

7th August 2024

Public Transport Working Group

In Attendance: Cllrs Wendy Brooks, Graham Parker, Andy Pearce and non-Councillor member John Sillett. Taylor Williams (Committee Clerk) and Karen Chapman (OPR Consulting)

The Working Group provided an update on their work to the Consultant and explained that public transport would be crucial to any regeneration of the town and the main issues were the disruptions to train travel and bus and train services finishing too early in the evening.

The consultant confirmed there was due to be more funding available for buses, so Suffolk County Council (SCC) and relevant bodies needed information from the towns to help plan new routes and enhance their current capacity. The evidence Lowestoft Town Council (LTC) provides would be crucial, so the public survey needed to be effective and succinct.

The previous chance to receive funding was from the Bus Service Improvement Plan in March 2024, from which Suffolk did not receive major funding whilst Lowestoft received some money for the Buzzabout community transport service.

The consultant notified the working group that Transport East, one of seven non-statutory and strategic bodies across England, would be providing advice to the Secretary of State on the transport needs of the area. They had previously held a consultation in February 2024 which had identified that the availability of buses was a key issue.

Suffolk Enhanced Bus Partnership were also keen to receive more information from Lowestoft, particularly with the impending opening of the new bridge and the impact it would have on the town.

A new initiative, Scheme on a Page was due to be launched where parish councils could submit details and evidence of areas that have a need for improved bus services. A meeting to discuss this initiative was due to take place 11 September 2024 (which the consultant needed to confirm if it was open to councillors or officers) and the deadline for submissions to the scheme was 15 November 2024.

Regarding the public survey, the consultant suggested it be a predominantly online survey (via survey monkey, for which officers would check if LTC already had an account) with hard copies placed in key areas. Furthermore, the working group were advised to not conduct a public engagement meeting until they have the results of the survey to inform the meeting (only if they feel a public meeting is warranted). The consultant had reviewed the survey questions and felt some raised concerns and needed to be reviewed.

For the timeframe, the survey could be published in September 2024 so it can be analysed and submitted in time for the Scheme on a Page deadline in November 2024. Therefore, the consultant suggested the deadline be set for two weeks after it has gone live, noting that whilst a closing date would be set LTC could still choose to accept late submissions.

As some members felt the survey should be live for a month and the consultant suggested a compromise of three weeks, with the aim to publish to survey after the August bank holiday and set the deadline to approximately 17th September 2024. This would allow the analysis to be finalised by the end of September (depending on the number of hard copy submissions) leaving a month to compile the information required for the Scheme on a Page initiative.

LTC officers had the most recent version which the consultant would integrate into a newly drafted survey. This re-drafted survey would be sent to all working group members, with comments to be received by 21st August. The working group would then consider if a meeting was required to finalise the survey and go live.

The working group would need to consider where to publish the survey (LTC's social media pages and website) and where to place hard copies. It was suggested to place hard copies in the library, the bingo hall, the Olive Tree next to the library, the bus station (perhaps a QR code sign could be considered), the railway station, Gunton St Peter's Church, Gunton Estate Community Hall and all other community halls, East Point Pavilion and theatres. The focus should be the online submissions as the survey software would be able to provide the analysis.

The consultant would speak with SCC and provide them with the draft survey to see if they have any feedback.

A formal letter could be provided to East Suffolk Council to notify them of the survey due to be published by LTC.

The Full Council delegation on the survey would be checked to ensure the working group and officers had been permitted to publish the survey.