



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

Damian Hinds MP
Minister of State
Department for Work and Pensions
Caxton House
Tothill Street
London
SW1H 9DA

6 February 2017

Dear Damian

Proposed closure of Goldthorpe Jobcentre, Rotherham

Thank you for your 26 January letter about your plans to "relocate" the Goldthorpe job centre to Mexborough.

In reality this means a vital local resource could close in a community which badly needs it.

In my Parliamentary Question (WPQ 62453) I asked what criteria were used to select Goldthorpe for closure. You said that the department had "sought ... to merge sites in close proximity." Looking at a map and making decisions based on geography without looking at the community each "site" serves means you risk removing services where they are most needed.

There can be few areas where a local job centre is needed more than Goldthorpe.

Demographics

Goldthorpe is in an area known as the Dearne, also made up of the villages of Bolton-on-Deerne and Thurnscoe, and this is a community with specific, unique and long-term needs. These problems are particularly heightened in the Dearne North ward, where the job centre is located. The Dearne has high levels of long-term illness and unemployment, stemming from the closure of the local mines in the 1980s.

The enclosed sheet provides more detail on the demographics of the area, but in summary:

- The area has a higher than average proportion of workless households and people who are economically inactive
- The area has a higher than average proportion of people claiming working age benefits including JSA and ESA

- If you live in Dearne North, you are **three times** more likely to have a long-term illness or disability
- The claimant count in Dearne North is **more than double** the national average

It was extremely worrying to discover, from your answers to my Parliamentary Questions (WPQ 62454/5) that you have not carried out an equality impact assessment and are “unable to identify” how many disabled, vulnerable claimants use Goldthorpe job centre and would be affected by this closure.

Travel

Your letter says the alternative job centre at Mexborough is 3.3 miles and 22 minutes by public transport from Goldthorpe, but this oversimplifies a journey that would be very difficult for many people, especially those with disabilities.

Most customers attending Goldthorpe job centre live in the Dearne. Travelling by bus from Thurnscoe to the Mexborough job centre, for example, could take nearly an hour at certain times of the day and customers could find themselves having to walk some of the way. At best it is two hours spent travelling, instead of looking for work. At worst, people with a long-term illness or disability simply will not be able to make the trip to Mexborough.

People travelling from Bolton-on-Deerne or Goldthorpe face a half-hour bus ride and a walk.

A one-way bus ticket costs £3.90, a large chunk of your income if you receive JSA and have just £58 a week to live on. It's an expense many people on benefits simply cannot afford. Travelling to other job centres in Barnsley and Doncaster would take longer and be even more difficult.

Bus services are being cut back, and this could make travelling to an alternative job centre yet more difficult, if not impossible, before long. For example, bus service 218, which operates between Barnsley, Goldthorpe, Bolton-on-Deerne and Mexborough, has recently stopped running on Sundays and in the evenings. This service is operated by Stagecoach under contract to South Yorkshire Passenger Transport Executive, which is facing significant budget cuts. The tendered service budget, which funds some journeys such as the 218, is expected to be cut by £400,000 in 2017/18 and by a further £139,000 to £146,000 each year until 2021. I am told by Stagecoach's managing director to “expect to see further reductions to tendered bus services over the next few years.”

Making claimants travel further, especially when public transport cannot be relied upon, increases the risk of sanctions being imposed for being late, even when a delay is outside their control.

Economy

Closing Goldthorpe job centre would also impact the local economy as it will drive people to use other local centres instead, like Mexborough, Barnsley and Doncaster.

The job centre currently brings people into Goldthorpe, which offers good links to other sources of vital support nearby, such as the food bank – which finds many of its most needy are there because of failures or delays in benefit payments – the Salvation Army and Community Shop, which provides affordable food and household basics for people on low incomes.

These points mean the Government should be doing more to help people in Goldthorpe and the Dearne get help and get back to work – not less. So I urge you to reconsider plans to close the job centre.

Questions

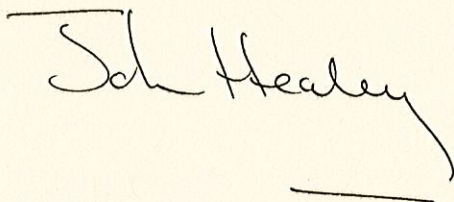
- Your letter said a 'work coach' would be based in a "local community location" on a part-time basis. If this closure goes ahead, where they will be based, for how many hours a week and how many appointments they will offer each week?
- I am concerned by reports that DWP has not carried out an impact assessment of the plan to close job centres across the country. What assessment has been made before the decision?
- Of the people who attend Goldthorpe job centre, how many claimants have received a) JSA b) incapacity benefit c) ESA d) income support e) Universal Credit, in each of the last six years?

Please provide me with your comments, and regard this letter as a response to the consultation.

I would like a meeting to discuss these concerns in more detail, and this can be arranged with my diary manager Jackie Bate (batej@parliament.uk).

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours



JOHN HEALEY MP
(WENTWORTH & DEARNE)

cc Sharon Thorpe, South Yorkshire District Manager

Economic activity

October 2015-September 2016

	Barnsley	Barnsley %	Rotherham	Rotherham %	Wentworth & Dearne	Wentworth & Dearne %	Yorkshire & Humber	GB
Economically active	117,400	75.5	117,300	71.7	48,900	70.6	76.8	77.8
Unemployed	6,700	5.7	8,000	6.9	2,300	4.7	5.6	4.9
Economic inactivity	37,400	34.5	45,300	28.3	20,100	29.4	23.2	22.2
(of which) long-term sick	13,700	36.6	11,400	25.2	6,400	31.9	23.7	22.4
(of which) wants a job	11,700	31.3	10,500	23.2	6,300	31.6	24.5	24.2

Summary:

- In Barnsley, Rotherham and Wentworth & Dearne there are fewer people who are economically active and more people unemployed than in Yorkshire & the Humber and GB.
- In Barnsley borough, 35% of people are economically inactive compared to the national average of 22%.
- Of that 37% of people are economically inactive because they're long-term sick (32% in Wentworth & Dearne) compared to the national average of 22%.
- Of that 31% want a job but can't get one, compared to the national average of 24%.

2011

	Dearne North	Dearne North %	Dearne South	D South %	Barnsley %	England and Wales %
Economically active	4,373	65.7	5,680	72.6	75	76.8
Unemployed	559	12.8	527	9.3	8.7	7.6
Economically inactive	2,282	34.3	2,146	27.4	25	23.2
(of which) long term sick or disabled	890	13.4	764	9.8	7.8	4.6

Summary:

- In Dearne North, 66% are economically active, compared to the England and Wales average of 77%.
- In Dearne North, 13% are unemployed, compared to 7.6% for England and Wales.
- In Dearne North, 34% are economically inactive, compared to 23% for England and Wales.
- Of that, over 13.4% are long-term sick or disabled, which is nearly 3 times the England and Wales average of 4.6%.

Workless households

January-December 2015

	Barnsley	Rotherham	Yorkshire & Humber
Workless households	16,600	16,200	290,700
% of households workless	20.5	19.3	16.6

Summary:

- Barnsley and Rotherham have higher proportions of workless households than Yorkshire and the Humber as a whole.

Working age benefits

May 2016

	Barnsley	Barnsley %	Rotherham	Rotherham %	Wentworth & Dearne	Wentworth & Dearne %	Yorkshire & Humber	GB
Total claimants	25,240	16.8	26,190	16.3	10,830	17.9	13.1	11.5
JSA	2,610	1.7	3,290	2	1,230	2	1.8	1.3
ESA and incapacity benefit	13,740	9.1	13,100	8.1	5,690	9.4	6.7	6.2
Main out of work benefits	18,830	12.5	19,090	11.8	8,000	13.2	10	8.7

Summary:

- Barnsley, Rotherham and Wentworth & Dearne have a higher proportion of people claiming working age benefits than Yorkshire and the Humber and GB.
- Barnsley, Rotherham and Wentworth & Dearne have a higher proportion of JSA claimants than the national average.
- 9.1% of people in Barnsley, and 9.4% of people in Wentworth & Dearne, claim ESA and incapacity benefit, compared to the national average of 6.2%.
- 12.5% of people in Barnsley, and 13.2% of people in Wentworth & Dearne, claim one of the main out of work benefits, compared to the national average of 8.7%.

December 2016

	Dearne North	Dearne North %	Dearne South	Dearne South %	Barnsley	GB
Claimant count	255	3.8	190	2.4	2.1	1.8

Summary:

- The claimant count in Dearne North is more than double the national average.

Source: <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/>