

Message

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Subject: Baroness Neville-Rolfe visit
Attachments: WP_20150605_002.jpg

I thought it would be helpful to let you know how BNR's visit to Penzance Road branch in Ipswich went this afternoon.

It was an informal, non-official visit. She was in the area (speaking at a business lunch with local MP Ben Gummer). She was accompanied by her husband [GRO]. They stayed for about 40 minutes.

The branch is a successful Main, having converted in September 2014.

Kevin and the postmaster, [GRO] led the discussions. We also ensured that she spent time behind the counter chatting to staff.

Her retail background was clear. She was interested in the relationship between PO turnover and retail turnover. She was also keen to talk to Shan about his retail offer. She drew parallels between our crown, main and local categories and Tesco's full offer - Tesco's Local - One Stop divisions. (There was a One Stop in the parade of shops which she noticed.)

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There was discussion about opening hours and how the models worked. This particular Main is an anomaly as the opening hours are not significantly longer than core hours. But she seemed impressed that it was open on a Saturday.

She understood the competitive threat and asked why we couldn't "consolidate" the area's smaller, less successful, PO branches into this one. We reminded her about convenience - earlier she had remarked how great it was that customers could collect parcels from the branch "much better than DHL where you have to drive for miles".

She asked about the investment in the branch and who'd carried out the work. Kevin explained why we'd invested more in this branch due to the potential for growth and the extent of the physical alterations required.

[GRO] said his biggest concern was declining government services income, and the fact he can't offer Passport Check and Send (Kevin explained the rationale for the latter).

[GRO] was very complementary about the sales training he and his team had received, and how it helped him grow his business. This seemed to land well.

BNR asked [GRO] about Horizon, and made a point of asking other staff about their experience using it when behind the counter. All emphasised ease of use and levels of security - there couldn't have been better advocates for the integrity of Horizon, or for the Post Office generally.

I would say that she's using her Tesco experience as an intellectual benchmark against which she's getting her head around the PO, rather than as some kind of blueprint (she's more switched on than that). When she was behind the counter she noticed some of the older, more vulnerable customers and the excellent service they received.

She is interested in visiting other branches to broaden the picture. Her husband told me their nearest branch in London is Westminster Bridge Road. They also mentioned Tisbury PO in Wiltshire, where they must live (Neville-Rolfe's full title is Baroness of Chilmark in the County of Wiltshire and he is on the Chilmark Parish Council). So we could look at some branches in that area.

I hope this is a helpful steer as we prepare for next week.

Best wishes

Jane