

# DOWNTON PARISH COUNCIL



Public Transport Survey  
Passenger Transport Unit  
Wiltshire Council  
County Hall  
Bythesea Road  
Trowbridge  
Wiltshire BA14 8JN

Dear Sirs

## **Re: Subsidised Bus Services Consultation**

In assessing questions 1 – 8, this response is on behalf of Downton Parish Council so representing all residents, including those of older age, those with disabilities and both males and females and representing car owners and those without private transport. This response also responds on behalf of those with and without concessionary bus passes; those that use the service regularly or rarely.

The Parish Council is pleased to note that the X3 is not on the list of services being considered for reduction and wish to express its support for the continuation of this service as it is a vital link for Downton with both Bournemouth to the South and Salisbury to the North. It is important to the residents of Downton that this service runs all week and offers an evening service. However, although the Parish Council recognises that savings must be made, it is concerned that there is no consideration of actually increasing a service from this area in the early evening, linking Downton to the hospital. Young and older residents who do not drive would use such a service both for appointments, which are increasingly being made in the evening, and to visit those in hospital. Evening services are vital to those people who work outside of Downton with the majority of those who are young and/or unskilled needing to find work outside of the village but not being drivers or having access to a car. It is important to the health of the village to encourage high levels of employment, access to training courses and youth services accessed independently through bus transport.

The Parish includes the hamlet of Charlton-All-Saints where a significant proportion of the residents are older people. The Parish Council wishes to stress that a bus service to this rural area remains a fundamental element of life to those residents. Referencing Wiltshire Council's sustainability policy, the Parish Council knows that Wiltshire is 'committed to reducing its carbon footprint, preparing residents for the consequences of a changing climate, pollution prevention and demonstrating continuous improvement' and will do this, amongst other things, by 'developing and promoting a range of sustainable transport options'. In Downton, too, 'Everybody matters' and that is why the Parish Council feels it is important to maintain options for continued independence in transport and to reduce the use of the car. However, it also recognises the impact of centrally demanded savings targets and has therefore understood the need to consider carefully which options for savings might best be reviewed with the least impact on those most vulnerable.

### Response to options potentially under consideration

Responses to Questions 9 – 25 will follow but as this response is on behalf of the whole demography of Downton, the individual impact cannot be specified.

**Question 9** – For Downton the Parish Council considers that the most important services for Wiltshire Council to continue to support are the regular services linking towns and villages, the irregular but vital services to the most rural areas and the services which run after 7pm. The impact of reduction of services within a town, on bank holidays and Sundays are less important to this locality and therefore the Parish Council considers these to be open to savings considerations. Although ideally it would appreciate Sunday and bank holiday services, the Parish Council accepts that the regular services must be maintained even when savings must be found and reductions on these days would result in minor inconvenience and affect fewer people.

**Question 10** – With the numbers using the service considered against the cost of subsidising the service demonstrating a cost of £3 per passenger journey, in addition to the charge made to the user, after 7pm, the Parish Council accepts that this is a high cost option. However, for the reasons stated above (hospital visits, young people working etc) it considers this an important element of public transport. It may be relevant to consider how those specific users may be better and more cheaply supported with, for example, the use of low cost taxi vouchers made available for purchase via Wiltshire council.

**Question 12** – The Parish Council considers that a review of Sunday and bank holiday bus services is worth further consideration as relatively few people use these services and usually for less crucial journeys.

**Question 14** – The Parish Council also considers that a reduction in the number of hourly buses on certain routes should be considered for efficiency savings but that such reduction should not be implemented across the service throughout the entire day. It feels that early morning (7 – 10) and after 4.00pm should remain at at least hourly intervals to support working people.

**Question 16** – With the service to Charlton-All-Saints being only a single day service on Tuesdays, the Parish Council believes such a service is vital to many of the residents of that area and should not be considered for reduction or withdrawal. The description given of option 4 indicates that this is unlikely but the experience of those residents demonstrates how central some services are to rural areas and so the Parish Council believes this option is not appropriate for consideration. Furthermore, the service to the Moot Lane area of Downton is described as 'rural' but is used by the older or disabled residents in what used to be described as sheltered accommodation, who are unable to walk to the bus stop accessing the X3 service and would therefore be deprived of the ability to visit outside of Downton by bus. **Question 18** - As described Option 5 does not specifically affect Downton and the Parish Council feels it inappropriate to comment.

**Question 20** – The Parish Council strongly feels that withdrawal of all subsidised transport with a small proportion of the savings being passed to community or voluntary transport options (option 6) should NOT be considered. While tax payers' contributions are managed by a democratically elected body as is the case currently, any consideration of savings or major service withdrawal is subject to consultation and scrutiny. The Parish Council does not believe this would be the case if this option were to go ahead. Even well-meaning and community driven organisation do not have the same accountability or the option of redirecting funds to continue to provide vital services.

**Question 22** – The Parish Council accepts that investigation into this option is necessary to allow consideration of all options for savings but recognises that local contributions to such

services are unlikely to always maintain the altruistic approach needed to support the minority and vulnerable users of transport so leading to eventual loss of service to these people. Furthermore local parishes are not eligible to run such services themselves as most do not have the power to fund or run bus services unless they have the general power of competence – a requirement in law.

**Question 24** – Downton does have the benefit of a Community First Link scheme and this is central to some transport users and such funding should continue, not only for transport reasons but because the service can also provide social support with minor tasks in the home. However, this provision is not a substitute for public transport as it applies criteria for its use only to those ‘people who are in need either because they are elderly, disabled, single parents or perhaps are temporarily in need because of illness’ and cannot be used for spontaneous unplanned journeys.

**Question 25** – The Parish Council believes that, in undertaking a review of subsidised transport options, Wiltshire Council must take account of the wider impact of any public transport reductions. Buses are used in the majority of cases, by older people, young non drivers and those who cannot afford to run a car. The required Equality Impact Assessment will need to address the impact on these people and it is these very people who would become more isolated and vulnerable and consequently have the potential to make greater demand on health and social care resources which already make up the highest area of spend for the Council. With both services for young people and for vulnerable older people making up two of Wiltshire’s key priorities, any reduction in such provision must be set in this strategic context and not run counter to the stated intentions.

With the impact of now having to find a further 0.5% saving on top of the already high pressure and with Wiltshire already increasing taxes to almost the maximum allowed without the cost of a referendum, the Parish Council accepts that all areas of potential efficiencies must be considered but urges the Council to take account of the points raised in this consultation response.

Yours faithfully



**Bev Cornish**  
**Clerk to the Council**