Gloucester Rural Community Council RSSG (Rural Services Support Group)
Meetings 5th June, 9th July and 25th September 2008.

I attended two meetings of the Gloucester Rural Community Council RSSG (Rural Services Support Group,) on behalf of the FSB on 5th June, 9th July and 25th September.

Gloucestershire County Council had received a grant of about £50k to help support village shops in villages which were likely to be adversely affected by Post Office Closures. The RSSG was constituted to advise on how the money should be distributed.

The first meeting was rather chaotic, but the second one, which was the decision-making one, was more professionally done – with actual voting on the proposals! The organisers had retained a retail consultant to visit the shops which had applied for funding (50% from the fund, 50% matched funding from other sources). As it turned out, there were more applicants than there were grants available. The reports were informative and one could make a decision on the basis of them. All the applications were approved 5 by 8 votes to 0. The closes vote was a 4-3 in favour, with two abstentions.

My only criticism of the operation method was that as we had received all the applications by email, most of the work could have been done electronically in advance. That would have saved 3 hours at the meeting. However, in general it worked.

My other criticism has to do with the disposition of the remaining funds. They plan to spend it on a conference about the impact of PO closures and developments there from, employing PR consultants and the like (see attached document). Although I would personally have been interested in attending such a conference, as a representative of the FSB I said that many business people were suspicious of conferences, consultants, facilitators, and other non-productive personnel. The money could have been better spent on training for small businesses e.g. in Excel or other tools (as the FSB committee is doing off its own bat in the Forest).

I attach copies of (a) their budget (b) their conference proposal and (c) the work plan. The agenda was in paper form only so I do not have an electronic version to send you.

Laurie Moseley
29th September 2008