

Public Transport for Sadberge

Introduction

Darlington Borough Council's draft budget for 2008 - 09 includes a proposal to remove the subsidy for the #17 and #97 bus services, which are the only bus services that go through Sadberge. The Borough Council is suggesting that the bus services could be replaced by a community transport scheme.

This note explains why an effective public transport system is important to Sadberge and outlines the requirements that need to be met by any such system.

Background

Please read the Sadberge Parish Plan 2007, which is available on the Sadberge web site (at www.sadberge.org.uk) or from Alastair Mackenzie.

In particular, note that the top two objectives in the Parish Plan are:-

1. To maintain a sense of village community.
2. To ensure that those village residents who do not have access to cars have access to facilities and services.

The Parish Plan recognises that there are two distinct groups of residents in Sadberge.

- The majority of residents can be characterised as commuters who work outside Sadberge. They have access to cars and their lives are mainly focused outside the village.
- There is a minority of residents whose lives are mainly focused within the village. Most of these people are elderly. Some are long-standing village residents and others will be people who moved into Sadberge as commuters and have chosen to remain in the village during their retirement. Many do not have access to cars.

Although they are in a minority, the non-commuters play a very important role in the social life of the village. The commuters tend to be busy people and their lives are focused on their work and other activities outside Sadberge. The non-commuters are the ones who contribute most to Sadberge's sense of village community. If they are driven out of the village then that sense of community will be lost.

It is important to note that the sense of community is not just important to the non-commuters. Although they only participate in village activities on an occasional basis, the commuters do appreciate living in a village community.

An effective public transport system is vital for the non-commuters in Sadberge. Without a public transport system they would be unable to get to work, college or school, would be unable to access vital services, and would feel trapped in the village. Note that the ability to access services in Darlington and elsewhere will become even more important if the Sadberge Post Office closes.

In the responses to the Parish Plan questionnaires, 11% of respondents said that they do not have access to a car. As shown in figure 1 below, the majority of the people without access

to a car are either young or elderly. An effective public transport system is particularly important to the elderly non-commuters who contribute a great deal to Sadberge's sense of community.

Note: Further details of the results from the Parish Plan questionnaires are available on the Sadberge web site. See also the Transport presentation, which is also available on the web site.

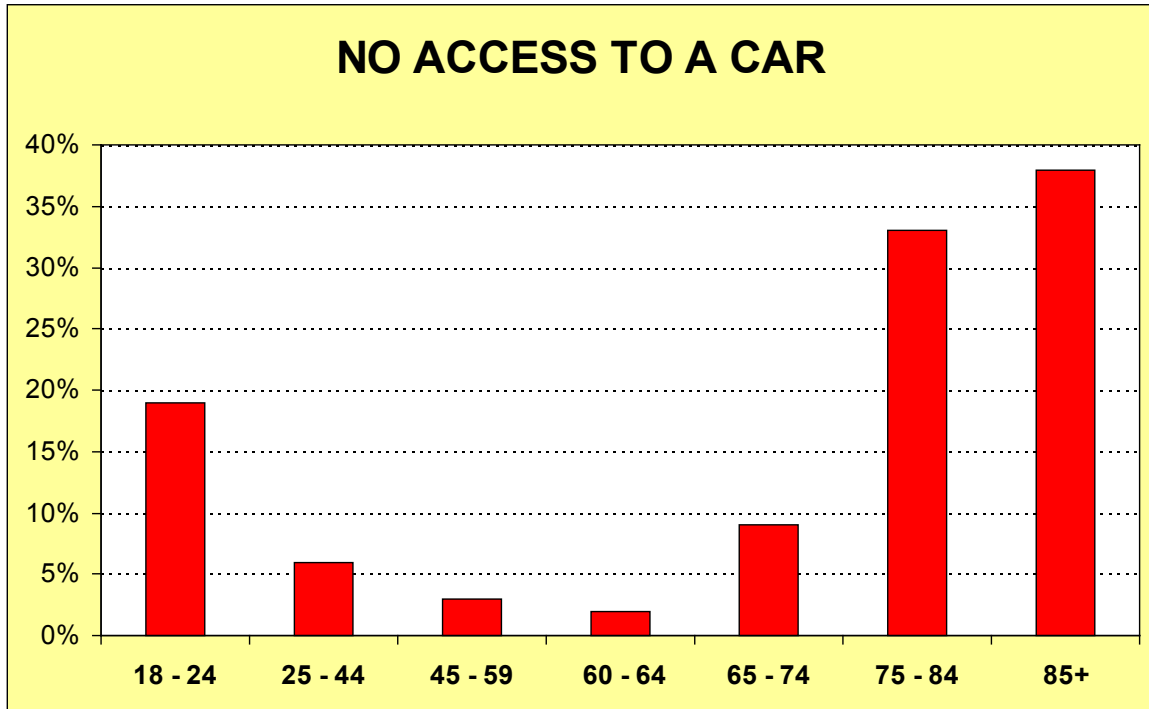


Figure 1

The need for a public transport service is, however, not restricted to Sadberge residents without access to a car. There are also residents who do have access to a car, but not all the time. For example, if a family has one car then when one spouse is using the car (e.g. to get to work) then the other spouse needs to rely on public transport. In the responses to the Parish Plan questionnaire, 7% of respondents said that they had access to someone else's car.

Requirements

To be effective, the public transport system serving Sadberge needs to satisfy the following requirements.

1. The system needs to enable Sadberge residents to travel between Sadberge and (a) Darlington town centre, (b) the Felix House Surgery in Middleton St. George, (c) the supermarket at Morton Park, and (d) the doctors' surgery and supermarket at Whinfield.

It would also be useful to for the system to enable travel between Sadberge and (d) Darlington railway station, and (e) Stockton / Middlesbrough.

2. The service needs to operate at those times when Sadberge residents want to travel.

This includes:-

- Getting to work or college in the early morning.
- Getting to shops and doctors' surgeries during the day.
- Returning from work in the early evening.
- Getting into Darlington during the early evening, particularly on Fridays and Saturdays.
- Returning from Darlington during the late evening, particularly on Fridays and Saturdays.

3. The system needs to be reliable and predictable.

A key test of reliability and predictability is: Can someone make a firm appointment in Darlington or Middleton St. George for the following week and be confident that they will be able to get there on time by using the public transport system?

It is particularly important for elderly people to be able to return home after trips to Darlington or Middleton St. George. There has been at least one instance of an elderly Sadberge resident being on the verge of hypothermia because the bus from Darlington back to Sadberge failed to turn up and she was forced to wait for an extended period in Darlington town centre in very cold weather conditions.

4. The system needs to enable people to feel independent.

The elderly people in Sadberge do not want to feel that they are causing inconvenience for others. A system that makes elderly people feel that they have to ask unpaid volunteers for favours will not work.

5. Journeys need to cost no more than the current bus fares.

Some final words

In order to achieve the Parish Plan objectives and to remain a socially cohesive village with a sense of village community, Sadberge needs an effective public transport system.

If the public transport system does not meet the requirements outlined above then the elderly non-commuters will be driven out, and Sadberge will become a commuter dormitory village with little sense of identity or community.

It is difficult to see how a volunteer-based community transport scheme can meet the requirements outlined above.

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