

# UPPINGHAM FIRST Community Partnership

**Chair: Robert Wills Vice Chair: Edward Baines Secretary/Treasurer: Ron Simpson BEM**

The Right Honourable Theresa May MP, 10 Downing Street, London

25.2.2019

**Copies to:** The Clerk to the House of Lords Select Committee on the Rural Economy  
The Right Honourable Sir Alan Duncan KCMG, Member of Parliament for Rutland and Melton  
Mr Kenneth Bool, Chairman of Rutland County Council

Dear Prime Minister,

## **Uppingham in Rutland - Loss of the Last Bank in Town - Barclays**

Following a very well attended public meeting of the Uppingham community at its Neighbourhood Forum on January 31<sup>st</sup> 2019 and subsequent meetings of the Uppingham Business Forum and Uppingham Town Council, I write on behalf of the community to you, as Prime Minister, to seek the support of you and your government in addressing the complete failure of the 'last bank in town' protocol agreed some years ago with the banking industry.

Until 5 years ago, Uppingham (Population c5000 with 150+ businesses) had two major banks and a General Post Office. HSBC then moved out creating significant difficulties for local businesses, the local council, schools and civil society. Reassured by a belief in the last bank in town protocol, many transferred their personal and business accounts to the local branch of Barclays in High Street West, Uppingham. With its modern layout within a heritage building, close to the town centre, this facility also provides excellent access for the less mobile and those with visual and physical impairments. This last bank in town provides the essential range of local, national and international financial services critical to this area's rural economy of which Uppingham has been the vibrant hub. Now an announcement from Barclays Bank, without any prior consultation, has revealed that the town is to lose its last bank in town from April 2019. This is a critical blow to the town's economy given that our post office building is already a busy place, does not have mobility impaired access and the nearest Barclays branch is a substantial car or bus journey away.

Uppingham has long been a supporter of government policy with regard to place and neighbourhoods. It was a government front runner with the much praised Uppingham Neighbourhood Plan and has followed this up with an acclaimed Town Centre & Business Zones Plan. The latter incorporates economic and social growth targets (including housing) for the coming years. Our famous public school has ambitious development targets linked to China and our primary and secondary academies also have forward looking plans for growth. The town's housing targets are significantly above the minimum required and a new housing trust is currently seeking government acceptance from MHCLG as a registered housing provider, so it may build and let affordable homes for younger people in Rutland.

Private investment is also playing its part here in addressing the government's strategic agenda for skills and economic growth. Our magnificently restored 16<sup>th</sup> century coaching inn and hotel is helping to rejuvenate our market place. Our 100+ independent traders have invested heavily in their galleries, shops and service centres. The Partnership is currently seeking to support their efforts with a bid via Rutland County Council to the Future High Street Fund.

Civil Society and the voluntary sector are strong in Uppingham, with the Police and Crime Commissioner commending its collaborative approach to community safety and well-being. We are advised that the town's Business Forum and Business Board are the envy of many a larger town.

In short, Uppingham has not sat idly by to worry about the changing character of the nation's high streets and town centres, or joined the many vocal communities trying to oppose national house building goals. This town has, with the help of a No 10 Advisor, created a Vanguard Board where developers and landowners sit down with business, education and community colleagues to seek mutual benefit in economic growth. This town is working with fibre broadband company Gigaclear and others to ensure that all new homes are offered up to 1Gb 'fibre to the premise' broadband befitting a next generation rural economy. This town is working with its Unitary County Council to address the perceived infrastructure impact of huge housing growth to our south (at

Corby) and the regeneration of the St Georges military base by the Ministry of Defence (MOD) to the north east of Uppingham.

Our Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) has confirmed that it is impressed with the town's plans and ambitions. Our Town Council has secured the General Power of Competence and is now attracting Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL). Our innovative community partnership has attracted much praise with such initiatives as its free community bus, its elected consultative structures and its promotion of Uppingham around the world with the Uppingham Webcam. This community has invested in itself and sought progress through partnership and self-effort.

On this occasion however, with banking, we need government assistance and intervention. The community recognises its own contribution to the changing face of banking and online trading. It does not wish to be negative about such trends. A financial transaction centre of some kind will, however, be vital to the town's economy and future way of life. Our current Post Office would need substantial investment and possible relocation if it is to attempt to replace an international bank. The good news is that our Post Office team are willing to welcome change.

The community therefore seeks your help to:-

1. Secure a high level round table meeting with Barclays Bank, the relevant Ministry and the Post Office with a view to exploring how all parties might collaborate to ensure a strong and secure financial facility survives to serve the present and future needs of this wonderful market town
2. Explore what other collaborative resources are available to help the town move forward with regard to financial sustainability. For example, is government help available to establish a Rutland Community Bank or Credit Union?
3. Explore how the town might help serve the needs of other communities facing similar challenges, perhaps by supporting a government approved conference with the objective of examining the alternative ways forward for small market towns like Uppingham.

Prime Minister we need your help. We recognise and understand your preoccupation with Brexit and its implications for the country. However, the issue of vanishing small town banks is equally urgent. Time is of the essence. Please help us at this difficult juncture in our town's history.

Most respectfully yours

Robert Wills

Chairman - Uppingham First

**Uppingham First** is the award winning 'all sector' elected Community Partnership for the market town of Uppingham in Rutland and its rural hinterland. It brings together the voices of community, business and statutory sector forums in the area. It incorporated as a limited company in January 2009. The objects for which the company was established are, "To protect and promote the interests of Uppingham Town and its rural hinterland helping to sustain their vitality and economic viability ensuring they remain an attractive place to live work and play." The Partnership comprises a board of thirteen directors made up from the three sectors recognised by central government, these being business, the state sector and the third/voluntary/civil society sector. Uppingham First is recognised by Rutland County Council and is active within the county's Local Strategic Partnership, Rutland Together and the commercial area of the former Greater Cambridge Greater Peterborough Local Enterprise Partnership. The Uppingham First Community Partnership is a member of Locality, Revive and Thrive and the Community Transport Association. It is chaired by international businessman Robert Wills. Uppingham First led the very successful Uppingham Neighbourhood Plan, a government front runner and the town has reached the top five in the Great British High Streets Awards. The Partnership was also instrumental in the establishment of a, currently expanding, Gigaclear FTTP broadband network in Uppingham.

**Unless otherwise requested please direct all correspondence to The Secretary, 7 Hawthorn Drive, Uppingham, Rutland LE15 9TA**

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**Company Limited by Guarantee: No:** 6788282 **Registered Office:** The Falcon Hotel, Uppingham, Rutland LE15 9PY **VAT Reg. No:** 996401391  
**Tel:** 01572 495050 **Mobile:** 07710 328469 **E-mail:** [rons@clara.net](mailto:rons@clara.net)

