

HERE AND NOW in HUNGERFORD

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CRISIS IN THE HIGH STREET?

The decision to close Martin's the Newsagent will rip the heart out of our High Street and the inevitable fall in footfall will impact hard upon many other establishments in the town unless this gap in our retail outlets is not closed quickly.

In what appeared at first to be a management ploy to gain better terms from the Landlord as their Lease was due to be renewed in April has proved to be a false hope. Instead the number crunchers in Martin McColl's HQ have done their sums and no doubt with the prospect of higher Business rates, concluded that the shop was no longer viable.

Some might be surprised that with over 1,000 customers per week visiting the in-house Post Office that it would have generated sufficient income. But clearly those customers did not purchase much in the other side of the operation. Perhaps the fact that most of this stock could be bought in many other shops in town and with no unique high value, high profit items, was the root cause of the demise.

What has been of the highest value in the store is the level of personal service provided by Rose and her colleagues and our hearts and best wishes go out to them along with our grateful thanks for their endearing efforts.

Our town is in a relatively affluent area and I have little doubt that the central location of the shop will attract many but it will be a challenge to ensure that it will be best suited to our needs. **What would be your choice of use for the premises?**

POST OFFICE TO CLOSE 21 APRIL

The era of Crown Post Offices in all towns is long since gone and each Post Office has to face up to fierce economic scrutiny. Whilst there is no obligation to have a Post Office in this town, we have established that we shall have the service renewed in due course.

This means that it likely that there could be a "break in service" for several months unless our

(the Council) negotiations already started, can produce an "outreach" provider. Details of such a service are at an early but promising stage and the result depends on a number of variables. Our immediate aim is to have this service sited in the Library complex. Clearly there are many hurdles to clear not the least of which will be the administrative maze of West Berks Council.

THE LIBRARY

As many will know, even though West Berks Council has decided to implement Option A for the West Berks libraries, they have acknowledged that our variation on this plan – now deemed Option D - is worthy of further investigation. Perhaps the prospect of having a Post Office in the building may even add weight to our case. If you will excuse the pun, we shall keep you posted on developments and will ensure that it is on the Agenda for our Annual Public Meeting scheduled for **Thursday 23rd March in the Corn Exchange. Put it in your diary.**



- Cllr Martin Crane, OBE, Town Mayor of Hungerford