



PARLIAMENT OF NEW SOUTH WALES  
LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

**FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-SIXTH PARLIAMENT**

**Private Members Statement**

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13 March 2018

**NEWCASTLE PERMANENT BUILDING SOCIETY  
BRANCH CLOSURES**

**Ms SONIA HORNER ( Wallsend ) ( 12:15 ):**

I have been contacted by a worried constituent who received a concerning letter from the Newcastle Permanent Building Society. In the letter, "the Perm"—as the building society is known in Newcastle—announced the closure of the Lambton branch and told my constituent that he could continue to bank with it without access to face-to-face, over-the-counter services. Located in the busy Elder Street of Lambton, this bank is the third Newcastle Permanent Building Society branch to be closed in the western suburbs in recent months, following the shuttering of branches at John Hunter Hospital and the University of Newcastle's Callaghan campus.

Elderly, disabled and lower-income people who do their banking with the Newcastle Permanent Building Society—people who may not have the mobility to get to other branches, or the capacity to make use of internet banking services—are being negatively impacted by these closures. Lambton residents and business owners told the Lambton Local magazine that they were aghast at the decision. Bede Jarrett, of local business Jarrett's Quality Meats, told the magazine:

I think it's short sighted of the Perm to leave Lambton. Elder Street is one of the busier local shopping strips around Newcastle and it's a real shame to think our locally grown building society will be walking away.

Mark Brooker, the publisher of the Lambton Local, pointed out that this was the fourth time in two years that the high streets of Lambton and New Lambton "have lost in-branch over-the-counter banking services". Mr Brooker wrote:

I must say I'm tired of writing and publishing the same story over and over again just with the name changed!

In response, the Perm put out a statement blaming the closure on the "evolution of digital and online banking" and on fewer of their members making use of the Lambton branch. Bede Jarrett said, "It looks busy enough when I'm in there." It looks busy when I go there as well. Anyone trying to get their banking done during the afternoon or on a Saturday morning would agree.

While I acknowledge that internet banking is becoming more prevalent, and that it offers a useful service to many in the community, it is not accessible to all. The elderly, in particular, are disadvantaged by this new model. As I have said, this is not the first time the Newcastle Permanent Building Society has closed branches in the western suburbs. It was the only branch at the huge John Hunter campus and many employees, patients and visitors at John Hunter Hospital relied on it. Now, without easy access to banking services and with a lack of internet connectivity at the hospital—which is an issue that I have raised before—some people are starting to feel the pinch.

The closure of the Newcastle Permanent Building Society branch at the University of Newcastle Callaghan Campus affects students, staff and student organisations including clubs and societies, unable to do their banking without travelling to Jesmond or Wallsend. While the Newcastle Permanent Building Society pointed out that there are seven branches within a short distance of Lambton branch, the recent traffic and transport chaos caused by the reorganisation of the Newcastle bus networks has not helped at all—in fact, it has disadvantaged people and inconvenienced them.

The Lambton branch will cease trading this week, on 16 March. I reiterate the message last week from the member for Northern Tablelands and the Minister for Tourism and Major Events, who is facing similar problems of bank and building society branch closures in his electorate. It is not in the best interests of our community. I have written to Newcastle Permanent Building Society asking it to take into account the concerns of local residents and to reconsider this decision.