



LOCAL COMMITTEE (WAVERLEY)

**PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND
RESPONSES**

21 MARCH 2014

1. From Mr David Beaman (Farnham)

Stagecoach South has registered a revised timetable for its Services 4 and 5 that operate between Farnham and Aldershot via Sandy Hill that will be effective from 20 April. I understand that the objective of the revised timetable is to make financial and operational savings required to maintain economic viability by reducing the number of buses needed by one without reducing the overall level of service operated during Monday to Saturday daytimes. The introduction of this revised timetable will, however, have the following consequences:

- During Monday to Saturday daytimes there will be no common bus stop in Farnham for passengers travelling to Sandy Hill and Heath End – whilst the level of service will remain unchanged (every 15 minutes) buses to Sandy Hill and Heath End will depart from Farnham alternately every 30 minutes from East Street (bus stop J) and Castle Street. In the evenings and on Sundays and Public Holidays buses to Sandy Hill and Heath End, which are subsidised by Surrey County Council, will continue to depart from the existing bus stop A on The Borough. The use of three different bus stops for buses travelling to the same destination rather than the single common stop currently used will cause considerable confusion to passengers, many of whom elderly.
- The level of service operated from Heath End, Sandy Hill and Upper Hale Road to and from Farnham Hospital will be reduced by 50% from every 15 minutes to every 30 minutes during Monday to Saturday daytimes.
- The level of recovery time (the time between when a bus arrives in Farnham and when it departs on its return journey to Aldershot) is being reduced from seven to two minutes. From personal observation, given the delays caused by traffic congestion in Farnham at all times of day and particularly during the peak periods, buses regularly arrive in Farnham late and reducing the recovery time is likely to result in the operation of the service becoming less reliable.

The only benefit to be gained from the revised timetable will be the restoration of a direct bus service to and from Farnham via Castle Hill for residents of Folly Hill.

In 2006 Stagecoach received a grant of £240,000, payable over three years, from a successful bid that was jointly made by Stagecoach with Surrey County Council to the Department of Transport's Kickstart initiative for the introduction of a Quality Bus Partnership between Stagecoach and Surrey County Council along the route of services 4 and 5, for which a fleet of nine low floor midibuses was acquired. Under this partnership Stagecoach made a commitment to operate a higher level of bus service and the service was increased to operate every 10 minutes during Monday to Saturday daytimes. The service has subsequently been reduced by 33% and now operates every 15 minutes.

My questions are as follows:

1. Why has the commitment given by Stagecoach in the Quality Bus Partnership with Surrey County Council, under which a grant of £240,000 in public funds from The Department of Transport's Kickstart initiative was obtained to operate a higher level of bus service, been allowed to be broken ?
2. Although Monday to Saturday daytime journeys on services 4 and 5 are operated by Stagecoach commercially, does a Quality Bus Partnership agreement still exist between Stagecoach and Surrey County Council covering services 4 and 5 ?
3. If there is still a Quality Bus Partnership agreement in force, has Stagecoach consulted with and secured the agreement of Surrey County Council to the service changes that are being made effective from 20 April ?
4. Whilst the desire to maintain the existing level of service is understandable, if operational and financial savings have to be made has consideration been given by either Stagecoach and/or Surrey County Council to the alternative option of reducing the existing level of service from every 15 minutes to every 20 minutes, which would preserve the use of a common bus stop in Farnham at all times for passengers travelling to Sandy Hill and Heath End as well as retaining existing recovery times in Farnham, to ensure the continued operation of a reliable bus service ?

Response

Bus services 4/5 Farnham-Sandy Hill-Aldershot-North Town are currently operated on a commercial basis during the day time period on Mondays to Saturdays, without funding from or a contractual obligation to, Surrey County Council. Service planning decisions during that period are the prerogative of Stagecoach, in terms of being a commercially-provided service. The Council does make some financial support for journeys in the evening and on Sundays.

Stagecoach are a member of a Voluntary Quality Bus Partnership with local authorities for the wider Blackwater Valley area. Under this, the authorities pledged to improve infrastructure and bus priority measures using external funding opportunities and Stagecoach could improve services if such an enhancement was commercially sustainable, without being prescriptive. Additionally, in 2006, Stagecoach and Surrey County Council successfully bid for £226,000 (over 3 years) through the government's Kickstart Funding competition. This facilitated revenue support to increase the frequency of each of services 4 and 5 from every 30 minutes to every 20 minutes, such that where the services came together over the majority of their routes, a combined 10 minute frequency

resulted. In addition, Stagecoach invested £675,000 in order to introduce nine new low floor buses to replace the previous elderly step entrance vehicles.

Stagecoach hoped to continue the services at the end of the three year funding period, based on expectations of passenger growth during that period. By Year 5, it was expected that the service would be commercially sustainable, but that has been prevented by increasing operating costs and a patronage level below estimates made back in 2006. The Kickstart bid did not encompass a Stagecoach obligation to maintain the service indefinitely at an enhanced level or on a prescribed intermediate route, once the Kickstart funding had been expended.

Stagecoach has notified the Council that action is now needed to reduce operating costs, as further subsidy is not available. By introducing the two different routings between Farnham and Sandy Hill (Castle Street and Folly Hill or Hale Road and Upper Hale Road), they can save resource without having to reduce the overall four buses per hour frequency which will still apply over the majority of the route. Although fewer journeys will pass Farnham Hospital, they feel their way forward will minimise inconvenience to the majority of their customers and will not weaken the customer offer on the most patronised sections. As no additional subsidy funding is available due to budgetary pressures, the County Council has noted Stagecoach's commercial position and the timetable they propose to operate.

Although the new routing into and out of Farnham does not involve both services using common stops in Farnham town centre when heading for Aldershot, this was felt on balance to be manageable, subject to improved information being available at bus stops to clearly show from which stops the various buses depart from. A reduction in the whole service to every 20 minutes overall could perhaps have proved sufficient for all buses on routes 4/5 to navigate Farnham town centre in reasonable time, within the sustainable resources and all to serve common stops, but the company feels that such an overall reduction, especially at the Aldershot end where patronage increases remain positive, would be counter-productive and potentially commercially-damaging.

2. From Ms Jane Godden (Parking Co-ordinator for Courts Hill Road West, Haslemere)

We have the following questions about the proposal in Surrey County Council's 2013 Parking Review to revoke the Residents Bay outside Haughton House in Courts Hill Road in Haslemere.

1. Following our informal question to the Committee's meeting on 13 December 2014, and our follow-up letter of 16 December, has the Committee given further consideration to the above proposal; has it considered the effect of the proposal on traffic safety and movement, and access to the highway, in Courts Hill Road West; and has it considered the results against the objectives of the Review ?
2. If it has considered the proposal further, has anyone visited the site as part of that consideration; has the Council taken account of the representations made on behalf of the majority of residents who supported the present traffic and parking scheme in Courts Hill Road West; and what were the results of its consideration ?

3. If it has confirmed the review proposal, will it explain in public why it believes it is acceptable to send eastbound traffic from Courts Hill Road West into a blind corner on the “wrong” side of the road to face fast moving westbound traffic, often speeding to the railway station, head on with little or no warning and without any refuge ?
4. As the references to Courts Hill Road in the Public Notice in *The Haslemere Herald* on 7 March 2014 are unclear and potentially conflicting, what advice does Surrey County Council have for Courts Hill Road residents: should they respond to the proposal in Item 8 (b) to revoke the residents only parking places or should they take account of the Note which refers to further amendments for Courts Hill Road being advertised at a later date ? What amendments is Surrey County Council considering and when will the amendments be advertised ?
5. Will the Council explain why there is a difference between the consultation procedures in Item 17 of the Public Notice in *The Herald* and the Notice in the road ? Which takes precedence ? And what rules and criteria will the Council follow in considering the responses ?
6. Does the Council accept that the residents in Courts Hill Road are as entitled to receive consideration as other Haslemere residents ? We had no opportunity to make an input to the review other than to confirm that we believed the Courts Hill Road West scheme was a success; and yet a major change was proposed to the scheme which showed no evidence of attention being paid to the consequences for our residents. Apart from the Chairman’s agreement to find a mechanism for the full Committee to take final decisions in public, which we continue to appreciate, we have received no further information or response from Surrey County Council to our representations and questions. We are now faced with a statutory consultation where we do not know which proposal we should be responding to or the basis on which decisions will be taken. Given that the Courts Hill Road West scheme was introduced following full and transparent consultation, we believe it is wrong to subtract a part of that scheme without the same level of consideration and openness.

Response

In August 2013, following Local Committee agreement, new parking restrictions were introduced in Courts Hill Road (West). These included residents’ parking bays, including a bay outside Haughton House.

Since these were introduced, frequent observations of the area indicate the resident permit bay outside Haughton House is infrequently used and is empty for most of the day. This parking space could perhaps be better used and so we are proposing to change the restriction here from 'permit holders' to unrestricted parking.

Parking Team members have discussed the proposals with some residents in Courts Hill Road (West), including Haughton House, and are aware that not all are in favour of this proposal. We will, however, look at the comments we receive and decide how best to proceed following the consultation period, which ends on 4 April 2014.

We are not planning any other amendments to parking restrictions in Courts Hill Road (West), the changes introduced last year have generally been a success and helped residents park more easily and access their driveways.

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