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10TH OCTOBER 2017

HOME TO SCHOOL TRANSPORT: LEEK WOOTTON TO KENILWORTH SCHOOL

Among a raft of county-wide proposals concerning Warwickshire County Council's Home to School Transport provision, WCC is proposing changes to the free school bus provision for the Leek Wootton to Kenilworth School route. The route is currently considered unsafe and 'unsuitable to walk'. Thus, the free school bus service.

WCC proposes to make capital works to the route between the village and Kenilworth order to make it 'safe'. The distance from Leek Wootton to Kenilworth School is 2.9 miles. The proposal is likely to have implications for parents whose children take up a place at Kenilworth School from September 2019. This includes parents of children currently at All Saints C of E Primary School.*

The WCC proposal is open to public consultation until midnight on 2 November 2017. It is important that villagers, especially parents whose children hope to attend Kenilworth School from September 2019, make their views known by completing an online survey at www.warwickshire.gov.uk/ask (Home to School Transport Consultation). Concerned villagers may also make your views known on the proposal by writing to transportconsultation@warwickshire.gov.uk

*WCC wrote only to parents of children currently at Kenilworth School – despite the fact that any alteration to the free school bus service will not immediately affect them. WCC did not contact the parents of children who will be affected by future changes to the school bus service.

PRÉCIS OF RESPONSE TO THE PROPOSAL BY [REDACTED]

The Council's proposal as it stands is to carry out 'capital works' by which to improve access to and from Kenilworth School thus allowing the possibility of discontinuation of the service.

What are the implications for discontinuing the service?

1. Children will be required to walk or cycle 5.8 miles to and from school for five days a week, making a total of just less than thirty miles a week.
2. Children will be required to make this journey in any weather conditions, and in winter during dark mornings and late afternoons.
3. This journey will expose Leek Wootton children to a number of hazards and real dangers.
4. Parents will be required to drive their children to and from school.

What are these hazards and real dangers?

1. Warwick Road proceeds two miles to Kenilworth roundabout and the only available footpath is no wider than 60cm at its broadest and 40cm at its narrowest. The combination of heavy traffic at rush hours (when the children will be making their way to and from school by foot or bicycle) with poor weather in winter, poor lighting, narrow pavements and a hazardous crossing point near the cricket ground, and again near the roundabout – these combinations of hazards are a recipe for disaster.
2. The proposal does not take into account the future expansion of Leek Wootton. Anybody buying into this capital project needs to know where they stand upon the safe transport of school-children to and from the major school in our catchment. Such a lack of clarity would be misleading for future members of the village.
3. The Council's proposal does not acknowledge the building of a new Kenilworth school on a green site that is further away from Leek Wootton – making the journey 6 miles and involving the crossing of the ring road around Kenilworth.
4. Parents being required to drive their children to and from school will increase congestion and pollution and add to traffic at rush hour in the morning.
5. Although an intangible benefit, I know from experience that the school bus service fosters a sense of community among the village children.

UPDATE

The number of routes designated for capital works has been reduced from eighteen to five. Leek Wootton to Kenilworth School is still on the list.

RESPONSE BY WCC

The proposal being considered in this consultation is how the reclassification is implemented, **we are proposing that existing travellers continue to receive free transport until the end of their time at the school with new applicants from September 2019 being assessed using the new classification of the route.**

Under the proposals this would mean that **from September 2019 all new applicants would be assessed for free transport** under the normal transport eligibility criteria, this means that pupils need to be travelling over the statutory walking distance - **this is 3 miles for pupils over the age of 8*.**

For those families who are low-income, we have extended rights eligibility criteria in place which means pupils can qualify to one of the three nearest schools over 2 miles away but less than 6 miles. Therefore, these families would still be supported with this journey.

I wish to clarify that the Council has not stated that the service will be discontinued. **A decision would be taken once all entitled travellers have left the service as to whether to continue to run the bus, based on whether it would be financially viable to do so.** We would always look to keep a service wherever possible and families who are not entitled to free transport would be given the opportunity to purchase a seat on the vehicle under our Vacant Seat Scheme (see www.warwickshire.gov.uk/vacantseatscheme for further information).'

IMPLICATIONS OF FINAL PARAGRAPH

* The distance is 2.9 miles. The number of children using the bus is currently 38.

If a vacant seat is available for purchase, and there may not be, the cost would be as follows:

Cost for the 2016/17 Academic Year

The rate of parental contribution is as follows this academic year:

Student lives:	Contribution
more than 3 miles from the school	£750 per annum or £250 per term
less than 3 miles from the school	£375 per annum or £125 per term

There is no guarantee of a vacant seat and parents would need to apply every year.

The cost at present is £125 per term or £375 per year. When Kenilworth School moves to its new site the distance will be 3.1 miles and the cost will be £750 per year (at current rates).

Currently the service is free.