

Dear Mr Sunak,

Save Britain's Access to Cash

We welcome the Government's commitment to protecting access to cash. As a group of organisations collectively representing hundreds of thousands of small businesses, millions of consumers, and providing thousands of the ATMs which form the backbone of the UK's cash infrastructure, we're concerned the UK is facing an unprecedented access to cash crisis.

The overall number of free-to-use ATMs across the UK has fallen by 23% since 2018, rising to a fall of more than 50% in some areas.

The worst impacts of the crisis have fallen disproportionately on vulnerable and low-income consumers, and those living in rural areas, as access to cash has been hollowed out of communities. Small businesses have also suffered as cash has declined. Cash means that businesses can continue to operate even when digital options fail. Cash also provides competition for other payment methods, keeping transaction fees competitive for small businesses where they may otherwise increase.

Meanwhile, deposit-taking facilities are at an all-time low and are continuing to fall as more bank branches close, harming both consumers and small businesses. This decline of deposit-taking facilities has accelerated the number of businesses going 'cashless', reducing consumers' ability to pay with cash and consequently excluding some people from easily participating in everyday life.

As legislation is developed, we strongly believe the Government must:

1. **Act without delay** to prevent further deterioration of cash infrastructure, introducing interim measures to protect cash access points at pre-pandemic levels and force LINK's bank members to enable ATM deposit taking through the LINK scheme while longer-term regulation is developed.
2. **Protect ATMs** – as the only sustainable national infrastructure that can maintain free access to cash 24/7, re-introducing independent assessment of interchange fees.
3. **Protect key schemes** including LINK and the Post Office framework by making bank membership mandatory.
4. **Include deposit-taking facilities** in the definition of 'reasonable access' and ensure requirements reflect consumers' lived experience as opposed to an arbitrary as-the-crow-flies measurement.

These actions are critical for safeguarding access to cash. As the Government prepares to legislate, you have an opportunity to move beyond the idea of managed decline and ensure both that consumers are not left behind and that cash can continue to play a practical and vibrant role that meets the future needs of the UK's economy.

Failure to act swiftly, putting ATMs at the heart of the solution and boosting deposit-taking facilities risks a self-fulfilling prophesy of decline which will leave consumers worse off.

Signed: