

NEWS RELEASE
Councillor Andrew Duffield
Hexham Parliamentary Candidate



**“USE POST OFFICES OR LOSE THE NETWORK”
DUFFIELD TELLS GOVERNMENT**

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New research compiled by the Liberal Democrats reveals the shocking number of post offices closed in the last 5 years. In the Hexham Constituency alone the numbers have fallen by 8, from 59 in 1999 to just 51 in 2004. This has severely affected many people's access to vital Post Office services in the North East, which has lost a total of 87 post offices; a fall of 12% overall.

Commenting on the figures Andrew Duffield, Liberal Democrat Parliamentary Candidate for Hexham, said:

“The closure of the local post office has an immense effect on the surrounding community, especially on more vulnerable people like pensioners and disabled people who depend on its services.

“Government policies like Direct Payment of benefits have significantly undermined post offices as viable businesses. Many sub-postmasters have lost up to 40% of their income from this measure alone. The Government's solution has been to pour massive subsidies into the rural network to keep it afloat while introducing a programme of closures in urban areas.

“This is not the way to secure the future of the network. Post offices need to be able to offer new services and products that will attract people back into their local branch and replace the income Government policies have drained away.

“My message to the Government is: use post offices or lose the network.”

ENDS

Note to Editor: Liberal Democrats believe that sub-Post Offices are the lifeblood of communities in both rural and urban areas, particularly when they are combined with other services, such as the local shop. When the local Post Office closes other services often follow suit, which can have extremely detrimental repercussions for the community.

Post Offices have a vital role to play for the more vulnerable groups in society – the over 65s, disabled people, carers, single parents, unemployed people and those without a car who find it difficult to use public transport. Closures affect these people more than any other members of society.

Published, promoted and printed by Neil Salvesen [Candidate's Agent] for Andrew Duffield and the Hexham Liberal Democrats, all at Ashfield House, Burswell Villas, Hexham NE46 3LD