

CONSERVATIVE AND INDEPENDENT GROUP AMENDMENT (Track Changes)

b) High Street Bank Closures and Financial Inclusion in East Cambridgeshire

Council notes that:

• There has been a sustained withdrawal of high street banking services across East Cambridgeshire, leaving ~~many communities~~ communities such as Soham, Littleport and Burwell without access to in-person ~~financial services~~ bank branches, and Ely with reduced access.

- Barclays operates a banking hub from the Lighthouse Centre in Ely on Tuesdays to Fridays, which offers:

- o Power of attorney assistance
- o Fraud and scams advice
- o Payments and transfers
- o Digital banking help
- o Bereavement assistance
- o Money management

• Recent and historic bank branch closures in the district include:

- o NatWest – Ely (17 Market Street), closed September 2025
- o Barclays – Ely (28 High Street), closed April 2024
- o HSBC – Ely (11 High Street), closed July 2020
- o Barclays – Burwell (High Street), closed 2016
- o Barclays – Littleport (Main Street), closed 2014/15

• These closures mean that many residents and businesses now have no access to a local bank branch and must travel outside the district.

• While the Post Office network provides “everyday banking” services under the current Banking Framework (2026–2030), including cash withdrawals, deposits, and balance checks, these services are limited in scope and do not replace full banking provision, such as:

- Post Office services do not provide:
 - o Dedicated financial advice;
 - o In-depth fraud and safeguarding support;
 - o Full business banking services;
 - o Reliable capacity for larger or more complex transactions (e.g. cash

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~~deposit limits and branch constraints):~~

~~• Banking hubs, coordinated by LINK, are expanding nationally but:~~

~~o Are currently limited in number;~~

~~o Are primarily triggered by “access to cash” assessments;~~

~~o Require strict criteria such as population thresholds, business density, and absence of any remaining bank branch:~~

Council further notes that:

~~• The current regulatory system places significant weight on access to cash, rather than the full range of banking needs, including advice, support, and relationship banking, which are particularly needed by small businesses and charities~~

~~• Digital banking is not a universal solution. Many residents are **digitally** excluded, including:~~

~~o Older people;~~

~~o Residents with disabilities;~~

~~o Those on low incomes;~~

~~o Rural communities with poor broadband or mobile connectivity, at risk of digital exclusion, especially older people, those with disabilities, those on low incomes or those living in rural areas.~~

~~• The impact of closures is compounded in rural areas, where:~~

~~o Public transport is limited;~~

~~o Distances to alternative branches are greater;~~

~~o Physical barriers further restrict access:~~

~~• Small and independent businesses rely on in-person banking for:~~

~~o Cash deposits and coin supply;~~

~~o Relationship banking and lending discussions;~~

~~o Day-to-day financial management:~~

~~- Over the past two years, the Council has delivered a digital inclusion programme aimed at digitally isolated residents, providing them with the skills, confidence, and access to use digital devices and online services safely and effectively.~~

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Council believes that:

~~Access to in-person banking is a vital component of financial inclusion, not simply a matter of cash access:~~

~~• The current national framework underestimates the importance of:~~

~~o Face-to-face advice;~~

~~o Fraud prevention and safeguarding;~~

~~o Support for digitally excluded residents:~~

~~• Rural districts such as East Cambridgeshire face structural disadvantages under current banking hub criteria, including population thresholds and reliance on standardised metrics:~~

~~• Post Offices play an important role but are not a substitute for full banking services and are themselves under threat.~~

Therefore, Council resolves to:

- 1- Call for Government Action

~~• Write to HM Government, including the Chancellor of the Exchequer, calling for:~~

~~o A broader definition of banking access beyond “cash access”;~~

~~o Reform of banking hub criteria to include:~~

~~o Digital exclusion;~~

~~o Rurality and transport limitations;~~

~~o Wider service needs such as advice and business banking;~~

~~o Stronger regulatory protections to prevent the loss of the last bank branch in a community.~~

- 2- Instruct the Leader of the Council to write to our MP to ask what more can be done nationally to support the continuation and improvement of the work carried out by LINK, who assess local need for in-person banking hubs, and Cash Access UK Ltd., who are responsible for providing the current banking hubs, including how access to hubs can

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be widened to communities that have already lost banking services. Engage with the Banking Sector

◆ Write to major banks operating in the UK to:

○ Highlight the cumulative impact of closures in East Cambridgeshire;

○ Request consideration of:

□ Shared banking facilities;

□ Mobile banking services;

□ Increased outreach and community banker provision.

- 3: Tackle Digital Exclusion Locally

◆ Expand council and partner initiatives to:

○ Improve digital skills and confidence;

○ Increase access to devices and connectivity;

○ Provide assisted digital support through council facilities such as

libraries and community hubs. Continue to support digital inclusion through the Council's activities and resident advice services.

- Encourage and support community hubs in the district to apply for Connecting Cambridgeshire's Digital Hub grant scheme

- 4: Request that the Council's economic development service communicates with local businesses, business groups and charities to assess the impact of closures, and encourage the relevant private sector bodies to continue in-person banking provision in East Cambridgeshire.

Support Residents, Local Businesses and Charities

◆ Work with local business groups to:

○ Assess the economic impact of closures;

○ Identify specific banking needs of SMEs.

◆ Work with local charities to:

○ Identify specific banking needs of charities;

◆ Provide clear guidance to residents on available services, including Post

Office provision, while acknowledging their limitations.

5. Monitor and Report

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- ◆ Request a report to Full Council within 6 months setting out:
 - Progress on engagement with Government and banks;
 - Opportunities for banking hubs or alternative provision;
 - Further recommendations to improve financial inclusion.

Amendment Proposer: Cllr Lucius Vellacott (Soham South and Wicken)

Amendment Seconder: Cllr Anna Bailey (Downham Villages)

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b) High Street Bank Closures and Financial Inclusion in East Cambridgeshire

CONSERVATIVE AND INDEPENDENT GROUP AMENDMENT – Net Effect Following Track Changes

Council notes that:

- There has been a sustained withdrawal of high street banking services across East Cambridgeshire, leaving communities such as Soham, Littleport and Burwell without access to in-person bank branches, and Ely with reduced access.
- Barclays operates a banking hub from the Lighthouse Centre in Ely on Tuesdays to Fridays, which offers:
 - o Power of attorney assistance
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 - o Money management
- While the Post Office network provides “everyday banking” services under the current Banking Framework (2026–2030), including cash withdrawals, deposits, and balance checks, these services are limited in scope and do not replace full banking provision, such as advice, support and relationship banking, which are particularly needed by small businesses and charities
- Digital banking is not a universal solution. Many residents are at risk of digital exclusion, especially older people, those with disabilities, those on low incomes or those living in rural areas.
- Over the past two years, the Council has delivered a digital inclusion programme aimed at digitally isolated residents, providing them with the skills, confidence, and access to use digital devices and online services safely and effectively.

Council believes that access to in-person banking is a vital component of financial inclusion.

Therefore, Council resolves to:

- Instruct the Leader of the Council to write to our MP to ask what more can be done nationally to support the continuation and improvement of the work carried out by LINK, who assess local need for in-person banking hubs, and Cash Access UK Ltd., who are responsible for providing the current banking hubs, including how access to hubs can be widened to communities that have already lost banking services.
- Continue to support digital inclusion through the Council’s activities and resident advice services.

- Encourage and support community hubs in the district to apply for Connecting Cambridgeshire's Digital Hub grant scheme
- Request that the Council's economic development service communicates with local businesses, business groups and charities to assess the impact of closures, and encourage the relevant private sector bodies to continue in-person banking provision in East Cambridgeshire.

Amendment Proposer: Cllr Lucius Vellacott (Soham South and Wicken)

Amendment Seconder: Cllr Anna Bailey (Downham Villages)