



Richard Arrowsmith (Chair)
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Dear John

Many thanks for the opportunity to talk to you earlier this evening about the serious problems we are facing over the loss of our bus services in Romsley.

I fully understand the difficult issues the County Council are facing with regard to the provision of rural Bus Services and that these services often struggle to attract enough users to make them commercially self sustaining. However, as we discussed there is much more to these services than simple economics, many residents in Romsley are completely reliant on the Bus Service to gain access to work, education, family, shops and medical services as well as connecting to wider transport infrastructure. Our Parish is situated at over 900 feet, the winter weather is often difficult and the nearest commercial centre is well over 3 miles away in Halesowen. I have undertaken this journey many times by foot and as a healthy forty one year old it takes me more than an hour to walk up a very steep hill and it is simply not viable for many of our community's disadvantaged, young or elderly people to undertake this walk because there is no bus, they cannot drive and they simply can't afford Taxis.

I recognise that the current bus operator, First Worcestershire, is a private commercial entity that can make these decisions. But the community I represent is stunned and dismayed at what they believe to be a rather absolute and arbitrary decision that did not involve any prior consultation with the community to explore any other options, such as reduced frequency of service, in an attempt to make it more viable. Of course the way this news broke via bus drivers as opposed to more formal communication to the County and Parish Councillors has added even more to the sense of injustice that many in the community now feel.

As we agreed, petitions can sometimes be misleading, however they are one of the few ways people can make their concerns heard and to obtain over 1000 signatures in such a small community is significant. When we factor in the widespread coverage in local newspapers and that we had over 40 people attend our most recent Parish Council meeting to discuss this; which is somewhat of a record, I am confident that it is indeed an important matter and retaining some form of regular bus service is a priority for the vast majority of Parish residents.

To my mind the current one hour service level is probably unsustainable, and it is a sensible step to ask your officers to ascertain accurate bus usage numbers. But I do firmly believe that there are a number of alternative options to explore for a sustainable bus service before any decision is made for total termination. The most obvious of these is a reduction in frequency perhaps utilising smaller vehicles and combined routes.

From our conversation I understand you are considering all options and recognise the importance of this, but may I take this opportunity to stress the urgency of finding a solution as the current service will stop in the next couple of weeks isolating our residents with immediate effect. I know that you and your teams are meeting the Bus Operator tomorrow and I'm sure you will explore all options with them. But I would ask you to remind them of their social responsibilities in this matter and suggest whether they would consider continuing to run the service to Romsley until we have another operator in place as this would be of huge benefit and importance to our community.

Finally, from our conversation I know you recognise the problems our community faces because of this issue and I too understand the massive financial pressures that have put the County in such a difficult position. But for the sake of many people in our community we must find a way to retain a sustainable level of public transport in the Parish. I would welcome the opportunity to sit down and discuss the options we have with you and your teams at the earliest opportunity and as I said I would also be willing to explore what financial contribution the Parish Council could make towards supporting this. Our budgets are small and I suspect any contribution would be symbolic more than anything else, but I understand your logic on this and I will do all that I can to support this in partnership with yourselves.

I look forward to meeting with you and working to resolve this matter in the coming weeks.

Kind Regards,

Richard Arrowsmith,

Romsley Parish Council Chair.

CC. Rachel Jenkins – County Councillor for Clent Hills.

CC. M Sherry – Bromsgrove District Councillor for Belbroughton & Romsley.

CC. C Allen-Jones – Bromsgrove District Councillor for Belbroughton & Romsley.

CC. Sajid Javid – Member of Parliament for Bromsgrove.