

AXE POISED OVER VALE BUS SERVICES

Proposed bus service cuts in the Vale of Evesham would decimate off peak services only introduced as recently as ten months ago.

The Vale Public Transport Group (VPTG), which campaigned for and promoted improved bus services leading to the introduction of the 50's services, is now urging Worcestershire County Council to consider emergency funding and/or options for alleviating some of the worst effects of the cuts.

Unless additional funding is forthcoming large villages such as Fladbury, Charlton and Wyre Piddle will lose all their off peak services and Eckington and Defford's service will become so unattractive to render it useless for shopping trips to Pershore and Worcester - the main reason for its existence.

Services to Drakes Broughton village centre, Norton near Worcester, and Wadborough would also suffer in the cutbacks which could come into force as early as mid September.

First Midlands has told VPTG that the number of customers has increased since the new services were introduced but not by the extent to make them commercially viable. The financial position has now also been adversely affected by a County Council decision to reduce the level of subsidy to bus operators for the concessionary bus pass scheme.

"We have expressed our deep concern at the level of these planned cuts to Vale services both to First Midlands and Worcestershire Council and have now taken up the issue with Vale MPs Harriett Baldwin and Nigel Huddleston," said VPTG chairman Julian Palfrey.

"The announcement in late July also comes at the worst possible moment with the desperate lack of time for any meaningful public representations due to the fact that many if not all the councils affected - including both Pershore and Evesham - do not have meetings in August and relevant county councillors and officers may be away at some stage.

"We are urging both the council and the government - through our MPs - to pay due regard to the serious hardship and rural isolation such cuts cause and increase funding for our ailing rural bus network to allow vital services to continue."