



Buriton Parish Council

c/o Buriton Village Hall, High Street, Buriton, Hampshire, GU31 5RX

E mail - buritonparishcouncil@hotmail.co.uk Tel – 079435360654

To Hampshire County Council

By email: environment.bus.review@hants.gov.uk

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RESPONSE TO HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL CONSULTATION ON PROPOSALS TO CHANGE SUPPORTED PASSENGER TRANSPORT SERVICES

At its meeting on 30th July, Buriton Parish Council considered this matter and resolved to submit the following response to this consultation.

The submission stresses that the Service 94 bus (linking Buriton to Petersfield) is a lifeline for many parishioners – not just the elderly or those in ‘affordable housing’ – but also points out that cutting bus services can have much wider ramifications for the County Council and its residents:

1. the Parish Council feels that the Buriton bus (Service 94) provides a very valuable service, catering for dozens of individual users and is widely appreciated. It is a lifeline for many.
2. we are aware 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
3. there are also a number of blind or partially sighted people in this community and younger people with special needs 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
4. we hope that at least some of the existing users will respond to the questionnaire survey – although we understand that there has been no mention of the consultation directly to bus users on the service and we feel that a 22-page Questionnaire may have been rather daunting for many people
5. we feel that a number of the questions may prove difficult for some respondents to understand properly – and to respond to accurately: hence all the answers may have to be treated carefully. Question 9 asks “How often do you use this bus service” and “Number of times a week”. Many people seem to be interpreting that as “How many days per week do you use this bus service.” Answers may, therefore, need to be doubled to take account of return journeys; Question 10 only allows one purpose but most bus users appear to combine their trip purposes: doing their shopping at some point in their working day; doing their shopping when travelling for doctor’s appointments; adding social or leisure visits (meeting with friends) when travelling for shopping etc. By limiting the answers to this question to one purpose only, there will be a very incomplete picture of the wide range of multiple benefits that bus services provide (and of the losses that could ensue if services were reduced or removed). Businesses in the parish have also pointed out that the questionnaire did not really provide them with an opportunity to make points relevant to them

6. 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. People are, for example, unable to travel to the Saturday market in Petersfield Square – or to the Farmers' Markets on Sundays
7. the Parish Council is slightly surprised that the County Council has no demographic information about current passengers (eg. age profiles, socio-economic circumstances, car ownership etc) or trip purpose data (medical journeys, school, work, shopping etc) for the services for which it has been providing subsidies for many years: just numbers of passengers and where they get on / off
8. 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 the 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
9. more 'affordable homes' are due to be built in the village in the next few years in line with the South Downs Local Plan – based on the fact that there is a bus service here. To change the service at this stage in the planning process would be irresponsible
10. 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 anyone 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?
11. with a taxi journey to or from Petersfield already costing £8 (£16 to travel both ways) many residents cannot afford to use taxis
12. Parish Council discussions with the village Neighbourcare Buriton Chairman (part of the Good Neighbours Network) reveal that their volunteers are already stretched providing other services and that they feel that the thought of having to handle any extra journeys is completely impracticable. They feel that it is vital to keep the existing transport service between the village and Petersfield
13. 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 cut 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
14. 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 ...

15. 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 people for cups of coffee and to put the world to rights ..."
16. at some point in their lives, elderly people lose their confidence to drive – but are, otherwise, still independent. The regular daily bus service is their lifeline to get out, to look after themselves and to enjoy meeting other people...
17. 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
18. 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
19. 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.
20. 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 a 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 and expecting walkers and other visitors to have already pre-booked onto some form of Taxishare or Call-and-Go service is unrealistic
21. 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
22. 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
23. 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
24. 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. It is already impossible to travel by bus to the Saturday Market in Petersfield or to the Farmers' Markets on Sundays. Cuts in bus services can have wide ramifications about which the County Council needs to think very carefully
25. 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

26. 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
27. 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; and for residents to visit the markets in Petersfield)
28. the Parish Council is disappointed with the County Council's encouragement of a spiral of decline in public transport services: cutting 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
29. the County Council should do more to publicise and promote bus services, including retiming 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
30. 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
31. with regard to other parts of the consultation survey the Parish Council would comment as follows:
- the Parish Council is willing to play its part in promoting public transport use, including helping parishioners with printed materials
 - the Parish Council is unsure about the wisdom of reducing the amount of support available to organisations who provide advice and training on community transport ideas and schemes – particularly at a time when the County Council may be hoping for more of these sort of schemes to commence
 - the Parish Council is unsure about the wisdom of removing the use of Older Person's Bus Passes on Taxishare, Dial-a-Ride and Call-&-Go services. This would seem to be geographically iniquitous and unfair (some communities may still have free travel opportunities whilst others nearby may have to pay a significant fare) and we understand that the introduction of this idea on the East Hampshire Tuesday and Wednesday Call-&-Go services led to a 30% decline in passenger numbers as soon as it was introduced. People did not see the 50% concession as a discount, but as a cost which they had never previously had to pay. This appears to have led to yet more elderly people feeling trapped and isolated in their homes, unable to afford to go out and feeling that a world that had promised them free travel towards the end of their lives was letting them down etc.

Yours faithfully,

Clerk to Buriton Parish Council