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22 July 2022

Passenger Transport Department  
Hampshire County Council  
Winchester  
Hampshire.

By email to: [passenger.transport.consultation@hants.gov.uk](mailto:passenger.transport.consultation@hants.gov.uk)

Dear Sir / Madam

### **HCC Consultation on proposed changes to supported passenger transport services (July 2022)**

Buriton Parish Council is pleased to have been consulted on these potential changes and provides the following comments, focusing primarily on 'Proposal One: To make operational changes to the current public bus and community transport services which the County Council supports'.

The Parish Council submitted comments on the County Council's BSIP consultation in October 2021, noting that there was very little for rural parishes in many of the 10 Commitments. Most of the Commitments seemed to be for busy corridors, areas with more than one operator etc.

It is hoped that this current consultation will give special attention and consideration to the increasing needs of rural villages including Buriton.

However, we are not sure how many existing bus users will respond to the survey as the 22-page questionnaire format may be daunting for many and we are not sure whether there has been adequate mention of the consultation directly to bus users on our local service.

### **Service 94: Buriton to Petersfield**

The Parish Council is particularly interested in Service 94 (Buriton to Petersfield) which is considered to be a very valuable service, catering for thousands of passenger journeys each year and being widely appreciated. It is a lifeline for many.

It is not clear from the consultation exercise whether or not the County Council has any demographic information about existing passengers (eg. age profiles, socio-economic circumstances, car ownership etc) or trip purpose data (medical journeys, school, work, shopping etc).

- such data would reveal that Service 94 caters for the full range of demographic users: from the young, through teenagers and families to the more elderly, including those in their 70s, 80s and 90s
- although passenger figures have declined since the outbreak of Covid it is not surprising that there is still some reluctance to use buses as frequently as in the past (with high levels of the virus still



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circulating within the wider community); but passenger confidence will increase with the passage of time and buses will remain vital to our community

- there are also a number of partially sighted people and younger people with special needs in this community for whom the bus service provides a great sense of independence; and there is at least one Carer who uses the bus service regularly to travel with her clients
- with reductions in the 94 service in previous years (including the re-timings of journeys) some villagers have already had to resort to walking all the way along Greenway Lane to use Service 37 at Buriton crossroads (a walk which is not very safe) whilst others now travel less than they would wish
- walking all the way to the roundabout at the end of Greenway Lane to try to catch the 37 service (and walking back with heavy shopping bags etc) is not really an option for everyone because it is a dangerous road with a number of blind bends and a blind hump bridge over the railway line. How would young mums with young children manage etc?
- there is a relatively high proportion of Housing Association 'affordable' homes in the village (25% of the dwellings in the village; 18% of the parish) with associated levels of relatively low car ownership and low car availability. These are amongst the most extreme figures in East Hampshire District. This adds weight to the need to retain a daily and frequent bus service to / from the village as there are many people here who cannot drive or who do not have cars. Without the bus they would not otherwise be able to get into Petersfield for employment, shopping, medical appointments or social events
- more 'affordable homes' are being built in the village at the moment (part of an allocation in the South Downs Local Plan) – based on the fact that there is a bus service here. To change the bus service at this stage in the planning process would be irresponsible
- with the high costs of taxi journeys to or from Petersfield, many residents cannot afford to use taxis and the community's voluntary 'Neighbourcare' system is already stretched providing other services (the thought of having to handle any extra journeys is completely impracticable). It is felt that keeping the existing bus service between the village and Petersfield is vital
- there is a risk of unforeseen extra costs (in Social Services Departments) as a consequence of relatively minor savings to the public transport budget: studies show that loneliness, a sense of isolation and a loss of independence lead to ill health and mental decline. Were the County Council to reduce the Buriton bus service it would run the risk of simply making savings in one Department (Transport & Environment) whilst increasing expenditure (and pressures) on another part of the public purse (Social Care) – as well as adversely affecting people's lives
- with increasing numbers of elderly people, living to older ages, this would not be a sustainable position for the County Council to adopt: far better to enable elderly people to live independent lives by providing public transport services ...
- parishioners have told us: "The days are long when you are on your own. You get 'down'. It is good to be able to go out when you want to – to go to lunch clubs or other groups in Petersfield and to be able to meet with others for cups of coffee and to put the world to rights ..."
- at some point in their lives, elderly people lose their confidence to drive – but are, otherwise, still independent. The regular weekday bus service is their lifeline to get out, to look after themselves and to enjoy meeting other people...
- such people in Buriton are already 'stranded' at weekends with no bus service to help them get anywhere at all; this should not be extended to other days of the week, and the Parish Council can see at least one way of getting a service re-instated at the weekend
- most elderly people in this parish are not internet shoppers, they are not even internet users or computer owners. Nor are many of them users of smart-phones and Apps. To expect this age group to change their ways at this stage of their life is unrealistic and could lead to more depression and isolation



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- some people fear that they have to move away from the village (and all their friends) in order to be able to access basic services such as shops, doctors, opticians and dentists etc.
- the usage of public transport by visitors to the area does not seem to feature in the survey at all and we wonder how HCC will be assessing this. This area is part of the South Downs National Park with many visitors who arrive by train and use local buses to help with walks in the countryside, visits to local attractions, pubs etc. Petersfield is a vital hub in this regard and buses out to nearby villages should be retained to help the local economy and to minimise extra traffic along country lanes. It would not be appropriate for the County Council to simply ignore or overlook this aspect of public transport services
- Buriton is the closest village to the South Downs Way and walkers enquire in the pubs almost every day about bus services, especially at weekends
- both our local pubs benefit from customers who use the bus service into and / or out of the village, in combination with healthy recreational walking in the area. Reductions in bus services could adversely affect their trading positions at a time when many village pubs are closing
- employees in our village pubs use the bus service – and prospective employees in the future may need to do so. To reduce the bus service in any way could add more problems for these local businesses and for local employment
- the bus service also provides economic benefits to shops and facilities in Petersfield by bringing in their customers. Cuts could affect businesses adversely: on-line shopping may be possible at Waitrose or Tesco, but not for most independent shops or market traders. Cuts in bus services can have wide ramifications about which the County Council needs to think very carefully
- links to rail stations are also important for local people – particularly if the County Council is serious about reducing car use. But, for a number of years, there has been no real attempt to time bus journeys to connect with train times (and there is no bus back to Buriton late enough to meet any of the commuter trains). So, inevitably, very few train users see the bus as a way of avoiding using their cars to get to or from the railway station. But that could be changed
- by failing to consider any commercial services in this consultation exercise the County Council appears to be missing any opportunities of making relatively small subsidy payments to the operators of profitable bus routes in return for short route-change diversions
- at some time in the future, for example, diverting a selection of journeys on the no. 37 service into the village could be a cost-effective option: it could improve the range of timings (so that more people could use a bus to get to / from work or school), it would offer a range of destinations including Waterlooville, Havant etc (which could attract more passenger journeys) and it could offer a service at weekends (for the scores of people walking to / from the village on the South Downs Way, Hangers Way and Shipwrights Way as well as other footpaths)
- the Parish Council is disappointed with the County Council's encouragement of a spiral of decline in public transport services: looking to cut some journeys which then make services less convenient for remaining users who therefore use buses less, so that HCC then says that usage is falling and so financial support must be cut further until it reaches the stage where the service is cut entirely
- the County Council should do more to publicise and promote bus services, including timing journeys so that they are more suitable and asking people what might persuade them to leave their cars at home and use public transport. As a matter of public policy the County Council should be encouraging people out of their cars and on to public transport instead of over-seeing its gradual decline and removal
- the Parish Council feels very strongly that the present Buriton bus service should be maintained and that serious attempts are made to make it more usable and convenient. The Parish appreciates that, with one bus and one driver, there will be limits to what can be done but even a few small timetable adjustments, along with a County Council mind-set which seeks to build public transport usage may offer a way forward.



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### Additional comments

- Now is the time for local authorities (and the Government) to react to the current cost of living crisis by luring car owners/drivers away from their vehicles and onto public transport by supplying an affordable and timely public transport service
- The Government's Review of National Parks (the Glover Review) concluded that “traffic spoils tranquillity and poor access keeps people who should be able to visit away.” The County Council should, therefore, be including proposals to improve bus services to, from, within and around the South Downs National Park – along with new ideas to publicise and promote these services to residents and visitors. These ideas would assist with the decarbonisation agenda by providing a sustainable alternative to driving for leisure visits to the South Downs National Park – contributing to the County Council’s Climate Emergency actions
- A package of proposals to robustly market, promote and publicise bus services that connect to the South Downs National Park would help to attract new users and encourage a modal shift which, together with the promotion of other sustainable alternatives such as cycling, would help reduce the impact of car congestion and pollution.
- Improved bus services in rural areas would also assist with inclusion and fairness by improving access to employment, education and training for residents.
- There is a particular need in rural areas for more bus services to run at weekends. Not only would these enable sustainable leisure access, they would also provide improved access to employment - especially in the retail, leisure and hospitality sectors where so many jobs require weekend working.
- Provision of weekend bus services on corridors that connect with long distance walking trails such as the Shipwrights Way, Hangers Way and South Downs Way would enable more promotion of linear walks, which make public transport an attractive option.
- County Councils in other National Parks appear to have recognised a number of these opportunities but there is hopefully still time for Hampshire County Council to do so.

We hope that these comments are helpful to you in your deliberations.

Yours sincerely

Petra Norris  
Clerk to Buriton Parish Council