



WICKHAM RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATION

August 2025

Hampshire County Council cancels subsidy to our bus route

Route 20, which connects Wickham, Knowle, Funtley and Fareham, is one of ten bus services having its subsidy withdrawn by Hampshire County Council (HCC) from 1st September. Without the subsidy it will stop. This will leave Knowle and Funtley with **no meaningful public transport**, just as thousands of new residents settle in the area.

In early 2024, HCC conducted its *Future Services Consultation* to obtain people's views on the future of key local services in Hampshire. Options were presented for change in 13 service areas that would help the HCC meet its £132 million budget shortfall. Regarding public transport, the consultation results provided two clear messages: 1. Opposition to cuts is deeply felt, and local transport is a top concern in Hampshire, and 2. Poorer people, the elderly and those with health conditions will pay the price of those cuts.

Despite this, HCC's Cabinet decided in October 2024 to withdraw funding from ten bus routes that it considers 'not viable' and with 'low demand' and had no school children using it. In fact, 45,000 trips are made on Route 20 annually, making it one of the most cost-efficient and well used bus routes supported by HCC. Also we have proof that pupils DO use it!!

The WRA has had to move into gear very quickly as we only learned a month ago that Route 20 was to be scrapped on 1st September. Indeed, the bus operator, First Bus, only announced in early August that the service was closing. To date, HCC has not informed anyone directly in our parish about the closure of Route 20, not even the Parish Council. Given the urgency, the WRA has made Route 20 its top priority. We have teamed with the Knowle and Funtley Residents' Associations and together have been liaising intensively with our Parish Council, Fareham Borough Council, Councilors, senior managers in HCC, and other local interested parties. We have reviewed all the information and documents we could find to help us understand how and why this decision was made, and what the impacts will be. We have also gathered some 40 impact statements from current users of Route 20. These have been shared widely, including with the leadership of HCC, because they show clearly how the real impact of these cuts will be felt by ordinary people in our area.

WRA believes that HCC, under significant pressure to find savings, most likely did not look at the Route 20 service closely in making its decision, and hasn't understood that it will leave large numbers, in growing communities, without any real form of public transport. Among these are pupils accessing education and older people that rely on Route 20 to access healthcare and other facilities. We also believe, after we have done extensive research, that this decision undermines HCC's own policy and statutory commitments to rural lifeline services and inclusive accessibility, particularly its Local Transport Plan (LTP4).

It seems obvious that cutting something as essential as affordable transport is a false economy and a backward step. Meagre savings will be made in the short term but these will be soon outweighed by the social costs of people unable to reach health services,

education, employment and leisure facilities. It is interesting that concerns were raised formally last year within HCC by the teams for adult social care and for child services, conscious that the burden of these cuts could be picked up by their departments.

We are happy to report that we are getting some traction. The issue has now been picked up by our MP (MP has done an online petition please sign it and forwards to others- link below and on our facebook page) and the local media. Also the Parish Council and other local agencies have written to complain at our instigation. HCC are starting to communicate with us – hopefully to find a remedy for their mistake. We are now requesting to meet with HCC leadership and pressing for a three month extension of the service to allow time to work out a solution. If this does not happen we will continue to work for our communities to get Route 20 reinstated.

If you know of anybody who uses this bus regularly and will be affected by its loss – please encourage them to email us with their own Impact Statement (including name and postcode). We are particularly in need of parents to contact us if their child uses this bus to access schooling.

Online petition:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/wickhamresidents>

The more voices, the louder we can be heard – join the WRA !!

WRA Membership is available to anyone 18 years or older who lives in the PO17 postcode area. Joining is simple and FREE just e mail your name, address, and contact number to membership@wickhamresidents.org.uk or visit our website <https://wickhamresidents.org.uk>.

If you need to contact us on any issue pertaining to Wickham and/or its residents please email: chair@wickhamresidents.org.uk

The WRA Committee