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## **RURAL COMMUNITIES HIT HARDEST BY POST OFFICE CLOSURES**

The closure of rural post offices will have a crippling social and economic impact on rural communities, according to Sparse, the coalition of over 80 of England's most rural local authorities.

SPARSE, along with its sister group, the Rural Services Partnership (RSP), has set out its position in a response to the Department of Trade and Industry's consultation document, "The Post Office Network". The response details how rural closures have a damaging effect on other local businesses and services, which rely on the post office aspect of their business to survive. As a result of the planned closures, remote areas may, for instance, face losing both their post office and their local shop.

Graham Biggs, Chief Officer for SPARSE and the RSP commented:

"The Government has repeatedly promised to secure and maintain strong and sustainable rural communities. What we see proposed in this consultation is a wide range of closures which will hit rural areas disproportionately hard.

"The Access Criteria proposed in the consultation is wrong for rural areas. Simply looking at how far people live from another post office if their local one shuts might work in urban areas, but not in rural ones. The impact of rural closures is much more extreme. There is no reason why residents in remote rural areas should be expected to accept poorer access to post office services than those in urban areas.

"The DTI should focus its attention on other factors when considering closures. Before any closures are announced, it is essential that a full Community Impact Assessment has been carried out. Demographics, availability of public transport, actual traveling time, and the social and economic impact of closures are all vital factors.

"This proposal is unfair and does not lie comfortably with the Government's social justice objective that no one should be disadvantaged because of where they live.

"We hope voluntarily closures will be sought before compulsory ones, and that the programme is dealt with sensitively.

"Where closures are unavoidable, all options to relocate the service to another location in that rural area should be explored, and that everything possibly is done to minimize the impact of closures on communities which depend on the services post office provide".

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Notes to editors:

1. The consultation process ended on 8<sup>th</sup> March 2007.
2. For further information, please contact Toby Craig on 020 7067 0447.