

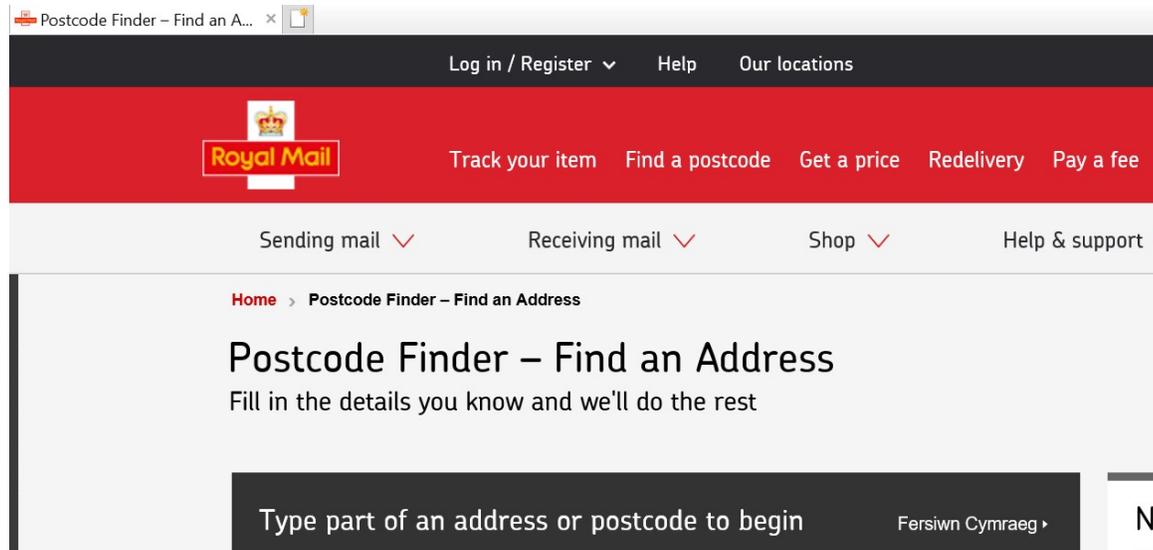
THE USE OF POSTCODES

POSTCODES AND THE POSTCODE ADDRESS FILE, OR PAF

Every house and business in the UK falling under Royal Mail's [Universal Service Obligation](#) has been given a postcode by Royal Mail. Its use enables Royal Mail to deliver items quickly and accurately. The postcode is a sorting and routing instruction to Royal Mail's staff and not always a geographically accurate description of where a property is located. (Royal Mail [Code of Practice](#))

The Postcode Address File, or [PAF](#), is a list of the 28 million delivery points to which mail items are delivered in the UK. It is currently owned and maintained by Royal Mail and is made available to anyone wishing to use it. The Postcode Address File or PAF has around 37,000 end users, many of whom use PAF as part of a larger product, for example, addressing solutions and software ([Ofcom](#)) for billing, utility connections, credit checks, insurance and delivery carriers.

PAF: screenshot¹



ADDRESS AND POSTCODE CREATION: STAGES

Local Authorities are responsible through their statutory street naming and numbering function for allocating house numbers and road names to new developments and property conversions. Individuals and developers must not allocate their own house numbers, building or street names.

- When a Local Authority creates new property numbers and road names, new address documents are sent to Royal Mail's Address Management Unit who then allocate postcodes.
- After Royal Mail's Address Management Unit allocates a postcode, they add the new postal address into the Not Yet Built file (NYB).
- Only when a new property is built, occupied and can receive mail will Royal Mail update the address from the 'Not Yet Built' file to the [Postcode Address file \(PAF\)](#).
- However, all government departments including the emergency services, MoJ for the electoral register, DVLA, TV licensing, HMRC etc use Address Base products based on the NLPG, not the PAF. This also applies to many insurance companies and utility companies. Therefore the postcode may not be as crucial as may seem for these agencies.
- All addresses consist of more than just a postcode. Royal Mail will allocate the same postcode to a maximum of 99 properties. Therefore a postcode by itself cannot identify an individual property. To do this you need the granularity of house numbers and street names information which is created by local authorities (not Royal Mail). Many local authorities overcome postcode problems by configuring their address look up functions to search on more than just a postcode e.g. <https://apps.wigan.gov.uk/LandlordsPropertySearch/>

¹ <https://www.royalmail.com/find-a-postcode>

The address lifecycle

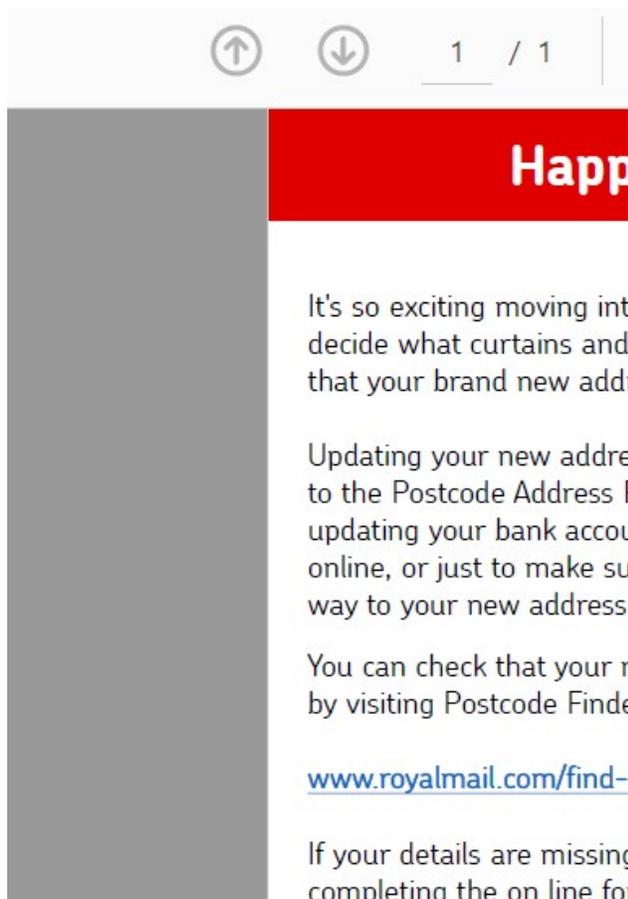
The address lifecycle was produced by Ordnance Survey at the launch of the PSMA and Address Base products¹ and they gave permission for it to be published and shared in any local authority reports or publications that relates to statutory service provision:



How to move an address from NYB to PAF?

See Royal Mail's [information sheet](#) on how to update an address from NYB to PAF.

Royal Mail information sheet (screenshot)²



² https://www.poweredbypaf.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/New_home_flyer_v0.2_KK_updated.pdf

ISSUES WITH POSTCODES ON NEW DEVELOPMENTS

A small survey was run between May and June 2019 locally; with housing association development officers and operations managers and related local authority officers, to identify local issues around postcode allocation and activation.

The aim was to gather information about times when late allocation or publication of postcodes on new housing development sites, had affected the respondent, their team or organisation, or customers / residents.

SUMMARY OF SMALL SURVEY OF LOCAL EXPERIENCES

Only 6 responses were received and three of these were fairly limited. However the three more fulsome responses add some examples of where late allocation or publication of postcodes has occurred, and some of the implications. Table x sets out the responses (in short).

Issues highlighted in survey	Possible cause of the issue
<p>A Cambridge City officer was aware of issues not strictly around postcodes but a new development at Eddington in Cambridge was not appearing on Google maps. This affected the officer others in her organisation and new housing residents. It meant people couldn't get post delivered and couldn't find the community centre. There was an incident where ambulance couldn't find the flat though this was resolved (though it took about a year).</p>	<p>Not appearing on Google maps does not prevent or stop post deliveries or an ambulance finding a property.</p> <p>It could however cause inconvenience to the public finding the properties.</p> <p>Don't think this is a Royal Mail NYB to PAF timing issue</p>
<p>Another Cambridge City officer was aware that although postcodes were issued on time in Southern Fringe they were not recognised within children / young peoples' services at Cambridgeshire County Council. This affected the officers' colleagues and customers on the Southern Fringe / Trumpington Cambridge and Eddington in North West Cambridge sites. The officer summarised the issues as follows:</p> <p>Southern Fringe / Trumpington Meadows Cambridge: County council systems had a lag in updating postcodes or failed to recognise new ones- meaning people couldn't register for children centre services. This affected the data the centre collated and affected how their budget was allocated based on number of homes in an area. This impacted the services being delivered and mapping of need. Residents reported issues with furniture / appliance deliveries etc as the company could not find their property on a map and their systems did not recognise the postcodes.</p> <p>Ongoing issues with companies relying on Google maps - which is not updated with new developments and could be up to 18 months out of date; experienced on all new developments.</p> <p>In Phase 1 (2012-2014) of Southern Fringe, many residents reported issues with not being able to choose their supplier for phone and broadband services, as many providers would not provide a service in the new development / postcode area; unclear as to reason for this. It took about 3 years or so until issues with choice of service providers for broadband/phone/t.v. services.</p>	<p>This seems to highlight issues with</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • updating internal Council systems • Google and • a Royal Mail NYB to PAF timing issue
<p>An officer at Flagship housing was not aware of any specific problems with this area but suggested postcode activation might affect BT. Here experience was of a site in Norfolk some time ago, in Wymondham with Persimmon Homes. BT could not connect any tenants as their postcodes were not registered. Think the problem lasted about a month.</p>	<p>Seems to be a Royal Mail NYB to PAF timing issue</p>
<p>Another Flagship officer was aware of these issues, mainly affecting customers / residents at Red Lodge; a Crest Nicholson site. This meant that customers struggled to set up their utility bills and lasted for between 2 and 4 weeks.</p>	<p>Seems to be a Royal Mail NYB to PAF timing issue</p>

Summary of the issues highlighted and their causes:

- The most common issues seem to relate to the timing of Royal Mail moving homes from NYB to PAF. This is not an uncommon issue and a new product is being devised (see below) to help overcome it.
- Not appearing on Google maps does not prevent or stop post deliveries or an ambulance finding a property. It could however cause inconvenience to the public finding the properties. As Google maps is a third party, it is not easy to see how our project can influence the speed of updating Google maps, without compromising or detracting from the Royal Mail process which is the requirement under the Public Sector Mapping Agreementⁱ which districts have signed up to.
- There may be other issues around updating Council systems particularly the link between district and county teams.
- Two main issues with postcodes on new developments:
 - Third party organisations who rely solely on PAF data and specifically the postcode field to drive their systems and processes. Some of these organisations will not buy Royal Mail's NYB file and will only take monthly updates of the PAF. However addresses change and update on a daily basis. There is nothing we can do to overcome the problems created by third party organisations who do not take regular and updated feeds of PAF data.
 - There is an increasing belief and reliance that Google maps is the definitive source of everything! In today's here and now society our younger generation find it hard to comprehend when properties, streets and addresses are not available on Google maps. This is particular prevalent for delivery couriers and taxi driver whose use their smart phone for navigation purposes. Google is a third party organisation (albeit a rather large one) that refuses to enter into any agreement with local government or Royal Mail for the supply of any accurate address or postcode data. Instead they rely on third party organisations to supply them second hand data. This obviously causes time delays and inaccuracies in Google maps. At this time there is nothing we can do to overcome the problems with Google.
- Royal Mail recognise that they have a timing issue on moving new addresses from their NYB file to PAF and why they have produced the recent 'New Homes' flyer. Street naming and numbering (SNN) departments should start sending out this flyer to developers with the SNN documents. Many developers are completely oblivious to Royal Mail's NYB to PAF process and we should help them to help themselves by reporting completed new builds direct to Royal Mail.

National changes

- There will be a new SNN code of practice due to be realised by GeoPlace in the next 12 months which will advise against consulting with Royal Mail on street naming and numbering. This simply slows down the process.
- There is discussion on how Address Data could be made more readily and freely available to improve UK addressing and overcome the postcode problems. Within 6 months a new address product called "Address Base Core" will be made available to UK PLC at a realistic reduced price. This will (briefly) be a copy of PAF plus all non-postally addressable properties together with coordinates - all sourced from our LLPGs. It's anticipated that many organisations will switch from PAF to this new product. Some 6 months after this, a web based version should be available online to compete with Royal Mail's postcode finder.

Summary of process and some suggestions to improve



Notes:

LLPG: Local Land Property Gazetteer

NLPG: National Land Property Gazetteer

You can find out more about both using Wikipedia, here https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Local_Land_and_Property_Gazetteer

With many thanks to

- David Heyes, Address Manager, Growth and Housing, Wigan Councilⁱⁱ.
- Seamus Doherty, Development Project Manager at CHS.
- Nick Milne, Construction Monitoring Officer, Cambridge City Council.

Next steps (notes to self!):

- Send note back to Dave to see if any further changes needed, have I understood his comments correctly? **AWAITING DAVE'S COMMENTS**
- Add to RP forum agenda, copy this note to members, and LAs; discuss if they might adopt the steps suggested etc.
- Ensure all SNN teams have access to the new Royal Mail flyer.
- Promote activation of postcodes by developers on all new sites (and related teams).

Sue Beecroft, 19th September 2019.

ⁱ What are PSMA and Address Base products?

The Public Sector Mapping Agreement (PSMA) is a collective agreement between OS and the government. Its licence lets you access and share OS digital mapping. This helps you make better decisions to save money and boost efficiency. From central government departments to town and parish councils and from the emergency services to NHS Trusts, nearly every public sector organisation in England and Wales can become a member of the PSMA and experience the benefits of using OS digital map products.

From <https://www.ordnancesurvey.co.uk/business-and-government/public-sector/mapping-agreements/public-sector-mapping-agreement.html>

ⁱⁱ A note about David's background and assistance:

For the last 11 years I have been Local Governments representative on the PAF Advisory Board which provides independent advice to the Address Management Unit of Royal Mail on behalf of PAF users <https://www.pafboard.org.uk/about/> In April this year I stepped down from the Board as part of a scaling back of my duties in advance of early retirement next year.

I can confirm though that the Board constantly sought improvements from AMU on the timeliness and accuracy on updating addresses on new housing estates from their Not Yet Built (NYB) file to their full Postcode Address File (PAF). If you look through the board's minutes you can see it was constant agenda item. Whilst AMU have made improvements to their processes the timeliness of updates is still far from ideal for many occupiers of our new build properties.

That said rather than attribute blame to the AMU the solution to this problem rests with understanding the whole process and identifying who can do what when to ensure that Royal Mail update an address from NYB to PAF in advance of our citizens moving into their new build properties. There are processes that can be followed by a variety of organisations and/or individuals that can prevent postcode problems occurring. These processes have yet to be clearly documented in the new SNN Code of Practice and are too complex to put into this email response. However I'm happy to discuss these over a phone call/conference or we can ask GeoPlace to facilitate a meeting to discuss further.