

PRESENT

John Ellerby (Chair)	Principal Bus & Rail Development Officer, Northamptonshire Highways
Richard Auger	District Councillor for Welford and County Councillor for Daventry West
Sarah Peck	District Councillor for Spratton
Emily Curtis	Parish Councillor for Hollowell & Teeton
Andrew Crisp	Parish Councillor for Hollowell & Teeton
Lynne Dyett	Parish Councillor for Naseby
Paul Reedman	Parish Councillor for Naseby
Jay Tindale	Parish Councillor for Spratton
John Hunt	Parish Councillor for Spratton
Anna Hughes	Parish Councillor for Creaton
James Hill	Parish Councillor for Creaton
Katy Fulcher	Parish Councillor for Guilsborough
Nigel Brotherton	Parish Councillor for Welford
Arthur Curtis	Parish Councillor for Welford

Apologies were given by Thornby and Cold Ashby. No attendance by Chapel Brampton.

1. John Ellerby (JE) gave an introduction to the tenders which had been obtained for alternative bus schemes/times along the current No.60 bus route. His colleague, James Loader, had prepared figures based on the tenders and these had previously been circulated showing four separate timetables and estimated costs. It was agreed in the meeting that the most practical of the options was Option A which was broadly similar to the existing service and discussions took place regarding this option in particular. JE handed out new figures based on the actual usage of the service by the villages which included a percentage of use for each adult and pass-holder (including weekdays and Saturdays). The percentage does not include children because this would be distorted by the Guilsborough school children but the Guilsborough percentage is high due to the high number of sixth formers attending the school who live in Northampton and use the service.

2. The annual net figure required on Option A would be in the region of £45,000 but the immediate figure for the period 23rd July 2018 to 31st March 2019 would be £30,000, payable in advance as NCC have to give three months' notice to an operator ie: before the end of June 2018. Concessionary reimbursements from the government are received by the operator for pass-holders and this is taken into account in the figures. The figures may vary depending upon how many people use the service.

3. JE says that a contract would have to commence on Monday 23rd July, in order for there to be no loss of service. Also there would have to be a funding partner as he would not be able to deal with 9 parishes separately. This could be one of the parish councils or a separate body which would collect the money from the parishes. NCC would have a contract with this single body as well as a separate contract with the bus company. There was discussion as to the appropriate division of money from each parish such as basing it on a percentage user basis or a population basis but each had its difficulties. For example Kingsthorpe residents would use the service much more per head of population as they would be closer to the town.

JE HAS SUBSEQUENTLY SPOKEN TO THE PREFERRED BIDDER WHO HAS ADVISED THAT THE CONTRACT WOULD HAVE TO BE AWARDED BY MONDAY 2ND JULY IN ORDER FOR THE SERVICE TO COMMENCE ON 23RD JULY.

The NCC does have an obligation to take children to school who are eligible (but not those out of the catchment area) and if there was just the bus dealing with the school children, it could not be used by the public.

There were questions about County Connect and its current service to Market Harborough but it does not go further towards Northampton than Creton. JE had not received many enquiries about County Connect so had not prepared figures for it. Quotes could be obtained if there was enough interest from the northern villages. There are two people in Cottesbrooke who use the service but as they do not have a parish council with a precept it is difficult to have any agreement with the village. However for the first financial year they may be able to use the N0.60 bus for free but perhaps put together a minimal precept for 2019.

4. Two councillors expressed concern that they thought their council would not be happy with payments of £16,500 and £11,200 respectively under the percentage division and were concerned if payments were due then there would not be a precept for it. Naseby was concerned that even under its low percentage it may have difficulty with its precept. Other proportions were discussed and it was generally accepted that there was no perfect solution, and for the financial year up to 31st March 2019, it may have to accept that a straight division between the 9 parishes would be the way to go.

A question was asked as to whether the 21st July date for the termination of the NCC-funded contract could be advanced but JE said that the dates were critical and the bus companies needed three months' notice. Therefore the date could not be changed.

One councillor said that in view of the time restraint, it would be necessary for parishes to take money from their reserves as they would not have a precept for it. A discussion took place as to the timing of the payment required following 31st March 2019 with a view to fitting it in with the receipt of the first tranche of the annual precept.

5. A question was asked about concessionary fares and JE said that the government provide NCC with about £6 million pa.

The bus company does not lose out by giving concessionary travel for free because the government formula is that the County Council gets £6 million pa and then get reimbursed for 110 thousand passes. A comment was made that if we got more concessionary people on the buses, that there would be less subsidy to pay. JE said that if we did not take the opportunity of subsidising a scheme for this financial year then it would be more difficult to resurrect a scheme for the following year. It was generally agreed that it was important that a bus service be continued now.

If we wanted to continue with a new contract in the next financial year there would have to be a contract with the bus company in April 2019 and the money would need to be in the bank for December 2018. This would cause problems with parishes as they only receive the first half of their precepts on 1st April and it was agreed that parish councils would need some flexibility.

JE appreciated that it would not be reasonable on parish councils to ask for money before they had received their precepts and goodwill would be needed on both sides. JE will look into whether there could be any change in the dates. There is no VAT payable on bus contracts.

6. Daventry District Cllrs Richard Auger and Sarah Peck said they would try to pursue the possibility of a matching fund grant from Daventry District Council. This would make the decision of the parish councils easier if they had to pay only half of the proportion of the subsidy. There was a problem in that the matter would have to go to a meeting of the full District Council in July and could this be accommodated. JE agreed to write to Richard Auger and they would liaise. There was one suggestion that the County Council guaranteed the funding pending any promise of money from the District Council.

JE agreed to write to the three councils who did not attend the meeting to try to ascertain their position.

7. It was stated from the floor that beyond April 2019, an equal split would not be fair as in one example, a £5,000 contribution would be half of the precept. There was further discussion about County Connect services and JE will obtain additional data about them. Anna Hughes of Creton Parish Council volunteered to be the co-ordinator for the enquires about County Connect. There was a show of hands in favour of putting the proposals to the respective parish councils with two hesitant participants due to their small budgets and being at the north end of the bus route.

8. Regarding pensioners who did want pay the full fare voluntarily; JE said that such payment would reduce the subsidy in that in the concessionary rate for every £1, the government reimburses the bus company 38 pence. However if a pensioners got on the bus and did not show the pass, the bus company would get 100% and therefore the required subsidy would reduce by that amount. JE said he was dealing with about a dozen other bus routes in a similar way across the county.

9. SUMMARY OF ACTION POINTS FOR JE:

He will email Cllr Auger regarding the last date for awarding a contract
He will talk to the Head of Services about payment for the next financial year
He will talk to the Chapel Brampton, Cold Ashby and Thornby about the proposed share of £3,300 (or £1,500 approx. if there is success in obtaining money from Daventry District Council).

The meeting closed at 9.30pm.