



<u>Committee and Date</u>
Special meeting of the Ludlow & Clee Area Local Joint Committee
28 October 2009
7.00pm

<u>Item</u>
3

Ludlow Town Subsidised Local Bus Services

Responsible Officer Jonathan Hayes
jon.hayes@shropshire.gov.uk 01743 255433

Summary

At the meeting of the Ludlow & Clee Area Local Joint Committee (LJC) meeting, held on the 16 September 2009, a number of options were discussed for changes to the Ludlow Town bus services. Following consideration of these options a decision could not be reached by the LJC on which option to proceed with. However, the LJC did agree the scope of some further work on an alternative to the existing network and the details are presented in this report.

Recommendations

It is recommended that the Ludlow & Clee Area Local Joint Committee agree which of the following options is pursued by Shropshire Council.

- Option 1 – Existing route and timetable (appendix 1)
- Option 2 – Amended route and timetable (appendix 2)

REPORT

Background

1. The Ludlow and Clee Area Local Joint Committee wish to review the routes of the Ludlow town bus services to improve access to Ludlow Leisure Centre, Ludlow Hospital and the outlying hamlets of Rocks Green and Sheet.
2. A number of options have been considered at previous meetings the most recent of which was held on 16 September 2009. A full description of all the options previously considered are given in the report which was presented at this meeting.
3. Following this presentation and discussions amongst attendees it was not possible to reach a decision on which option would be most suitable for the town and officers from Shropshire Council were asked to consider further suggested amendments.

Existing Provision

4. Ludlow Leisure Centre is owned and operated by Shropshire Council and free swimming is provided to those aged over 60 and under 18 as part of the agenda to promote healthy living and active lifestyles. Linking the town bus service to the Leisure Centre will help to make this facility more accessible via a direct bus service.
5. The Leisure Centre is currently linked to the Town Centre and the existing main bus stop at Castle Square using the 435 local bus service. This service operates on an hourly frequency and is also subsidised by Shropshire Council. To access the leisure centre the majority of residents are required to change between services which involves a financial and time disincentive to using public transport.
6. The hamlet of Rocks Green has recently seen the addition of a number of affordable homes. This area is currently linked to the town centre using the 292 (Ludlow – Kidderminster) bus service which operates on a 2 hourly frequency. It is felt that this level of service is not sufficient for a hamlet of this size and where there is likely to be a higher than average proportion of residents who need access to public transport.
7. In addition to service 292, residents of Rocks Green are able to access local bus service 701 at the junction of Henley Road and Weyman Road. It is a 650 metre walk from the furthest property to access this service. There are pedestrian crossings on the A49 to make this possible.
8. There has been a long standing request for improved bus services in the Sheet area. At present residents are required to walk to the bus stops at the entrance to the Eco Park to catch either of the town services. This is a walk of approximately 570 metres.

9. Ludlow Hospital is currently served by the 701 town service on a 30 minute frequency. Residents wishing to use public transport to access the hospital, and do not live on this route are required to change services at Castle Square.

Options for change

10. Any changes to the local bus services must be undertaken within the existing budget for providing passenger transport services in Ludlow. The passenger transport budget is under considerable pressure and no additional funding is available for such changes.
11. From comments received at the LJC, and subsequent meetings, officers have identified a single option for amending these services as detailed below. Clearly there are many possible variations available, all of which will generate benefits and dis-benefits to different passengers. The aim here is to achieve a service that provides a good, sensible logistical alternative to the existing services for the majority of passengers.
12. Whilst a number of options have been considered at various stages through this process, these have now been discounted in favour of a single option which should be considered along side the existing route and timetables. The Local Joint Committee is asked to consider this option and agree if it should be implemented by Shropshire Council to replace the existing services which are shown in **Appendix 1**.
13. The basis of any successful public service is to provide continuity on an easily understood and well publicised timetable that satisfies the needs of the majority of potential passengers. Continual changes to a service are likely to reduce patronage and disrupt the service. It is therefore important to consider proposals for change very carefully.
14. The route and sample timetable for the amended services are given in **Appendix 2**.
15. Service 703 would operate from the Park & Ride site every 40 minutes and link the town centre with the leisure centre, hospital and Rocks Green. This will be undertaken on a clockwise loop around the town. This represents the shortest possible route between these destinations.
16. Service 702 would operate every 30 minutes from the Park & Ride site along Sheet Road before undertaking a clockwise loop around Temeside, Castle Square, Corve Street and Station Road. On the return journey the service will call at Tollgate Road, Parys Road and Sheet before returning to the P&R site.
17. In order to streamline the routes and provide additional time to serve the additional areas it is proposed to remove the service from Greenacres. Residents in this area will be required to board the bus on Sheet Road.

18. A trial run of the proposed routes has shown that it is possible for the bus to turn at the end of Beaconsfield Park in Sheet and therefore provide a service in this area. However, to ensure this route is possible at all times it will be necessary to implement Traffic Regulation Orders preventing on-street parking on Beaconsfield Park. Should this option be approved the service will not be implemented until the parking restrictions have been put in place.
19. From trial runs of the proposed 703 service this route is timetabled to take approximately 40 minutes. When combined with the 702 service, which departs the P&R site every 30 minutes, this gives an irregular pattern to the timetable for P&R users. Also, the proposed new route of the 703 would mean that P&R and town passengers would be unable to access the Castle Square area and the main town bus stop whilst using this service.
20. It has been shown elsewhere that providing a consistent timetable and route is simpler for the user and makes public transport more attractive and easier to use. The inconsistent nature of the routes and the differing drop off and pick up points for the 702 and 703 park & ride services could be confusing for visitors to the town and could reduce patronage.
21. Service 703 has been designed to be as short as possible however, because it is a circular route some passengers will experience either outbound or return journeys in excess of 30 minutes.
22. Consideration was given to operating service 702 anti-clockwise around the proposed loop. This would reduce the journey time for passengers in the Tollgate Rd and Pary's Road area of the town when accessing services and facilities on Lower Galdeford and Station Drive. However, the operator had safety concerns over turning right when exiting Steventon New Road on to Sheet Road. Therefore, under this proposal, the bus would be required to use Weeping Cross Lane, it would not be possible to serve Steventon Crescent and Steventon New Road.

Operators' Views

23. Discussions have taken place with the operator of this service and they have asked for the following to be raised:
 - Concerned about having to turn the bus in a residential area and potential delays being caused by parked cars on Beaconsfield Park.
 - Questioned how many people would actually use the service at Sheet – The operator has previously driven services which served Sheet and said that they picked up very few passengers
 - Questioned number of people who would board at Rocks Green.

- Questioned the requirement to serve Rocks Green when they have an existing service.
 - Questioned the need to serve the leisure centre and the hospital when they already have an hourly and half hourly service respectively from the town centre.
 - Concerns over greater journey times because of circular one way services which could reduce patronage and result in an increased level of subsidy from Shropshire Council.
24. Their overriding opinion was that because services in the town have only recently been changed they should be left for a minimum of 12 months to allow them to take effect. There were some complaints regarding the recent changes but these have now died away and changing things again is likely to generate more complaints.

Conclusion

25. Option 2 provides improved services to those destinations identified by the LJC. However, in order to achieve this with in existing budgets it has been necessary to reduce the level of existing services elsewhere in the town and introduce a 40 minute circular service. A number of concerns have been raised about the potential negative impact of these changes on P&R and existing town users and this needs to be carefully considered.
26. The constitution for the Local Joint Committees allows them:
- To scrutinise local service delivery by the Council and Town/Parish Councils with the power to request members of the Executive or senior managers to attend to explain decisions affecting the locality and service “failures”
 - To act as decision maker with regard to the local delivery of a range of services and to prioritise resource allocation in their area.
 - To act as a formal consultation mechanism for the Council over and above that taken with individual Parish and Town Councils.
27. Therefore the Local Joint Committee are requested to consider the options presented in the report and advise officers which option would best meet the needs of the local community.
28. The committee should also be aware that as this is a subsidised service , there is a risk that should patronage figures reduce and the subsidy per trip increase, further changes and or reductions in service could prove necessary to reduce the subsidy per trip.