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Mr David Coates
Dorset Passenger Transport
County Hall
Dorchester
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17th September 2013

Dear Mr Coates

SYMONDSBURY PARISH COUNCIL RESPONSE TO DORSET COUNTY COUNCIL CONSULTATION ON BUS SERVICE.

The parish council fully appreciate the need for service assessments in order to ascertain where savings can be made and in the context of the above consultation feel that a number of points are worthy of re consideration when viewed in the light of the following comments and in particular the conclusions in respect of the No.76 service

GENERAL

Dated 27th July 2013, the circulation of this consultation was ill-timed since many parish councils do not have meetings during the month of August leaving little time for full consideration to be given. The wider ramifications of the proposals need time for further consideration from all parties.

The impact of these cuts will be particularly harsh in rural areas, serving to underline the inequality of rural groups when compared with their urban counterparts. The County Council has responsibility for County wide Health Scrutiny and the health aspects of Rural Poverty, Rural Isolation and Social Contact are being ignored.

The timing of the passenger surveys is questionable. Carried out in the months of November to March the figures reflect the lower seasonal passenger usage. Assessment of the services indicates a lack of management directives by both the operators and DCC in publicising and encouraging support of the services.

With a number of services prominently displayed in bold capitals as being 'WITHDRAWN FROM JANUARY 2014' the document appears to be fait accompli rather than consultative.

SPECIFIC

Symondsburry Parish Council has concerns for the future of route 76, a Wednesday only bus for the benefit of those wishing to visit Bridport on a market day. In the main the users are of a generation which was more used to travel by bus than by car and the bus becomes more of a necessity. The service travels through a number of villages and hamlets covered by the parishes of Char Valley, Chideock and Symondsburry and serves to allow passengers to make a once weekly trip to Waitrose where they are able to order a week's supplies which can subsequently be delivered to their homes.

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It is also a social service. They can meet and chat with long standing friends or meet their children, have a coffee, sit with a grandchild on their knee, and for a couple of hours they are able to forget their rural isolation and the worry of being denied the bus service which means so much.

On the day the service was considered there were three passengers to board at Symondsbury joining with seven already on board, a total of ten which is at odds within the 2.8 passengers cited by DCC. The words of Disraeli and statistics come to mind. The winter survey may have been carried out when road flooding was predominant and we certainly had days of rain, cold and biting winds - did you feel like going out? This is one example but it is echoed throughout Dorset and the collective effect of the curtailment of services will reflect badly on a caring society.

CONCLUSIONS

1. The survey was ill-timed and the figures should be reconsidered
2. The effects of Rural Poverty and Rural Isolation are currently of great concern and need to be brought into the Dorset equation.
3. The benefits of the social contact similarly should be considered.
4. Independent consideration should be sought from the Health Scrutiny Committee as to the effects of these cuts on County Health, particularly its cost to benefit ratio.
5. All Sunday services scheduled to be cut should be re visited to ensure that family visits, hospital visiting and events i.e. Christmas shopping are not curtailed.
6. Services are contracted on a net basis to ensure that it is in the operator's interests to maximise income.
7. Better vehicle utilisation by operators is an area for investigation.
8. Wider advertising of the buses linking to train services to Weymouth and Bristol.

In the context of the No.76 bus service; Passengers using this service have indicated their willingness to contribute toward the fare and in the event we would welcome advice as to the best method of collection. Symondsbury Parish Council would be willing in order to keep this service running to consider a level of financial support. Our understanding is that the level of subsidy currently being made by DCC is £6,100.pa. Consideration should also be given to other parishes on this route contributing in like manner. Symondsbury Parish Council would welcome details of the Community Volunteer Scheme promoted by DCC.

Thank you for your time and consideration to our comments and we look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

Lucy Hart
Clerk to Symondsbury Parish Council