

Post Offices Closures in Halton

Summary

As part of the Network Change Programme Area Plan Proposal for Merseyside, Wirral and Cheshire with Wigan, Leigh and Makerfield, three post office branches within Halton have been proposed for closure.

These branches are;

- Appleton Village, Appleton, Widnes
- 212 Hale Road, Widnes
- Stenhills, Picton Avenue, Runcorn

Maps showing the location of these Post Offices can be seen in Appendix I (Figures 1, 2 and 3).

Within the Network Change Programme the Post Office have conducted a Branch Access Report, looking at the current accessibility of the branches proposed for closure, and the nearest alternative branches customers will need to use.

When the current series of closures was first announced in early 2007, Halton Borough Council looked at the current provision of Post Offices in the Borough, including the population within half a mile and one mile of a branch (in a straight line) and how this may be affected by any closures.

Demographics

Currently 115,452 people within Halton are within one mile of a Post Office (Figure 4), of which 80,825 are within half a mile of a Post Office. Figure 5 shows the resulting one mile coverage by Post Offices were the three proposed branches to be closed.

As part of the Branch Access Report the Post Office looked at the total population, population aged 0-15 and population aged 16-retirement age within one mile of the branch proposed for closure. However figures for the number of people aged above retirement age (for the purpose of this report, aged 65+ for both sexes) were not included.

Table 1 shows the data provided by the Post Office in the Branch Access Report, and relates to the area of one mile around each of the three Post Offices.

Whilst the criteria set by the Post Office has been adhered to, the Council believes that there are other critical criteria that must be taken into account when considering the closure of any Post Office. These factors are explained in more detail below.

Table 2 includes additional data relating to the elderly (aged 65+) and the permanently sick or disabled who live within one mile of the three post offices. Two

further factors have been included, these look at overall figures for the Borough, showing the situation as it is now, and what it would be like after the proposed closures.

It was decided to include data relating to Elderly customers as these are the people who are most likely to struggle to get to an alternative branch, and who are more likely to use the Post Office to withdraw money from Post Office accounts, and who see Post Offices as not just another shop but as a community resource on a regular basis.

Data on permanently sick or disabled people has been included for similar reasons. In the case of Stenhills it has been noted that many disabled customers use this branch because of the ease of access to it, whereas the alternative branch (High Street, Runcorn) has no ramp and is situated at the bottom of a steep hill that wheelchair users may find difficult to approach.

Table 2 clearly illustrates that whilst on a Borough-wide level coverage for the elderly and disabled within one mile will barely change, both Appleton Village and Hale Road Post Offices have a higher than average number of elderly people nearby.

All three Post Offices have higher than average numbers of disabled people within one mile of them. In the case of Hale Road Post Office nearly 2 per cent more people are disabled within one mile of the branch than the Borough average (10.65 per cent compared to 8.50 per cent). This point was echoed in correspondence received from the owner of Stenhills Post Office, who also mentioned many of her customers were disabled people who had started using Stenhills after other nearby Post Offices were closed in previous re-organisations. A further closure would cause even more inconvenience to some of the most vulnerable members of society.

Table 3 contains the same data as Table 2, however looks at the area within half a mile of the branches proposed for closure, with overall figures for all people within half a mile of a Post Office, before and after the closures.

Car Ownership & Public Transport

In the Post Office Branch Access Report figures were given for the number of people who had access to a car within 1 mile of each of the three branches. However this figure was a number and not a percentage, and did not cover those who would find it most hard to access an alternative branch (i.e. those without access to a car).

Table 4 therefore shows the percentage of households who have no access to a car within half a mile and a mile of each of the three branches, as well as Borough-wide figures for the current situation at the moment, and how it would be were these three branches to close.

For all three branches at both a mile and half a mile, the percentage of households who do not have access to a car is much higher than the Borough-wide figures. In the case of Appleton Village and Hale Road the percentage of households who do

not have access to a car is higher in the half a mile catchment area than the mile catchment area, as more affluent areas of the Borough are situated with a mile of these Post Offices. However with Stenhills the percentage rises, with 33% of households who live within a mile of the Post Office having no access to a car.

For the three branches proposed to close, the Post Office suggested branches that could be used as an alternative. One of the issues that was considered in the Branch Access Report was Public Transport. In all three cases the alternative branches were well served by busses from the communities affected by closure.

However, one point that the Post Office did not look into was the costs associated with using Public Transport to access a Post Office, where previously residents could have walked to a nearer local branch. Within Halton the two predominant bus operating companies are Arriva and Halton Transport. With either of these services the cost of a return journey within the Borough is £2.80. For those that who are not eligible for concessionary fares this may be a lot of money to find, especially when issues of deprivation and low income are taken into account.

Where people have Post Offices accounts in order to receive benefits, and withdraw these on a weekly basis as cash then over a year they will need to find an additional £145 for bus fares to and from the new alternative branch.

Whilst the statistical arguments against the closure of these branches has been well detailed above, there are many community related reasons against the closure of local post offices that can only be understood through an in-depth local knowledge of the areas concerned, and the people that live within those areas.

Deprivation

Halton is a deprived area, and was ranked 21st in the Index of Multiple Deprivation 2004. Many people within the Borough suffer from differing levels of deprivation and poverty, and a reduction in access to the vital services that Post Offices provide could make it harder to reverse these trends of deprivation. Many people rely on the Post Office for Post Office Bank Accounts, and use these accounts to access benefits and draw savings. Closing local Post Offices would make it harder for some of the most deprived sections of society, and especially those who do not have access to a regular bank account. It is believed that in Halton that figure could be around a third higher than the overall national figure, with many of these people living in the areas currently well served by the three Post Offices proposed for closure.

Low incomes are acknowledged as another problem associated with deprivation within the Borough. Using a Household Income Index where the average household income for Great Britain is 100, Halton scores 88.

Within a half mile buffer of the Hale Road Post Office the median household income is £22,000 a year, this figure is £25,200 for Appleton Village and £26,370 for Stenhills. Therefore in the surrounding areas of all three Post Offices the median household income is lower than the Borough average.

Community Safety

In a letter to the Council the owner of Stenhills Post Office raised several issues that she thought were important to consider. These surrounded the issue of confidence that customers (especially those that are elderly) gain in their local Post Offices over time.

When Post Offices in the west of Runcorn were closed in previous network reforms many elderly people began to use Stenhills as the nearest alternative. Over time they have built up a strong personal relationship with the staff at Stenhills, something that many people find is important when dealing with matters such as finances and pensions.

Another point to be considered is that of the increased demand that will be put onto alternative branches. The nearest alternative branch to Appleton Village is the main post office in Albert Square, Widnes. This branch already gets very busy at peak times such as around lunch, an influx of extra people from Appleton would add to this load, and could lead to increased time spent queuing for all users of the main Widnes branch.

Such personal relationships may also be harder to re-build at the alternative branches because of the issues mentioned above. When a branch has a large number of regular customers and regularly has large queues then staff would find it harder to maintain the personal level of service seen at smaller branches such as Stenhills.

New Housing

Halton Borough Council published a yearly Housing Baseline Report that details where new houses have been built, or new housing has been allocated to be built in the near future.

Within the 2007 Housing Baseline Report a total of 58 new houses were completed within half a mile of the three Post Offices. These were split into 15 at 1 site near Hale Road, 41 at 4 sites near Appleton Village and 2 at one site near Stenhills. Availability for a further 218 houses within half a mile of the three Post Offices was also highlighted in the report. This was broken down into 74 near Hale Road (at 4 sites), 99 near Appleton Village (at 11 sites) and 45 near Stenhills (at 8 sites). Further details of these sites can be found in Appendix 2, Table 5, or the full report can be accessed at:

<http://www2.halton.gov.uk/content/environment/planning/forwardplanning/localplanningmonitoring?a=5441>

In conclusion we feel there three proposed closures would particularly effect the most vulnerable members of society – the elderly, the most deprived and the less physically able.

The 3 neighbourhoods all contain a high proportion of people who are:

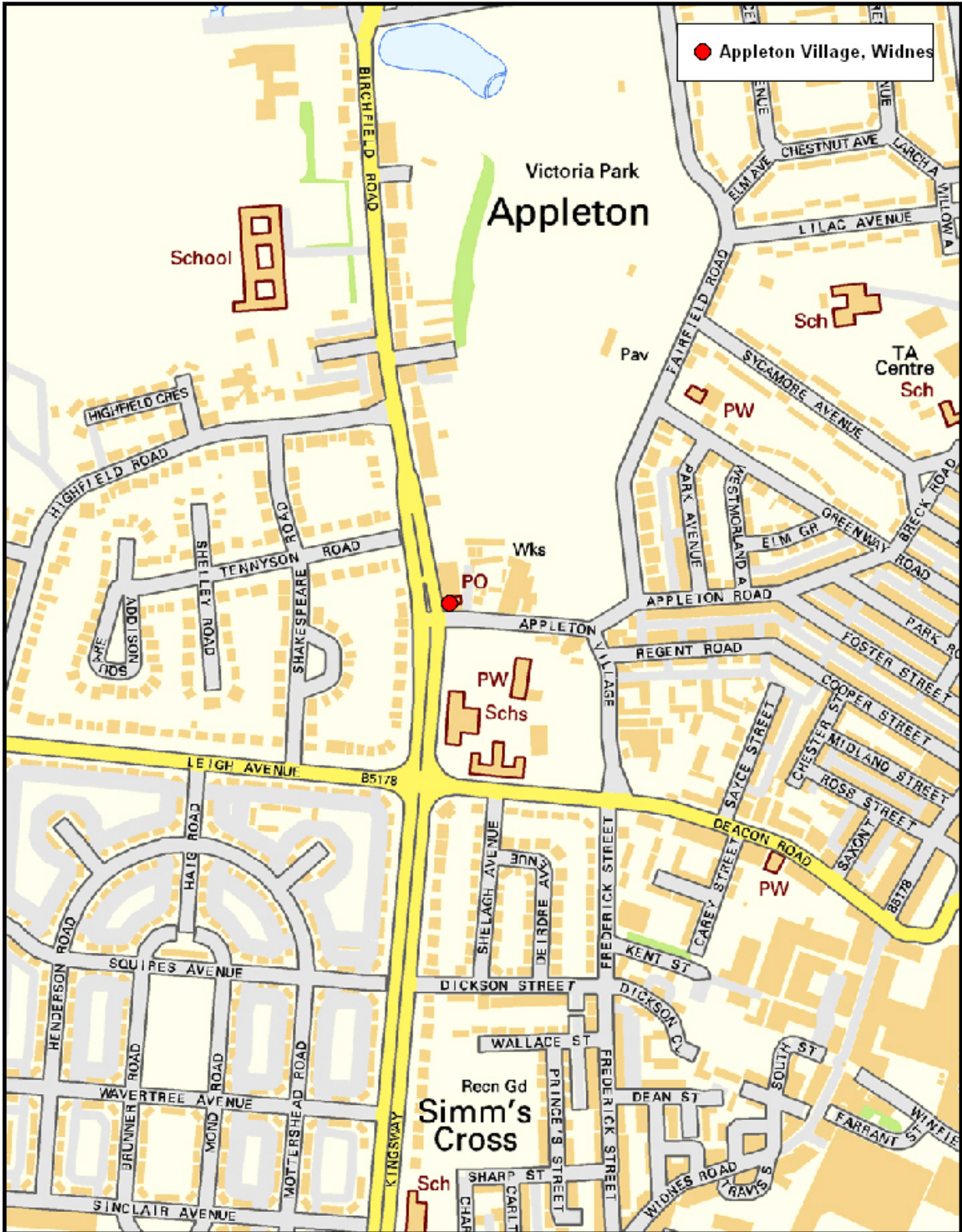
- more likely to be in receipt of benefits
- less likely to have a high street bank account
- less likely to own a car
- more likely to suffer from ill health (a high proportion on incapacity benefit)
- less likely to able to afford public transport
- more likely to have caring responsibilities

and so Halton Borough Council strongly objects to the proposed closure of these three Post Offices.

Appendix I

Area Maps

Figure 1





	<p>Map of Appleton Village Post Office</p>	<p>Date: 6th December 2007</p>	
	<p>Reproduced from the Ordnance Survey mapping with the permission of the controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office Crown Copyright. Unauthorised reproduction infringes Crown Copyright and may lead to prosecution or civil proceedings. Halton Borough Council Licence Number 100018552 2007</p>	<p>Produced by Research & Intelligence Team Halton Borough Council, 2007</p>	

Figure 2





	Map of Hale Road Post Office	Date: 6th December 2007	
	Reproduced from the Ordnance Survey mapping with the permission of the controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office Crown Copyright. Unauthorised reproduction infringes Crown Copyright and may lead to prosecution or civil proceedings. Halton Borough Council Licence Number 100018552 2007	Produced by Research & Intelligence Team Halton Borough Council, 2007	

Figure 3





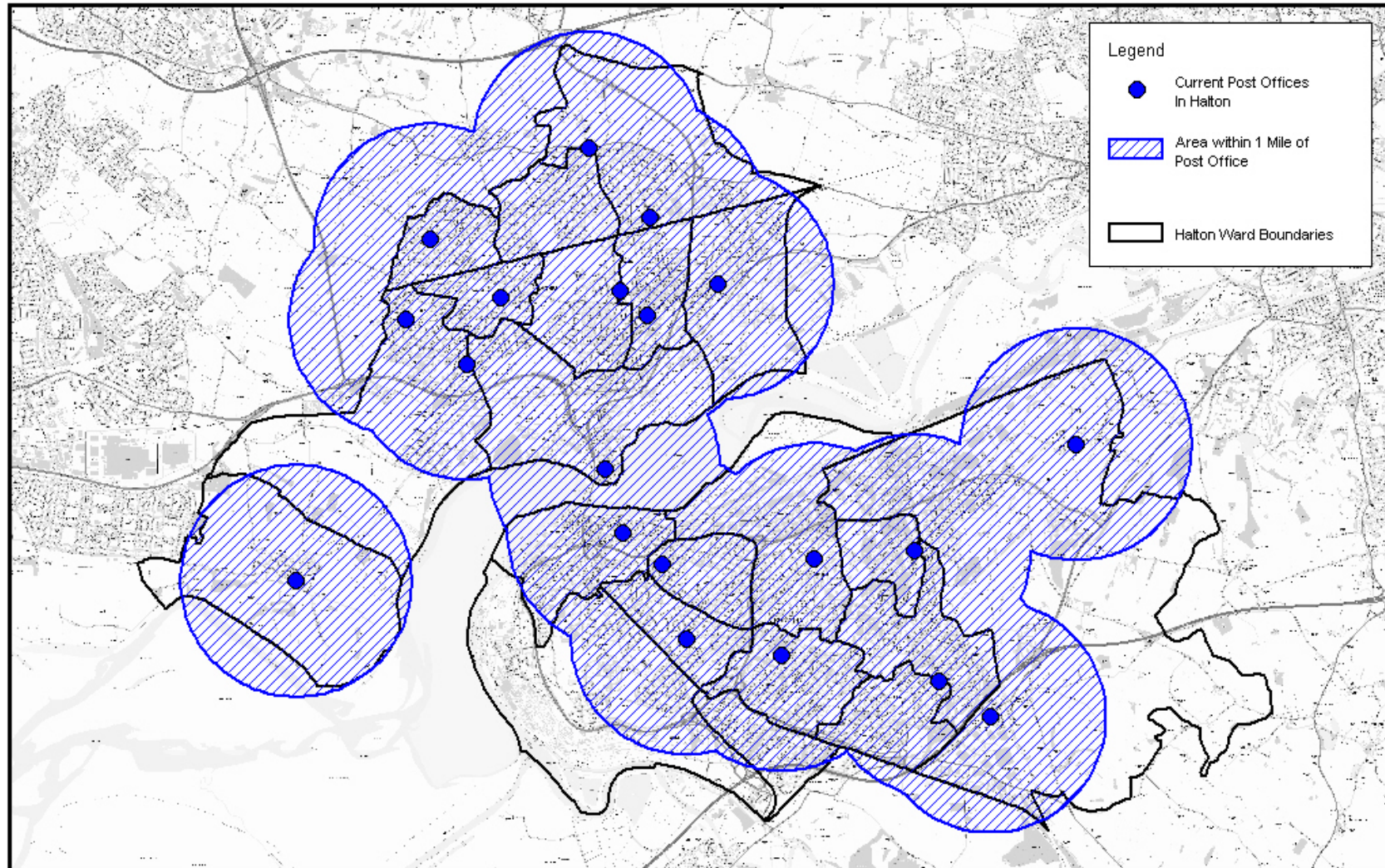
	Map of Stenhills Post Office	Date: 6th December 2007	
	Reproduced from the Ordnance Survey mapping with the permission of the controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office Crown Copyright. Unauthorised reproduction infringes Crown Copyright and may lead to prosecution or civil proceedings. Halton Borough Council Licence Number 100018552 2007	Produced by Research & Intelligence Team Halton Borough Council, 2007	

Figure 4





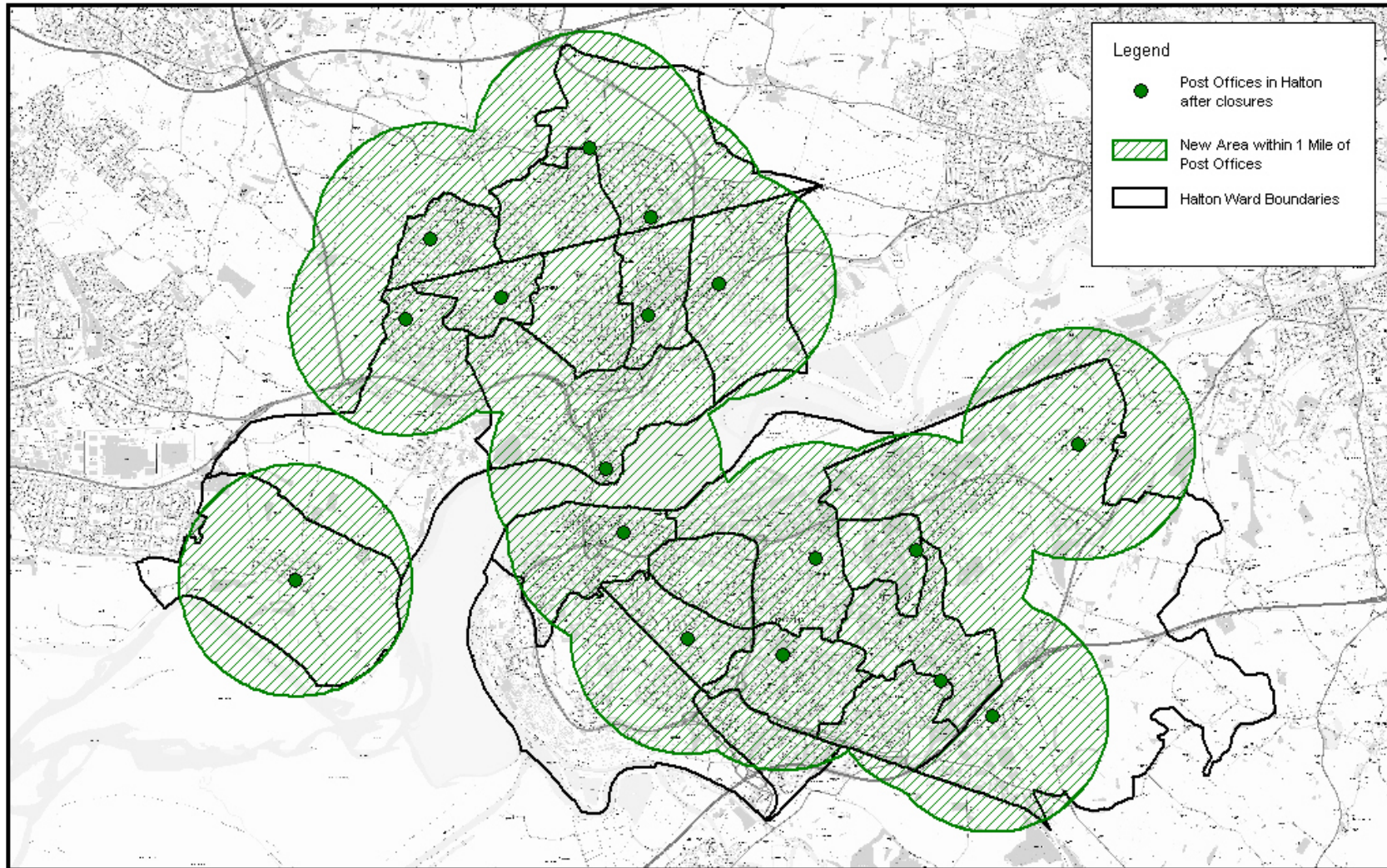


	Current Situation: Area within 1 Mile of a Post Office	Date: 19th November 2007	
	Reproduced from the Ordnance Survey mapping with the permission of the controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office Crown Copyright. Unauthorised reproduction infringes Crown Copyright and may lead to prosecution or civil proceedings. Halton Borough Council Licence Number 100018552 2007	Produced by Research & Intelligence Team Halton Borough Council, 2007	

Figure 5



	After Closures: Area within 1 Mile of a Post Office	Date: 19th November 2007	
	Reproduced from the Ordnance Survey mapping with the permission of the controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office Crown Copyright. Unauthorised reproduction infringes Crown Copyright and may lead to prosecution or civil proceedings. Halton Borough Council Licence Number 100018552 2007	Produced by Research & Intelligence Team Halton Borough Council, 2007	

Appendix 2

Data Tables

**Table 1 – General Demographics as provided by Post Office
within Branch Access Report
(Within 1 Mile of Branch)**

	Total	0-15	16-65	65+	65+ %	Sick/Disabled %
Appleton Village	22,971	4,864	13,821	*	*	*
Hale Road	18,211	4,041	11,127	*	*	*
Stenhills	21,471	4,604	12,893	*	*	*

* Data not provided within the Branch Access Report

Source: No source of data provided by Post Office.

**Table 2 – Demographics provided by Halton Borough Council
(Within one mile of Branch)**

	Total	0-15	16-65	65+	65+ %	Sick/Disabled %
Appleton Village	24,298	4,922	15,922	3,457	14.23	9.18
Hale Road	20,664	4,423	13,242	2,997	14.50	9.14
Stenhills	18,210	3,839	12,129	2,243	12.32	10.65
Overall figures (pre-closures)	115,452	24,023	75,660	15,772	13.66	8.50
Overall figures (post closures)	114,839	23,912	75,256	15,675	13.65	8.50

Sources: Population Data (2004 Mid Year Estimates at Census Output Area Level, Merseyside Information Service), Disability Data (2001 Census Data at Census Output Area Level)

**Table 3 – Demographics provided by Halton Borough Council
(Within half a mile of Branch)**

	Total	0-15	16-65	65+	65+ %	Sick/Disabled %
Appleton Village	8,985	1,753	5,927	1,307	14.55	9.05
Hale Road	5,967	1,352	3,783	831	13.93	11.66
Stenhills	6,074	1,294	3,921	859	14.14	10.02
Overall figures (pre-closures)	80,825	16,634	52,121	12,075	14.94	9.87
Overall figures (post closures)	76,712	15,804	49,425	11,488	14.98	9.97

Sources: Population Data (2004 Mid Year Estimates at Census Output Area Level, Merseyside Information Service), Disability Data (2001 Census Data at Census Output Area Level).

**Table 4 – Car Ownership Data
(Percentage of people with no access to a car)**

	Within 0.5 Mile of Branch (%)	Within 1 Mile of Branch (%)
Appleton Village	33.80	28.83
Hale Road	32.53	24.82
Stenhills	31.28	33.20
Overall figures (pre-closures)	26.00	20.57
Overall figures (post closures)	25.97	21.29

Source: Census of Population (2001)

Table 4 – Housing Completions and Availability (2007)

Appleton Village (Completions)

Site Ref	Sub Ref	Area (HA)	Site Name	Total Capacity	New Build	Remaining Capacity
8130	0	0.2	Columba Hall Frederick St	24	24	0
8136	0	0.01	12 Deacon Road - Widnes	2	2	0
8145	0	0.21	Sayce Street	14	14	0
8177	0	0.34	Cohhes Glass 31 Gerrad St	1	1	

Appleton Village (Availability)

Site Ref	Sub Ref	Area (HA)	Site Name	Total Capacity	Remaining	Land State
8054	0	0.23	Rose View Avenue	2	2	Brownfield
8090	0	0.3	Park Works Appleton villa	48	48	Brownfield
8106	0	0.01	Albert Road	1	1	Brownfield
8114	0	0.05	Hood Road	2	2	Brownfield
8126	0	0.15	88a - 92 Albert Road Widn	15	15	Brownfield
8147	0	0.33	Appleton Village (missed)	18	18	Brownfield
8151	0	0.03	153 Albert Road Widnes	6	6	Brownfield
8187	0	0.02	49 Albert Road	2	2	Brownfield
8193	0	0.01	3 Park Road Widnes	1	1	Brownfield
8201	0	0.13	Rear 126 Birchfield Rd	2	2	Brownfield
8220	0	0.01	71a Albert Rd Widnes	2	2	Brownfield

Hale Road (Completions)

Site Ref	Sub Ref	Area (HA)	Site Name	Total Capacity	New Build	Remaining Capacity
8156	1	0.39	Nazareth House St Michael	15	15	0

Hale Road (Availability)

Site Ref	Sub Ref	Area (HA)	Site Name	Total Capacity	Remaining	Land State
8117	0	0.64	61 Ditchfield Road	25	13	Brownfield
8156	0	1.81	Nazareth Hse,St Michaels	56	3	Brownfield
8156	2	0.44	Nazareth Hse St Michaels	50	50	Brownfield
8192	0	0.12	56 Blundell RD Widnes	8	8	Brownfield
8117	0	0.64	61 Ditchfield Road	25	13	Brownfield

Stenhills (Completions)

Site Ref	Sub Ref	Area (HA)	Site Name	Total Capacity	New Build	Remaining Capacity
8108	0	0.04	Cambridge Street rear of	2	2	0

Stenhills (Availability)

Site Ref	Sub Ref	Area (HA)	Site Name	Total Capacity	Remaining	Land State
938	0	0.06	Trinity Street	9	9	Brownfield
8010	0	0.064	Wicksten Drive	3	3	Brownfield
8093	1	0.13	Edgerton Arms Irwell St	23	23	Brownfield
8140	0	0.09	132 134 Halton Road Runco	2	2	Brownfield
8182	0	0.01	Jnc Sewell St/Picton Ave	1	1	Brownfield
8189	0	0.07	York Place Runcorn	2	2	Brownfield
8207	0	0.06	Adj 54 Bold Street Runcor	4	4	Brownfield
8208	0	0.84	Daresbury expresway/bridg	1	1	Brownfield

Source: Housing Baseline Report (2007), Halton Borough Council