

Response to West Suffolk Council

Impact of Reduction in Bus Services

Cllr Sarah Broughton, Chair of West Suffolk Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee has written advising that the Committee on 7 November 2024 is considering the topic of rural buses, with the intention of holding a further meeting on Monday 16 December 2024 to consider how service reductions affect the ability of School, Business, Leisure and Health passengers to get to their destination either at all, or on time.

Below is a public link the meeting agenda for the 7 November 2024, setting out the work programme request and scoping documents which provide additional information:

[Agenda details on public web site](#) (see page 57 onwards)

Wickhambrook Parish Council, as one of several parish councils affected by recent changes in the reduction in local transport services, has been invited to submit in writing information setting out its concerns by **Monday 25 November 2024**, to assist the Committee in gathering evidence and to help members to gain a better understanding of the impact being faced by local communities.

A proposed response, based on comments made by local residents at recent parish council meetings (**Minutes 24.07.05; EO.24.08.03** and **24.09.05** – see **Appendix A**) is set out at **Appendix B** to this report.

Action:

Cllrs are asked to review the proposed response and suggest any amendments, or additional information for inclusion.

Appendix A

Cllr Bobby Bennett reported (Min. 24.07.04)

She had not been made aware of the proposal to cut the Stephensons 10:46am No 14 service until raised by the clerk that morning. She had raised the issue with SCC Comms team and would get to the bottom of it. There had been no explanation on Stephensons website and was concerned that:

- The proposal actually reduced local resident links with West Suffolk Hospital due to the difficulty in accessing the Hubs
- The service was particularly needed on a Wednesday (Market day in BSE)
- The Community Service bus service had recently been withdrawn and the replacement link to hubs at Stradishall, Depden and Chevely would need to be booked in advance and cost £8 return.

Cllr Bennett committed to challenging the withdrawal of this service on behalf of the parish.

Min. 24.07.05

Withdrawal of Stephensons 10:46am No 14 Service

- Residents should have been included in a consultation and received a questionnaire
- The change would take away a lifeline for villagers without cars, which included not just elderly people, but young people without private transport
- The proposed hubs at Stradishall, Depden and Chevely would be difficult to access
- Connecting Communities Transport links required advance booking and were not always available
- If people are to move away from car transport, a replacement service is needed
- The proposed new service, based on return times, would give passengers only six minutes in Bury St Edmunds
- 4pm bus, there is no return service back – last bus back is 18.15

Min. EO.24.08.03

Withdrawal of Stephensons 10:46am No 14 Service

Mr John Norton (and others) concerned at the recent withdrawal of this service, and noted that:

- Residents should have been included in a consultation and received a questionnaire
- The change would take away a lifeline for villagers without cars, which included not just elderly people, but young people without private transport
- The hubs at Stradishall was difficult for many villagers to access, particularly on a return journey with shopping.
- Withdrawal of the service would also be likely to affect residents from other villages trying to access Wickhambrook Surgery and Pharmacy for appointments and medicines (the surgery has a wide hinterland, extending as far north as Horringer)

Cllr Lavelle summarised the action that the parish council had taken so far to advocate on behalf of its residents which included:

- Escalating through our County Councillor, Bobby Bennett
- Contributing a statement to the Suffolk News story on this issue
- The clerk following up through wider parish networks

And suggested that an additional mechanism to raise the profile of this issue to work towards a resolution would be for local residents to write to their MP.

Min. 24.09.05

Would the recently withdrawn 10:46am Stevensons's No 14 Service would be re-instated?

The clerk advised that many clerks whose parishes had been affected had raised this issue through Suffolk County Council, which hosts the EP Passenger Interest Group. At its meeting held in early September, but that it had been made clear that the service would not be re-instated. Groups of parishes could apply for funding to establish a BSIP proposal (new route), however, they would need to be able to demonstrate that such a route would attract between 350 to 850 passengers a week (the threshold for viability). **Session Closed:** 19:14

Appendix B

Wickhamrook Parish Council is concerned that the withdrawal of 10:66 Stephenson's service, is having a disproportionate impact on its residents (and residents of neighbouring villages who access Wickhambrook as a local service centre for schooling and healthcare):

- The new service has actually reduced local resident links with West Suffolk Hospital due to the difficulty in accessing the Hubs
- The bus service was particularly needed on a Wednesday (Market day in BSE)
- The change will take away a lifeline for villagers without cars, which include not just elderly people, but young people without private transport
- The proposed hubs at Stradishall, Depden and Cheveley are difficult to access, particularly for those with accessibility issues
- The Connecting Communities Transport links require advance booking and are not always available. They cost disproportionately more, at £8 return (simply to get to the bus stop, with no guarantee of a connection)
- If people are to move away from car transport, a replacement service is needed
- The proposed new service, based on return times, gives passengers only six minutes in Bury St Edmunds
- With the 4pm bus, there is no return service back – last bus back is 18.15
- The hubs at Stradishall is difficult for many villagers to access, particularly on a return journey with shopping.
- Withdrawal of the service also affects residents from other villages trying to access Wickhambrook Surgery and Pharmacy for appointments and medicines (the surgery has a wide hinterland, extending as far north as Horringer)

The parish council is also concerned that there was no formal consultation, either with it or its residents, prior to the withdrawal of the service.