

Review Committee of Rochford District Council



**REVIEW OF
BUS SERVICES**

**FINAL REPORT OF THE PROJECT LEAD AS
APPROVED BY THE REVIEW COMMITTEE**



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE



**Rochford District
Council**

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2 Glossary

DDA	Disability Discrimination Act
ECC	Essex County Council
NIBS	Nelsons Independent Bus Services
RDC	Rochford District Council

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3 **Review Committee Chairman's introduction**

I am indebted to Cllr. Terry Livings and our Overview & Scrutiny Officer Paul Gowers for their hard work and tenacity in producing this review of the bus services within the Rochford District.

Having read the detailed findings that they have presented, it is apparent that there are both problems particularly associated with our District, and problems which are endemic to the country as a whole.

I will comment on our local problems first.

There has been identified a social need for additional and/or enhanced services to some, especially the more rural areas, of our district. As advised by our team, these services are unlikely to be commercially viable and would require financial support in the form of a subsidy. It is plain that until the appropriate funds and initiatives are made available there will, regrettably, be a significant section of our society who are prevented from gaining reasonable access to services.

Access to services must be considered an unalienable right of all residents, and in this regard, it is being breached

The condition of the buses employed in this area is poor and unattractive; they are not user friendly with respect to folk who have a difficulty in walking, or for families with young children and push chairs; the services are un-punctual and infrequent.

There is an unfortunate conundrum here. If more people were to use the buses then the bus companies would invest in better vehicles and provide a better service. If the bus companies were to provide better vehicles and a better service, more people would use the buses. How is this circle to be broken?

I will now comment on the national situation.

There are fewer miles travelled by bus, per head of population, than ever before relative to private transport. There are fewer buses and bus routes; there is precious little investment in new fleets for local use.

The government is desperately trying to encourage people to leave their cars at home for reasons of inadequate infrastructure, pollution and global warming. And instead to use the bus for commuting to work, school etc. Without an adequate public transport system in place, how can this exodus begin?

The government's only answer at this time is the "stick"; penalize the motorist; this is evidenced by congestion charging, ever higher taxation on vehicles and fuel and now road tolls, (pay as you drive, spy in the sky systems).

Maybe it is time that consideration should be given to applying the “carrot”. I will direct the readers attention to the public transport systems that are available to the residents of Austria, Germany and France; they are wonderfully successful with many folk no longer bothering to own a car as an essential means of transport; we are a very poor cousin to our EU partners.

Conclusion:

I would say to our partner Essex County Council; it is high time you took a closer look at this far flung South East corner of your domain and help to provide the “Access to Services” that is being denied to such a significant section of our population.

I would encourage Central Government to take a look at how their continental partners have solved their public transport problems, because they have done a much better job.

Finally:

I sincerely hope that this report will be added to the growing pile of evidence and information that will encourage wise and substantial investment in our woefully inadequate public transport system. Rather sooner than later!

Keith Hudson
(Chairman Review Committee)

4 Introduction

- 4.1 The report that follows has been compiled from the evidence that the Overview & Scrutiny Officer and I have been able to assemble during the course of our investigation.
- 4.2 I have had a life long interest in public transport having spent my working life in the sector and since retiring this has become my sole mode of independent transport. I regularly use the bus service to travel around the District and the surrounding area and have experienced the problems that a lack of an available bus service can cause first hand.
- 4.3 During the investigations I have tried to gather any evidence that was available to support the perception that there is a demand for additional bus routes within the Rochford District.

Cllr T Livings, Project Lead

5 **Background**

- 5.1 The Review was suggested by various Councillors following representation by their constituents regarding their concerns about the lack of bus services in the outlying parts of the District.

6 Terms of reference

- 6.1 To ascertain what the Residents' requirements are with regard to a local Bus service and to provide evidence, if available, of this demand to the Bus Operators in the area.
- 6.2 It was agreed that the project would not look at issues of comfort or pricing at the current time.

7 Methodology

- 7.1 As a starting point there was a review of the previous Council questionnaire, when comments on the local Bus Service were requested from the local community.
- 7.2 The Bus Companies operating in the local area were contacted to explain the nature of the review and to obtain details of customer demand and any complaints with regard to service coverage.
- 7.3 The Parish Councils were also contacted to obtain details of any complaints they had received with regard to the service or lack of coverage from the Bus services.
- 7.4 The transport section of the County Council were contacted and updated on the purposes of the Review and asked for their comments.
- 7.5 A meeting of the Parish Passenger Transport Representatives for Rochford and Castle Point was attended to hear directly from the Parish Council representatives of their concerns regarding the Bus Service.
- 7.6 The information that was subsequently gathered was collated to establish the actual level of demand for any additional service or coverage with the intention that the information would be provided to the Bus Operators that serve our District.

8 Findings

8.1 Council Survey

8.1.1 Whilst the intention was to use the latest Council survey to provide an initial indication of possible demand this survey was undertaken in December 2002. It was therefore felt that, due to the changes that had taken place in the Bus Services since that time, it would be unwise to place too much reliance on this document.

8.2 Web Survey

8.2.1 Given the age of the previous survey it was decided that some more up to date responses from the public were required. The best way that this could be achieved in the short term was to place an electronic survey form on the Council's Web site to try to obtain some responses.

8.2.2 A set of six questions was formulated with a choice of answers for four of them and two boxes available for any other comments.

8.2.3 A copy of the questions and possible answers is included in the appendices at the end of the report.

8.2.4 The survey was posted on the front page of the Council's web site on the 16 August 2006 and since that date twenty seven responses have been received:-

Frequency	reason	Age group	Area live in	Use of additional Bus Services	Any other comments
Never	Too many changes of Bus to get where you want to go	51-60	Rochford	No	Your second question should allow multiple reasons, and the final yes/no should probably include a maybe.
Never	Run a Taxi Service	41-50	Rayleigh	No	No
Never	Run a Taxi Service	41-50	Rayleigh	No	No
Never	Have own Transport	60+	Hawkewell	No	-
Never	Have own transport	41-50	Rayleigh	No	-
Never	Have own Transport	22-30	Rayleigh	No	-
Once a	No evening bus	31-40	Great	Yes	

APPENDIX A

Frequency	reason	Age group	Area live in	Use of additional Bus Services	Any other comments
month	service available		Wakering		
Once a week	Other	60+	Hullbridge	No	Very grateful for the free bus pass.
Never	Bus service does not go where you want to visit	41-50	Rochford	Yes	Many buses are old and uncomfortable.
Never	Other	41-50	Rawreth	Yes	Want to use no 35 to Rayleigh Station but times are not good.
Once a week	Other- lack of adequate service	51-60	Rawreth	Yes	Services between Rawreth Lane and the station/town centre totally inadequate considering the rapidly expanding housing developments in this area, particularly at peak commuting times.
Less than once a month	Other	31-40	Rayleigh	Yes	Buses are not DDA and has difficulty with pushchair
Never	Other	41-50	Canewdon	Yes	
Never	Have own transport	22-30	Rayleigh	No	Very expensive so going by car is much cheaper
Once a week	Other- Usually Walk	41-50	Rayleigh	No	Bus service is pretty good
Daily	No evening bus service available	18-21	Hullbridge	Yes	The bus drivers do not seem to know the names of the stops. There is one bus stop with Crouch ave written on it but they insist that it is not called Crouch ave? 20c
Never	Too many changes of Bus to get where you want to go	41-50	Hawkwell	No	
Never	Bus service does not go where you want to visit	22-30	Great Wakering	Yes	Buses are not on time and no longer go to Shoeburyness regularly so I am not able to use service anymore. No Buses from Southend to Gt Wakering in the evenings
Once a month	Bus service does not go where you want to visit	18-21	Rayleigh	Yes	
Daily	Never on time	22-30	Ashingdon	No	The buses are always late and never turn up on time, sometimes they just don't turn up at all
Once a	Have own	51-60	Rochford	Yes	Whilst the service is

APPENDIX A

Frequency	reason	Age group	Area live in	Use of additional Bus Services	Any other comments
month	transport				reasonable, the fares are high, especially for families. Also there is a lack of low floor buses for the elderly, disabled and those with pushchairs
Less than once a month	Have own transport	41-50	Hullbridge	No	When I do have need to use the bus service I find it excellent. I use it in preference to my car for shopping in Southend and hospital appointments. If I didn't work full time I would use it more.
Less than once a month	Journey time by bus unacceptable	22-30	Runwell, Wickford	Yes	
Never	Have own transport	41-50	Rochford	No	Two key reasons why buses are not used more: quality of the buses themselves (Arriva buses are antiques) and the limitations on frequency and routes.
Never	Bus service does not go where you want to visit	51-60	Canewdon	Yes	The poor bus service to and from Canewdon precludes regular use. The links with other routes require an interminable wait. Those that live in the rural outlying areas have no choice other than the car
Less than once a month	No evening bus service available	31-40	Stambridge	Yes	The bus service to Great Stambridge starts too late for me to be able to arrive in work on time and finishes too early for me to be able to get home after work
Once a month	Bus service does not go where you want to visit	41-50	Rayleigh	Yes	Overall it's a good service but it could do with a service that runs later into the night as it can be difficult to get back to Rayleigh from Southend after 11pm

- 8.2.5 The responses show an even split between people who would use additional Bus Services and those who wouldn't.
- 8.2.6 Age was not a factor for this small sample as those that use the Bus service and those who do not was spread across the whole of the possible age range.
- 8.2.7 Some of the complaints regarding the service were to do with the condition of the vehicles and the failure to keep to the published timetables.

8.3 **Bus Companies**

- 8.3.1 Letters regarding the Review were sent to each of the four Bus Companies operating in the area. These were Arriva, First, Stephensons and NIBS.
- 8.3.2 Written responses were received from NIBS and Stephensons whilst a phone response was received from Arriva some two months after the letter was posted but to date no written reply has been received.
- 8.3.3 Both NIBS and Stephensons have indicated that they were unable to supply any details of complaints regarding lack of service on the basis that they only have a small representation in the District and the work that they do is under contract to Essex County Council.

8.4 **Town/Parish Councils**

- 8.4.1 All fourteen Town/Parish Councils were contacted for their comments and input with regard to any complaints on lack of service that they had received.
- 8.4.2 Responses were received from a number of the Parishes spread across the District. Some of the comments received were regarding the lack of evening services and the previously withdrawn services within their parishes.
- 8.4.3 None of the Councils were able to point to any record of complaints or provide any details of the numbers of complainants that would require the Bus Services.
- 8.4.4 The lack of service to the residents of the Dome was also raised as an area of concern by several of the surrounding Parish Councils.
- 8.4.5 Most Councils made mention of the poor condition that the buses were in and the fact that they failed to adhere to the published timetable.

8.5 Essex County Council

8.5.1 In September a meeting was held with two representatives from the Transport Department of Essex County Council. This was to explain to them the aims of the project and to assess whether they were able to assist the review and provide some answers to the questions that had been raised from our initial investigations.

8.5.2 We were advised that when a demand has not been proven and the Bus Companies are therefore unwilling to provide a service, Essex County Council have a number of support criteria that they use to assess whether they will provide funding for a service.

8.5.3 Minimum Service Level:-

- If Urban Corridor based then it can be hourly during the day, and 2 hourly on a Sunday.
- If Parish based then criteria is based on number of residents, i.e. under 100 there is no minimum service level, over 1000 minimum of several journeys per day.
- Value for money and sustainable over time
- Limit to funding of £5 per passenger travelling on the route.
- Overall cost
- Money within the County budget
- Not able to compete with existing commercial services.

8.5.4 The Regal Busways service came into operation in May of this year and runs between Canvey and Chelmsford. It was funded via the Governments' kickstart initiative, which ceased last year. The County were able to provide funding for the service for 3 years and also purchased the buses from this source. Regal Busways had to guarantee to run the service for a further 2 years after the funding has ceased.

8.5.5 During the first month the service carried 4,000 passengers and then 6,000 passengers the second month. It appears to be used by a high proportion of older people although some younger people have used the service to attend Chelmsford College. From the figures available it would appear that most of the usage is that of generated journeys (ones that would not have otherwise been made) rather than existing ones taking passengers from the other existing services. It is not clear, however, if these journeys have had an impact on travel to Basildon or other towns.

- 8.5.6 All requests by Essex County Council for quotes in respect of operating one of its subsidised services specify that vehicles should be Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) compliant. This is one of the major reasons why the lowest quote does not always win, First and Arriva both provide quotes but have relatively few DDA compliant buses in the area. A list of all the subsidised services and the winning tender can be obtained from the Essex County Council web site.
- 8.5.7 The representatives from Essex County Council were keen to stress that they have no enforcement powers for the Buses on commercial services.
- 8.5.8 The Traffic Commissioner who is based in Cambridge is only able to look at cases where there are significant Health and Safety or congestion issues. Otherwise they have to grant a licence to an operator of good repute. There is a legal requirement that operators should give the Commissioner and the County Council 56 days notice of any changes to the service.
- 8.5.9 County are already aware of the problems of lack of service between the Dome and Hullbridge and are reviewing the situation as they assess the transport provision in the area.
- 8.5.10 Following a number of suggestions from Councillor Livings during this review a meeting was arranged with representatives of Essex County Councils Highways and Transportation Department and some interested residents of the Dome.
- 8.5.11 Residents are not in agreement with alterations that had been suggested to the No 10 service and took the opportunity to indicate what they considered to be an acceptable alternative.
- 8.5.12 They would like a Monday to Friday service departing from the Dome in Hockley and terminating at Rochford which would enable access to the market, Post Office, doctors and shops. It would also provide a connection to the main Arriva Service to and from Southend.
- 8.5.13 The residents representatives felt that 2 departures from the dome in the morning period with a return journey at approximately midday and then a further journey from the Dome to Rochford with a late afternoon return would meet the needs of residents.
- 8.5.14 This would need financial resources from the County Council.
- 8.5.15 The residents also requested that some No 20s be diverted up Lower Road, Hockley from Coventry Corner via suitable roads in surrounding area to finish in Ferry Road at "The Anchor". Again commercial demand for this would be doubtful and would necessitate funding from the County Council.

8.6 **Petition**

- 8.6.1 During the course of the investigations it came to the projects notice that a petition had been started by a Hullbridge resident and a local Parish Councillor for a bus service between Hullbridge and Southend via Ashingdon and Rochford. Details of the petition and its aims have been forwarded to both First and Arriva for their comments.
- 8.6.2 First have responded to this enquiry to say that they do not have any plans to introduce any further commercial services in the area. They also suggested that we should contact Essex County Council who could consider supporting the introduction or improvement of local bus services if a social need cannot be met by commercial bus services.
- 8.6.3 In response to the letter from First we have written to Essex County Council to obtain their views on the proposed service.

8.7 **Parish Transport Representatives meeting**

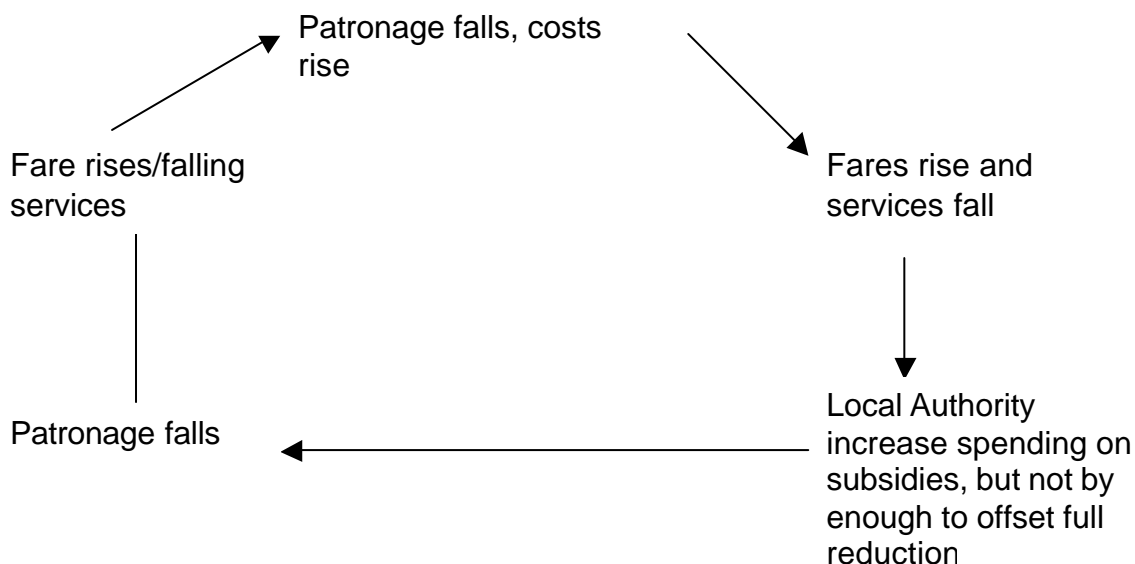
- 8.7.1 As part of the Review, a meeting of the Parish Transport Representatives meeting was attended on 9 November, in order to establish whether the Representatives had any comments that they were conveying to Essex County Council regarding the Bus Service within the District.
- 8.7.2 Whilst mention was made of the petition which had been instigated by a Hullbridge resident and one of the Parish representatives no other evidence of public demand was brought forward for discussion.
- 8.7.3 The meeting was used by the County representatives to stress that they had no powers over the bus companies in the area due to deregulation and the only services that could be influenced were those directly funded by ECC.
- 8.7.4 There was some discussion around the provision of the free bus passes to anyone over 60 and the effect that this had on passenger numbers and the bus companies in general. Commercial operators must not be any better off or any worse off by accepting the free passes. The reimbursement to the operators is calculated using the actual value of the travel undertaken for each company by the number of passengers using free fare passes (revenue forgone) less an amount calculated to represent fare generation as a result of increased bus use by pass holders. Early indications are that the number of journeys generated due to the issue of the free bus passes has increased but the funding to the bus companies might need amending.
- 8.7.5 The officers from Essex County Council did take the opportunity at the meeting to tell the Parish Representatives about a number of reductions in the local services that had been advised to them via the Transport Commissioner. The most important of these was the

withdrawal of the No 35 (running from Southend to Chelmsford) service operated by First at the end of the year.

- 8.7.6 It was pointed out by the Rawreth representatives that this would have a detrimental effect on the area around Rawreth as it was the only service to pass through this area. The ECC representatives did say that they were hopeful that another commercial operator would step in to run the service.
- 8.7.7 Following the meeting Councillor T Livings made representation to the Leader of the Council and the local MP, Mark Francois, to enlist their support regarding the loss of this important service.
- 8.7.8 It has since been announced that a new company, Stansted Transit, will take over this route commencing 2 January 2007.

8.8 Putting Passengers First

- 8.8.1 During the course of the review the Government has published its proposals for a modernised national framework for bus services entitled "Putting Passengers First."
- 8.8.2 This Government report refers to the nationwide decline in the bus services since deregulation and sums up the problems facing the bus operators and local authorities (in the case of Rochford District it is Essex County Council.)
- 8.8.3 Apart from an increase in usage this year due to the introduction of free bus passes to the elderly and disabled, bus usage is predicted to continue to decline.
- 8.8.4 The report also includes the following diagram, which demonstrates the spiral of declining services that is affecting the bus services nationwide:-



- 8.8.5 It shows that, as fares are increased by the bus operators, so passenger numbers reduce causing services to be cut and fares to be increased further. The local authority then tries to replace the services that have been cut with a subsidised service. The new service usually offering less coverage than the previous commercial service. Therefore, once again passenger numbers fall and so it is necessary to increase fares and cut services. This spiral of decline continues as the bus services contract.
- 8.8.6 Whilst the official solutions to the declining bus services have not been decided upon the indication is that a mixture of solutions will be needed from the introduction of local road pricing schemes to the building of bus only lanes to speed up the buses and make them more punctual. It is recognised that in rural areas more measures will be needed to persuade people to stop using their cars in favour of the bus.

9 Conclusion

- 9.1 No information to aid the review was forthcoming from the two major bus companies and so other sources of information have been relied on to try and gain an understanding of the commercial pressures that they are faced with.
- 9.2 The fact that there are two major bus companies operating across the Rochford District and Southend Borough areas would appear to keep fares low as they compete against each other. Whilst in the short term this may be beneficial to the bus users it does mean that there is no subsidisation of uneconomic routes and limited investment in new vehicles.
- 9.3 The general indication gained during the investigation is that if there was a single operator within the District fares would probably rise but this should have the effect of making some routes more commercially viable in the short term.
- 9.4 The majority of the routes within the District are not subsidised and rely on passenger numbers to pay for them. Due to the relatively high level of affluence in the District and the high level of car ownership the demand for bus travel has reduced over the last decade. The fact that people might wish to catch a bus occasionally will not cover the cost of running a service, there has to be a regular commercial demand to cover the overheads of the company running the service.
- 9.5 The bus companies operate only those services that have a commercial demand and this has meant that there are pockets of isolation within the District, which cause concern and inconvenience for the residents of these areas.
- 9.6 There is no coverage to enable visits to certain amenities within the District or in Southend and the lack of evening coverage also causes problems for some residents.
- 9.7 The lack of a commercial demand means that the bus companies will not provide these services and therefore the only way forward is to subsidise the routes.
- 9.8 Essex County Council has set criteria that they use to assess whether a route should be subsidised which has been detailed earlier.

10 Recommendations

- 10.1 During the course of the review it has been identified that a number of services possibly require subsidisation. These services are where there is insufficient commercial usage to support the additional services but there is deemed to be a social requirement by the local community. Considerable funding would be required to take these initiatives forward given that, for example, a standard bus costs approximately £100,000 to purchase.
- 10.2 At the moment there is only one bus a day that leaves from the Dome, Lower Road, Hockley in the morning and then returns in the evening. This is supplemented by the No 10, which runs between Rayleigh and Paglesham, on a Wednesday that can be requested to stop and passes the Dome twice. This service only goes into Rayleigh rather than into Hullbridge itself. During the time of compiling the report the shop and Post Office have both ceased trading on the Dome site itself, making the residents more isolated from such services.
- 10.3 Whilst there is undoubted hardship for some residents of the Dome who do not have their own transport, a number of residents do have access to other forms of transport.
- 10.4 During the review several suggestions have been made to Essex County Council's Highways and Transportation Department to improve this link such as changes to the route of the No 10, and additional service as detailed in the local residents' petition.
- 10.5 The lack of an evening service causes problems to young and old alike. Anybody who does not have access to a car is unable to travel to any places of entertainment, as the bus service is non-existent after approximately 8pm for most of the District. This means that people without cars cannot use public transport to travel to places of recreation such as the theatre, cinemas, pubs, clubs etc. as there is no public transport home at the end of the evening to get them home.
- 10.6 Whilst the No 7 service, Rayleigh to Shoeburyness, is available to take passengers through to Rayleigh it has been pointed out that this is not always convenient for the passengers from the No 8, Hockley to Shoeburyness, to change service midway through their journeys. The No 7 service only has alternate buses travelling the complete route and so there are two groups of passengers switching buses at the same point in Hockley if they wish to continue the journey to Rayleigh. The reinstatement of the No 8 service for this journey would negate the need to change buses, cut down the journey time, thus alleviating potential hardship caused to the infirm passengers and those with young children and heavy shopping and could possibly attract passengers back to this route. Currently the No 8 service runs through to Rayleigh only on a Sunday and is subsidised by the County although

it is questionable whether this arrangement is the best proposition for Bus users.

- 10.7 As mentioned in 9.4 above current bus services do not provide people in the Rochford District with convenient links to places of recreation outside the District. As the bus service has been reduced so the ability for residents in the Rochford District to use the bus service to visit leisure areas in the District and in Southend has declined. Residents have become more reliant on their own cars as a result.

Recommendation No 1

It is recommended to the Planning Policy & Transportation Committee that Essex County Council's Highways & Transportation Department be asked to:-

- explore with the local residents ways in which the transport link between the Dome and Hullbridge could be improved
- explore ways of improving evening services generally
- explore the possibility of reinstating the No 8 service from Hawkwell to Rayleigh during the week
- explore with the local residents ways in which the local bus services could be expanded to cater for people wishing to visit places of recreation from the Rochford District

- 10.8 It is clear from our discussions and the research undertaken that whilst there are a number of people that would like to use the bus services rather than their cars the current services do not meet their needs and there is insufficient demand to attract a bus operator to provide a service without subsidisation. The County Council only have a limited budget to be able to subsidise services within the County and have therefore work to a set criteria when providing support.

Recommendation No 2

It is recommended to the Planning Policy & Transportation Committee that Central Government be lobbied to increase its funding to support subsidisation of the bus services in the County.

- 10.9 Whilst it was outside the remit of the review it was noticed that a lot of bus users have made comment about the condition of the buses and the difficulties experienced by people with pushchairs and the infirm.

Recommendation No 3

It is recommended to the Planning Policy & Transportation Committee that Arriva be lobbied via Essex County Council to improve the condition of their buses and make them more user friendly.

11 Appendix

11.1 Survey questions and possible answers

- 1. How often do you use the bus services in the District: -
 - Daily
 - Once a Week
 - Once a month
 - Less than once a month
 - Never

- 2. If you do not use the bus services regularly is this because: -
 - Have own transport
 - Bus service does not go where you want to visit
 - Too many changes of bus to get where you want to go
 - No evening bus service available
 - Journey time by bus unacceptable
 - Other (please specify).....

- 3. Age group: -
 - 18-21
 - 22-30
 - 31-40
 - 41-50
 - 51-60
 - 60+

- 4. Which area do you live in: -
 - Ashingdon
 - Barling Magna
 - Canewdon
 - Foulness Island
 - Great Wakering
 - Hawkwell
 - Hockley
 - Hullbridge
 - Paglesham
 - Rayleigh
 - Rawreth
 - Rochford
 - Stambridge
 - Sutton
 - Other.....

- 5. If additional bus services were available in your area would you use them: -
 - Yes
 - No

- 6. Any other comments regarding the Bus Services in the District: -
.....
.....