken. My office has shared many sites in the town that could be suitable for, at the very least, a temporary location.

Member of Parliament for Tonbridge and Malling

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One site that was well favoured by many was The Eden Centre. This was constructed by Kent County Council (KCC) less than 20 years ago to bring together a variety of community organisations and facilities under one roof. It explains why so many local people thought this was a good solution.

On Monday, 30 October 2023, my office received confirmation from the Post Office that The Eden Centre wasn't considered a suitable location as "*After some consideration both the Town Council and Eden Centre have come back to us to say they are unable to provide premises*". This was, initially, extremely disappointing.

However on Tuesday, 31 October 2023, I received a letter from Peter Oakford, Deputy Leader of KCC which, in regard of The Eden Centre, stated:

*"By way of an update, a representative of the Post Office had already attended the centre where its requirements and options were discussed. Following your letter, officers contacted the Post Office representative again to invite her to a further meeting at the Eden Centre. However, she has informed KCC that she had two other options in the pipeline that she is exploring which are nearer the High Street; she wished to explore these other options first and would follow up with KCC if the other options did not go forward."*

While I am sure that two sites in the High Street would be preferable, use of The Eden Centre is clearly better than the current position, which is no Post Office facilities in Edenbridge tomorrow. I am deeply concerned that this also contradicts the message I received from the Post Office on Monday as well. Given the number of months in which it has been known that Paydens would be closing, I would have expected the Post Office to have followed through with KCC and potential franchisees on securing an alternative facility by now.

Edenbridge and surrounding villages have been let down by the lack of urgency by the Post Office for many months, despite numerous emails over what will now be 9 months. I look forward to your personal reply on how you will address this urgent issue and invite you to come and meet with me and residents in Edenbridge as soon as possible.

Best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tom Tugendhat".

**TOM TUGENDHAT**