

# Sustainable Transport Herefordshire



## All Electric Town Bus Service for Ledbury

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# An Electric Town Bus Service for Ledbury

## 1. Introduction

The Herefordshire Council Core Strategy 2011-2031 stated

*'Within the overall vision for Herefordshire, Ledbury will continue to be supported in its role as a thriving service centre to its surrounding rural area in the east of the county. This vision is manifested in strategic objectives 1, 4, 6, 8 and 10. For Ledbury, the focus will be on meeting housing needs including affordable housing, reducing the need to travel by private car, facilitating the provision of new jobs to stem out-commuting, improving delivery of and access to services, and realising the value of the local environment as an economic asset through promoting sustainable tourism and high quality housing.*

## 2. New Housing

Ledbury was anticipated to accommodate a minimum of 800 new dwellings during the plan period with the majority of 625 on a greenfield site to the north of the town. However, new development of 275 dwellings to the south of the town is now proceeding and there is a further application for up to 475 dwellings off the Dymock Road in the same general area. If all developments proceed the total increase in dwellings could reach 1,375, well in excess of the core strategy guidelines. With a national house occupancy of 2.4 person per dwelling, this gives an anticipated population increase on 3,300, raising the total population to 12,900.

## 3. Car Ownership

With car ownership for rural town and fringe areas in the West Midlands running at 1.4 (Government National Travel Survey Summary) then the impact of development in Ledbury will mean an anticipated 1.925 extra vehicles taking to the local roads. Given that the town centre and town employment areas will continue to be major destinations, then traffic congestion and all the implications is set to substantially increase.

Parking space in Ledbury is already at a premium and the opportunities for increasing it are severely limited if not impossible. At the same time we should note that the core strategy includes the need to reduce travel by private car. Similarly the Ledbury Neighbourhood Development Plan 2018-2031 includes an objective: *'To promote the use of sustainable transport methods such as cycling, walking and public transport as a primary means of getting around the Parish of Ledbury and providing connectivity to neighbouring parishes.'*

## 4. What Can be Done? The Background

In the 1990's a draft discussion document was prepared for Ledbury Town Council on the need for an internal transport service for Ledbury. The document indicated the benefits of such a service would be to:

Provide a cost effective solution to local travel requirements including getting to work as well as shopping.

Ease the parking problem in Ledbury as fewer cars could come into town.

Improve local trade as there would be a greater incentive to shop in Ledbury.

Improve mobility for the locally retired.

Ease transport costs for local young people.

In October 2001 a Ledbury Town Bus Project was started as a partnership between the Countryside Agency and DRMBus as part of the new Small Market Towns Transport Initiative. The project was funded

by the Countryside Agency for three years and operated by DRMBus with a short wheelbase Volvo bus dedicated to the service. The service connected the New Mills estate, Lower Road, New Street and Deer Park with the town centre and the railway station.

Whilst early use of the service was encouraging, at the end of the funding period it was determined that the service was not commercial enough to continue without financial assistance from the Transport and Highway Authority. In the event support was not forthcoming and the service was downsized and integrated with the DRMBus service 476 to Hereford. The last vestige of the service operates today as service 600 operated by First Worcester as part of a package of services in the Ledbury and Bromyard area funded by Herefordshire Council.

## **5. The Future**

In retrospect the town service of 2001-2004 was a pioneer, but perhaps introduced too early in the development of Ledbury. However, as noted previously in this document, the land use pattern in Ledbury is evolving quickly with new housing development and designated employment areas growing rapidly. Couple this with a forecast dramatic increase in congestion and resulting deteriorating in town centre air quality, plus the impossibility of providing new parking areas within the conservation area, then the opportunity of reintroducing a town bus service becomes a real possibility.

To make an impact in line with the strategies of the Herefordshire Core strategy and the objectives of the Ledbury Neighbourhood Development Plan in respect of sustainable transport, such a town bus service would comprise the following:

- ◆ The use of modern nil emission low floor electric buses for short haul work
- ◆ A service that penetrates housing estates and connects the following with the town centre throughout the day and at peak times connects with the main employment areas:
  - The new Hawks Rise and Dymock Road housing areas south of the town
  - The established Deer Park housing area
  - Lower Road industrial estate
  - Established New Mills and Hereford Road housing areas
  - Bromyard Road industrial area
  - New housing development off Bromyard Road
  - The railway station.
- ◆ A service frequency throughout the day of no less than every 15 to 20 minutes.
- ◆ A maximum walking distance 400 metres or less to bus stops together with good design of stops, shelters etc. especially in respect of people that are mobility impaired.
- ◆ Minimum fares and through fares to Hereford, Gloucester and Worcester.
- ◆ A range of weekly and monthly season tickets with special fares for schools and young people.
- ◆ An increased level of service to the Ledbury fringe villages of Bosbury, Cradley, Ashperton, Much Marcle and Bromsberrow thus strengthening the ties between Ledbury and its catchment area for shopping and employment.
- ◆ Improvements to bus stops, shelters and no waiting restrictions providing easy bus access for senior citizens, young families and those with a disability.
- ◆ Linked bus and shop promotions in partnership with local retailers.

## 6. The Role of Government and Local Authorities

The government has started the ball rolling with the announcement of their National Bus strategy. Which states that: *'Buses play a vital role in our transport system. Responsible for around 12 million journeys a day, our buses transport more people than any other form of public transport - getting people to work, to education and to see friends and family, the everyday journeys that make up our lives'*. The report goes on to say *'That's why we are taking the lead in launching a revolution in bus services, delivering a better deal for bus users that meets the needs and demands of the travelling public. In a package worth £220 million we are committing to the UK's first-ever long-term bus strategy and funding settlement.'* (ref: [www.a better deal for bus users.gov](http://www.a-better-deal-for-bus-users.gov)).

The government strategy includes packages to introduce electric buses (all new buses after 2025 to be electric and by 2035 all buses to be electric, the introduction of new initiatives for rural transport, including small rural market towns and increased support to local authorities in order to introduce new services and replace services that have been lost.

Local authorities have the responsibility to grasp the support the government is giving in the Bus Strategy and thus implement ways of improving bus services as a vital part of our future transport system. In this respect the support of Town and Parish Councils is vital. After decades of service withdrawals and poor service quality, the news that Herefordshire Council is to spend up to £39 million on electric buses to improve transport links in the county is very encouraging. That a package of proposals for Ledbury to improve the image of the bus, make the bus attractive, easy and economical to use and link the bus with the economic, social and environment future of Ledbury must now be self evident.

### **Sustainable Transport Herefordshire**

#### **Who Are We?**

We are a small group of professionals who embrace transport and land use planning, economics, the environment and who see into the future and learn from the past.

The realisation that future transport has to change led to the formation of the **Herefordshire Sustainable Transport Group** in 2017 (HSTG).

We publish under the title of **Sustainable Transport Herefordshire**.

Our principal aim is to examine and study innovative, environmental and economic changes in transport that can be applied to Herefordshire's current transport problems. We seek to work with the local transport authority, local MPs, the Department for Transport, transport operators and community groups in planning the future.

HSTG is an Independent Group allied to Rail & Bus for Herefordshire and the Herefordshire Transport Alliance.

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