

SEVENOAKS DISTRICT

SENIORS ACTION FORUM

Working together in the interests of people aged 50 plus

Special Newsletter 32 June 2018

The Future of Rural Transport in Kent

*Views and Comments from SDSAF
on the forthcoming KCC Consultation meetings*

RECENT HISTORY The debacle over proposed bus cuts to what KCC calls ‘Socially Necessary Bus Services’ announced between November 2017 and January 2018 has now evolved to there being no cuts being made in the 2018/19 fiscal year. In a press release on 12 March, KCC announced that the original £4million cuts having been reduced to £2million would be reduced to £455,000 in the 2018/19 financial year. In a press release dated 1 June these cuts have now been made – through initiatives from two bus companies, Stagecoach and Go. This does not rule out further cuts in the future. KCC currently spends £7million on transport subsidies and is under pressure from central government to reduce expenditure. What KCC called Socially Necessary Bus Services in their November and January communications is now referred to as Rural Transport. KCC promised public consultations on the future of bus services from April to June. These didn’t happen.

THE LATEST SITUATION SDSAF received an e-mail from KCC on the 18th of June announcing that these consultations will now be taking place across Kent including Sevenoaks District between June and August and there will be a **Bus Summit** in October. For the public, the main part of the consultation is a questionnaire to be completed before 8 August (more later). More immediately though there is a series of 11 public meetings across Kent with none to re-register. In or near our area just turn up at;

Elite Venue Centre, Dunkirk Close, Gravesend on 26 June
The Stag Community Arts Centre in Sevenoaks on Wednesday 4 July, and
Borough Green Village Hall on Thursday 5 July.

Members from the north of the District only have the Gravesend opportunity available.

The project is called **The Big Conversation**. The meetings are from 7pm to 9 pm.

SDSAF is not aware that any notice of these meetings has been given to the public but by the time you receive this Newsletter there may be some local press coverage.

WHAT ARE THESE MEETINGS FOR? In their latest e-mail KCC says that they will be presenting three initial ideas and providing opportunities for the public to ask their team

any questions. In earlier announcements they stated that “their aim is to improve things especially for those who don’t have a car to hand.”

THE THREE INITIAL IDEAS FROM KCC

- 1 Feeder Services. A small bus or taxi service could connect rural communities with an existing commercial bus service for the onward journey.
- 2 A bookable flexible bus service could be introduced.
- 3 A taxi-bus style service could replace scheduled bus services.

All these ideas seem to imply that there will be cuts in existing services, and that fares would be charged.

SDSAF has some doubts about these ideas.

MORE INFORMATION For members with e-mail you can get the full details of these meetings and the questionnaire at www.kent.gov.uk/bigconversation. For those without e-mail and that’s 44% of over 65’s you probably can ask a friend or neighbour to access it for you. KCC states that copies of these documents are available from Kent Libraries and Gateways. We have asked Sevenoaks Library to be prepared for them.

THE QUESTIONNAIRE This 24 page document is available on line, those who do not use the internet can get a copy from the library. SDSAF has suggested that it would have been better to distribute via supermarkets or ideally by a household delivery. Even though £500,000 has been allocated to these consultations, we don’t expect this to happen.

SDSAF’s view is that much of the data KCC is collecting will not provide much actionable information beyond that which KCC should already know. On the good side, there is a provision for the Kent people to add their own comments. SDSAF hopes you will do so. Don’t be restricted by the size of the comment box they give you. SDSAF suggests we should attend the meeting first. Then with that knowledge and what we might read in the local press, fill in the questionnaire

KCC IS NOT DEFINING THINGS What is a rural bus service? KCC has not made this clear. We believe that most of the bus services in the District are rural and are concerned that KCC may not be learning from rural bus services elsewhere in the country. SDSAF’s research suggests we can learn from examples like the Little White Bus company in Hawes, Yorkshire. By a rural bus service, SDSAF means any bus route that is not wholly in a town. Within Sevenoaks district a lot of travel is by commuters getting to a railway station. Many walk or drive in to the station from rural areas. Will these consultations address this sizeable issue?

WHAT DOES KCC MEAN BY ‘OTHER FORMS OF TRANSPORT?’ KCC has only given limited examples of ‘other forms’, we feel there is deliberate vagueness in their communications to see what the public comes up with. There are many experts in transportation working for KCC, could we not have more guidance? SDSAF has researched examples like the City of York Car sharing scheme.

SOME THOUGHTS AND QUESTIONS

The Meetings themselves – SDSAF has asked KCC who will be chairing the meetings? Will the bus companies be there? How will the meetings be conducted? At the time of writing, all we know is that there will be presentations and a Q and A session. Will KCC be taking written questions in advance? Or question from the floor?

How do we get to the meetings? – SDSAF has written to KCC with a number of comments and observations. One of these came from our members – “ How are people without cars supposed to get to these meetings when there are few if any buses that would help them to get there?”

Can you arrange some car sharing? Or ask your parish councillor, District Councillor or County Councillor for help. Car sharing has not come up in KCC’s current short list of ideas but SDSAF we will be putting it forward.

WHAT SHOULD WE, AND YOU, BE DOING? This is where our members need to put forward ideas. Do you have examples of good rural transport in other parts of the country? We recommend that you all participate in these consultations. It’s no good moaning after the event if you haven’t had a go now. SDSAF would advise you to prepare questions in advance for the consultation meetings and be prepared to put your own ideas forward.

Without more information SDSAF fears that these meetings could become a stage managed nonsense with no firm outcome or information.

BUS PASSES There is no information on possible changes to the provision and use of the existing older persons bus passes.

WHAT DO WE DO NOW?

SDSAF will attend our local meeting, and report back in a later Newsletter

Members need to attend a meeting if they can. We must ALL make our points known.

As Members, you might write to your local councillor about any of the issues in this debate especially if;

you been excluded by only having the meetings in the evening,

OR you don’t have internet access,

OR you been excluded from the consultation by being unable to get to the meeting because of bus timetables,

OR you are having real difficulty living a normal life because you don’t have the bus service you need.

SDSAF sees this as an opportunity to plan for the future and not just a chance to have a moan about a particular bus route.

We will try to circulate the meeting agenda, if we receive one, to Members but it will be short notice and we may not be able to contact postal only members.

IN OTHER NEWS... IN OTHER NEWS... IN OTHER NEWS... IN OTHER NEWS...

Roof Insulation Scam

One of our members had a call from an insulation company offering to check the free roof insulation that she had had installed. They offered to replace it with a sprayed on material at a quoted price of £7500. That sounds like a roof as big as the one over Centre Court in Wimbledon!

SDSAF Committee Member Brian Gasson has also been contacted by a company offering a similar deal. Brian says 'with their surveyor due to call next week, I did a quick check at Companies House and tried trading standards (no luck there).' Subsequently Brian received another call from the company to confirm the appointment. When he said he had changed his mind they became very pushy. When he informed him that he spoken to Trading Standards, the rep could not finish the conversation quickly enough and hung up.

PLEASE DON'T FORGET **If we are not active in the campaign on public transport, then the next set of cuts in public expenditure will take away something else that is important. This campaign is as much about the funding of local government as it is about getting from A to B. Please contact Alan Dixon via Roger Bryan for any further information.**

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