

Paper for Charlbury Town Council

Subject: **Bus promotion campaign**

Author: Frances Mortimer / Journeys working group

Date: 29 November 2022

Background

Bus patronage remains suppressed after the pandemic with approximately 80% of passengers having returned to the network, while the costs of provision have increased significantly. The Government requested that all local authorities worked with their bus operators to ensure financially sustainable services going forward, with operators required to identify all services as either commercial, marginal or non-commercial.

Following this exercise, both bus routes S3 and X9 serving Charlbury were declared as non-commercial by their operators.

The County Council has agreed to provide funding for services which were commercial prior to the pandemic, in order to give them time to return to self-sufficiency over the next two years. Therefore, contracts have been awarded for continuation of these services at their current level until August 2024. The contract for service X9 includes the introduction of contactless payment (now in place).

The County Council does not have a budget for ongoing support of non-commercial services, and continuation of these routes beyond August 2024 cannot be guaranteed if patronage has not increased to a sustainable level. We are therefore encouraged to promote these services locally to give them the best possible chance of survival.

(The above info is taken from an email from OCC Public Transport Planner Dave Harrison to Liz Leffman and Richard Fairhurst in August 2022.)

In a national Government initiative to promote bus use, bus companies are being invited to opt into a voluntary fare cap of £2 per single journey in January-March 2023. It is likely that Stagecoach (which operates the S3 service) will take part. We do not yet know whether Pulhams (which operates the X9 service) will or not.

Reasons for low rates of bus use

Anecdotal reasons for low bus use to and from Charlbury include:

- Culture of private car use; many residents may never have used the buses
- High cost of fares (although free bus pass for over-60/65s)
- Poor awareness of services / timetables / real-time information
- Confusion over bus routes/ location of bus stops
- Lack of services (e.g. at specific times / transport connections / or at all on Sundays)
- Post-Covid concern over infection risk from shared public transport

It may be useful to survey residents in order to better understand barriers and potential enablers to bus use.

Possible actions to enable and encourage bus use

- Awareness of services: Improve information re bus routes, stops and times – via website, posters, at bus stops, at local events, in community buildings.
- Provide real-time information/[live maps](#) – on website, at bus stops, promote apps
- Cost: promote £2 fare cap; encourage pensioners to apply for bus pass
- Culture: engage with local Societies & organisations to encourage bus use / first bus trip. “Love Our Buses” campaign. Decorate bus stops. Promote evening leisure trips to Chippy/ Saturday country walks.
- Ask businesses / events along bus routes to offer discounts for people arriving by bus.
- Write to neighbouring parishes to share information.
- Engage with bus operators to explore improvements to info, services, fares – encourage Pulhams to participate in fare cap.
- Provide personalised travel planning.

Proposal

Charlbury Town Council (Journeys Working Group) to run a campaign to promote use of the X9 and S3 bus services.

Initial actions to include:

- Provide information re services on TC and Charlbury.info websites
- Produce map showing routes and display this at bus stops with QR code linking to webpage (**cost: £36** for 10x A4 outdoor (polyester))
- Produce a poster including map & QR code to display in community spaces (**cost: £48** for 10 x A3)
- Write to all Charlbury societies to make aware of the campaign and the £2 fare cap and encourage them to organise a trip using buses between Jan-March 2023
- Develop a short survey on barriers and enablers – administer online and (if volunteers available) face-to-face at Farmers Market.
- Consult on an effective campaign slogan
- Develop a plan of further actions to bring to future TC meeting.