

Brenchley and Matfield Parish council would like to express their deep concern at the consultation that suggests that certain bus services will no longer receive funding to operate.

For our residents it will affect the 296 and the 6 Sunday bus service as well as the Tunbridge Wells Kent Karrier.

We have quite an elderly population as well as many who do not drive. Those who have never learnt to drive or who are not allowed to drive due to health reasons such as epilepsy, vision problems or brain tumours. Pre Covid these residents used the bus services to be independent and travel to Paddock Wood and Tunbridge Wells for their shopping and any other appointments. Most importantly they could get to their hospital appointments.

To say “use it or lose it” needs to be a far more prolonged campaign. We still have at the moment many hospital appointments by phone so residents are not needing to use the bus to attend. But still many residents particularly on the 296 route have no other public travel option to get from Pettebridge into Paddock Wood or Tunbridge Wells.

The removal of these services would be particularly disastrous for members of our community who cannot drive if it is combined with the removal of the Tunbridge Wells Kent Karrier.

The Equality Impact Assessment suggests that KCC intends to work with community transport providers to help to mitigate the effect of the cuts, but there is currently no community transport provision in our parish. Although a community minibus service is an ambition as a community project in our draft Neighbourhood Plan, this would depend on the availability of sufficient finance, a body who could manage the service, a safe place to store the vehicle and sufficient qualified volunteer drivers. At present there is no indication that these will become available in the near future. Therefore, the proposed mitigation for the cuts to the regular and Kent Karrier services would be completely ineffective in our parish. This would appear to conflict with KCC’s public sector equality duty as regards disabled residents of our parish.

Our Local Plan, Neighbourhood Plan and current housing developments within our Parish are actively encouraging the use of public transport. If these two services (296, and part of the 6) are removed how does that fit in with sustainability and being environmentally friendly?

We urge KCC to review and keep these services. They are a vital link for the independence of our residents whatever their age and whatever their circumstances.

**Brenchley and Matfield Parish Council**

Approved 4 April 2022

Submitted to KCC (via Email) 6 April 2022