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Rural Advocate urges communities to make their voice heard in consultation on future of Post Offices

Today, Tuesday 2 October 2007, sees the beginning of a UK-wide consultation on the future of the Post Office network. Starting in Kent, East Midlands and East Yorkshire with Bassetlaw and North Lincolnshire, plans detailing proposed changes in each of nearly 50 areas of the country are to be subject to a six-week period of consultation.

As part of a programme of change up to 2,500 branches are to close across the country, with the possibility of up to 500 of these being replaced through ways of providing an alternative service known as 'Outreach'. There are currently four types of Outreach service: a mobile Post Office that visits small communities at a regular time each week; a shop or community centre where Post Office staff provide services during set hours; the provision of a reduced range of services from a partner's premises, such as a pub; and a service where pre-ordered items are delivered to a customer's home or at a local drop-in session.

Commenting on Post Office Ltd's consultation plans, Dr. Stuart Burgess Chairman of the Commission for Rural Communities, and the Government's Rural Advocate, said: "Post Offices play a crucially important role in the economic and social fabric of rural areas. Earlier this year we responded to the Government's consultation on the future of the Post Office network. Whilst we felt that the period for local consultation of 6 weeks was too short, I would now urge rural communities to take every opportunity to make their views known and to use the consultation period to the best advantage for their local community.

"There are already successful examples around the country of Post Office services being provided in places such as pubs and community halls, as well as in village shops. Wherever there are possibilities, as part of the consultation process, to consider alternative ways of providing service, I am confident rural communities will make the most of the opportunity to come forward with practical and creative solutions".

Of the 14,500 Post Office branches around the UK, around 8,000 are in rural areas. Over three-quarters of Post Offices in rural England have an attached business, with almost a half attached to a village shop.

ENDS

For further information Chris Wynne-Davies on 01242 534070 or 07900 608030

Notes for editors:

1. Details of Post Office Ltd's Network Change Programme and plans for local consultation can be found at:

www.postoffice.co.uk/portal/po/jump2?catId=19100175&mediaId=57600693

2. Some examples of alternative ways of the provision of Post Office services can be found at:

www.ruralcommunities.gov.uk/files/PO%20Case%20Studies2.pdf

3. Information about the Commission for Rural Communities and its work can be found in our current Annual Review at:

www.ruralcommunities.gov.uk/publications/annualreview20062007