

# NOTES OF THE BUS SERVICE CONSULTATION MEETING HELD IN SADBERGE VILLAGE HALL ON WEDNESDAY 7<sup>th</sup> MAY 2008

There were 42 names on the attendance sheet.

## 1. Introduction

Alastair Mackenzie give an introduction to the meeting.

- 1.1 In the initial draft of its budget for 2008-09, Darlington Borough Council proposed to withdraw its subsidy for the #17 and #97 bus services, which are the only services to Sadberge and the other villages to the north-east of Darlington.
- 1.2 After a campaign by village residents, the Borough Council agreed to put £80,000 back in to the budget to subsidise a bus service for the villages to the north-east of Darlington, and to consult with the relevant Parish Councils and village residents in order to design a timetable that best meets the needs of the various villages.
- 1.3 It is important that the subsidised bus service meets the needs of people who do not have access to cars. It is also important to encourage people with cars to use the bus for some journeys, because if the net cost to Darlington Borough Council is high then they may decide to withdraw the subsidy at some point in the future.

## 2. Bus service options

- 2.1 Simon Houldsworth, Darlington Borough Council's Transport Policy Manager, presented three options for the new bus timetable.
- 2.2 In **Option 1**, the single bus operates two interleaved services, #17 and #18, operating Monday to Saturday.
  - The #17 comes out of Darlington town centre along Haughton Road, does a loop around Whinbush Way, comes through Sadberge, goes round the Stillington / Bishopton / Redmarshall loop, returns through Sadberge and then goes back in to Darlington town centre via the Whinbush Way loop and Haughton Road.
  - The #18 comes out of Darlington town centre along Yarm Road, visits Morton Park, comes to Sadberge via the A67 and Middleton Road, goes back down Middleton Road, does a loop round via The Square in Middleton St. George and then goes back in to Darlington town centre via the A67, Morton Park and Yarm Road.

This option has the following features:-

- The services operate to a "click face" timetable. For example, the #17 service passes through Sadberge at 7 and 34 minutes past each even hour and the #18 service passes through Sadberge at 20 minutes past each odd hour. This makes the timetable easier to understand and to remember.
- There is one bus from Sadberge to Darlington each hour.
- The first bus into Darlington is timed to get people to school, college and work. It arrives in the town centre at 8:55 a.m.
- The last bus out of Darlington leaves the town centre at 5:50 p.m.
- The #18 goes to The Square in Middleton St. George. Felix House Surgery is about a third of a mile from The Square.

The following comments were made during the discussion of this option.

- Would bus passes be valid on the bus that leaves Sadberge at 9:20 a.m.?  
*Response from Simon Houldsworth:* Under the National Off-Peak scheme, bus passes are valid from 9:30 a.m. They could therefore not be used at 9:20 a.m.

- People living in Beacon Hill would need to walk up to the centre of Sadberge to catch a bus into Darlington. Would it be possible for the bus to go down to Beacon Hill to pick people up? It could turn round in the lay-by near Beacon Hill.

*Response from Simon Houldsworth:* The timetable is quite tight, and adding additional route elements might cause it to unravel. Also, buses are generally not allowed to turn round in laybys, particularly if this involves reversing. However, he will investigate what might be possible. **ACTION:** Simon Houldsworth

2.3 In **Option 2**, the single bus operates the two interleaved services – #17 and #18 – for most of the time, but breaks off from this "standard service" for blocks of time to do a shuttle run between Sadberge, Whinbush Way and Middleton St. George.

- During the "standard service", the #17 and #18 operate to the same timetable as in Option 1.
- On specified mornings or afternoons the bus breaks off from the "standard service" for an hour and a quarter to do a shuttle runs between (a) Sadberge and Whinbush Way and (b) Sadberge and Middleton St. George / Middleton One Row.
- During the Whinbush Way part of the shuttle run the bus goes from Sadberge, along the A66 to Great Burdon, round the Whinbush Way loop and then back to Sadberge along the A66.
- During the Middleton part of the shuttle run the bus goes from Sadberge, through The Square in Middleton St. George, past Dinsdale Station and the Felix House Surgery, past the Devenport Hotel in Middleton One Row, round the back of Durham Tees Valley Airport and back to Sadberge via the A67 and Middleton Road.
- A morning block of shuttle runs lasts from 9:20 a.m. until 10:34 a.m.
- An afternoon block of shuttle runs lasts from 2:07 p.m. until 3:20 p.m.

This option has the following features:-

- The #17 and #18 services operate to a "clock face" timetable.
- The "standard service" always operates in the early, in the middle of the day and in the late afternoon.
- Except during the shuttle run blocks, there is one bus from Sadberge to Darlington each hour.
- During the shuttle runs the bus goes past the door of the Felix House Surgery.
- The timetable is more complicated than in Option 1. People need to be aware of when the bus is doing shuttle runs rather than the standard service.
- During the shuttle run blocks there is no service to Great Stainton, Stillington, Bishopton and Redmarshall.
- At a meeting on 30-Apr-2008, representatives from the other villages to the north-east of Darlington said that they would have no objection to Option 2 provided that there are no more than two shuttle run blocks per week and that one of the shuttle run blocks is on a Tuesday afternoon (when the Stillington surgery is closed).

2.4 **Option 2A** is the same as Option 2, except that the shuttle run blocks are two hours rather than an hour and a quarter.

### 3. Discussion

The following points were made during the discussion:-

- Most of the people using the service will be using bus passes and so will not be paying fares. Will this cause a problem with the finances of the service?

*Response from Simon Houldsworth:* This should not cause a problem. Use of bus passes will result in a notional transfer of money between budgets within Darlington Borough Council.

- If the bus services become profitable, will Darlington Borough Council continue to receive the income.

*Response from Simon Houldsworth:* The contract will be placed on a gross cost basis, so Darlington Borough Council will pay the costs of running the service and will keep any revenues generated. However, the service is highly unlikely to generate a profit!

- Arriva will be introducing a new set of commercial services in July 2008.
- In Option 2, it would be better to run the Middleton shuttle run loop clockwise so that people do not have to cross the road to get to the Felix House Surgery.
- Will it be possible to get to work at Morton Park between 8:30 a.m. and 9 a.m.?

*Response from Simon Houldsworth:* Sorry. No. The needs to get children to school in Whinfield and to get people to college and work in Darlington create "fixed points" in the timetable. It is not possible to devise a timetable that meets every requirement.

- An 8:55 a.m. arrival in Darlington Town Centre is tight for getting to college. Would it be possible for the first bus to run a bit earlier?

*Response from Simon Houldsworth:* It is difficult to set the times so that the buses get the children to school in Whinfield at the right time and get people in to the town centre in time for college and work. However, it may be possible for the first bus to run about five minutes earlier.

**ACTION:** Simon Houldsworth

- Why did the #98 stop coming through Sadberge? According to the timetable, it only took two minutes for the #98 to get from Sadberge village green to the Newton Grange lay-by.

*Response from Simon Houldsworth:* The change to the routing of the #98 was a commercial decision by Arriva.

*Other response:* Arriva probably believed that a direct service from Darlington to Stockton would attract more passengers than a service that called in at the various villages on the way.

#### 4. Votes

For the purpose of voting, those present were divided into two groups.

- Group 1 included people who regularly rely on the bus service because they do not have access to cars for at least three days per week.
- Group 2 included people who do have access to cars, but who may be prepared to make some journeys by bus.

4.1 The first vote asked people in Group 1 which option would meet their needs better. The results of the vote were as follows:

Prefer option 1	12
Prefer option 2	4
No preference	0

4.2 The second vote asked people in Group 2 which option would persuade them to use the bus service more often. The results of the vote were as follows:

Would use the bus more often with option 1	12
Would use the bus more often with option 2	2
There would be no difference	5

4.3 The third vote was about the timing of the second shuttle run block in Option 2. All those present were asked which morning or afternoon would be best for the second shuttle run block if Option 2 is being operated and the first shuttle run block is on Tuesday afternoon. The results of the vote were as follows:-

Thursday morning	4
Thursday afternoon	2
Friday morning	4
Friday afternoon	3
Don't mind	10

4.4 The fourth vote asked all present which way the bus should go round the Middleton loop during shuttle run blocks if Option 2 is being operated. The results of the vote were as follows:-

Anti-clockwise	2
Clockwise	19
Don't mind	6

4.5 The fifth vote asked people in Group 1 which option would meet their needs better if there were no minor ailments clinics in Sadberge Village Hall. The results of the vote were as follows:-

Prefer option 1	3
Prefer option 2	10
No preference	0

## 5. Persuading people to use the buses

5.1 It will help to protect the future of the subsidised bus service if the buses are well used. How can we persuade car owners to make some journeys by bus rather than using their cars?

5.2 The following suggestions were made:-

- A Park and Ride scheme.
- Make sure that the buses are reliable.
- Provide a simple timetable for people who want to make occasional journeys between Sadberge and Darlington Town Centre.
- Provide information about where the buses stop in the town centre.
- Deliver a bus timetable to every house in Sadberge.

## 6. Miscellaneous

6.1 It would be useful to have a direct telephone number to report occasions when the bus fails to turn up. **ACTION:** Alastair Mackenzie

6.2 The bus stop at Beacon Hill needs a proper top. **ACTION:** Simon Houldsworth

## 7. Acknowledgements

7.1 Councillor Brian Jones proposed a vote of thanks to Sadberge Parish Council, Alastair Mackenzie and Simon Houldsworth for their efforts in arranging this consultation meeting and putting together the timetable options.

7.2 Brian Jones was also thanked for his work to save the bus service subsidy.

7.3 Judith Turner, Chair of Stillington Parish Council, thanked Sadberge for its campaign to save the bus service for all the villages to the north-east of Darlington.

**Alastair Mackenzie**