



WHO WE ARE AND WHAT WE DO

THE HERSTMONCEUX TRANSPORT ACCESS GROUP is a non-political, not for profit group that wishes to improve transport links for the rural community of Herstmonceux, Cowbeech and Windmill Hill.

BACKGROUND

In 2013 I was approached by Herstmonceux Parish Council to help with their Neighbourhood Plan (Mark I). At the time I was chair of the Business Association and the council wanted input from the business community.

As part of my input we interviewed many residents aged between 19 and 25 about their concerns with employment. The majority of the interviewees made comment that it was impossible to get to and from college or places of work outside the parish by public transport. (Bus timings did not assist, and not all youngsters qualified for assisted travel).

The Plan was put on hold and resurrected in 2017.

The new Neighbourhood Plan – that was adopted in 2018 – had improved transport links included as one of the policies.

PROBLEMS FOR OUR RURAL COMMUNITY

The 3 communes of the Herstmonceux Parish are considered to be part of a wealthy locality within the Wealden District area.

But however, like a lot of rural communities in the UK, it has its own problems.

Herstmonceux had in 2017 the second highest rate of isolation and registered dementia sufferers in East Sussex.

Isolation can be put down to the high number of large family homes with single or two person occupancy. It has become very difficult to stay in the communities by down-sizing. The policies of central government – of all colours – has been to encourage developments for family homes, and discourage the building of bungalows, etc.

The high average age of the residents of the 3 communes - 58 – does mean that we have a lot of elderly people who, realistically, will have to give up driving.

The elderly often feature in the statistics of the authorities of the high number of KSIs (Killed or seriously injured) victims.

For many years the trend has been for youth to move away from rural communities, often leaving residents without access to friends, family or others in the community – because they cannot get out.

As with the growing trend of the entire Western world, dementia has become a growing problem for Herstmonceux and its environs.

There have been several reports of residents driving their cars into towns and villages, only to forget where they parked – or even where they were.

THE COMMUNITY ARE HELPING BUT ..

We are fortunate that we have a lot of active groups and organisations in our locality that help get the lonely involved.

Vitality Villages – centred within our doctors' surgery – brings these groups together and with the help of the surgery staff they involve those considered to be vulnerable. But, pride often stops some of the more lonely to ask for help.

The Parish Council is a catalyst for sign-posting those needing help to places where the help may be.

THE FAMOUS BUS SERVICE

The village of Herstmonceux is served by the infamous rote 98 – operated by Stagecoach.

It only operates out of the village centre between the hours of 7am and 7pm.

It is unreliable, expensive and does not operate on Sundays. It is often delayed and quite frequently cancelled without warning. This is believed to be the main reason why residents do not use the service.

Cuckmere Buses operate a service through Cowbeeche and the village centre on Wednesdays to Eastbourne. Very often the two buses are full by the time it arrives in the village centre. It is a reliable service and hence the reason why it is used!

ACCESS TO HOSPITAL HEALTHCARE

Our communities are served mainly by the two general hospitals in Eastbourne and Hastings.

These hospitals share services and residents can be called for outpatients' appointments at either venue.

To get to either hospital by public transport is difficult. If a 98 bus runs from Herstmonceux on time it is possible to get a direct service to the Eastbourne District General Hospital but the last service leaves at 1800 to get into the village.

For the Conquest it is more difficult. To get there from Herstmonceux it normally involves a change, or two to get to the Ridge. But the real problem is the return trip. Unless the resident leaves the Conquest by around 3pm then a return by public transport is impossible. This can involve a £ 30 taxi fare.

The NHS nationally have called for necessary scans and reviews to be carried out as quickly as possible after diagnosis. With East Sussex Healthcare it can mean evening and weekend appointments. The frequency of our bus route makes this impossible for residents to attend using public transport. (There is no bus service on Sundays).

OTHER MEANS OF TRANSPORT LOCALLY

CYCLING is dangerous on local roads. Badly maintained and too narrow for safe cycling. There are no cycle routes within the parish area but the Herstmonceux Neighbourhood Plan, as adopted, does set out one of it's policies to build a cycle path between Windmill Hill and the village centre.

H-TAG will be reviewing how it can assist the increase use of cycles.

There are taxi services to and from the parish. But it is not an inexpensive way of travelling. (For example, a taxi from Polegate Station to the village centre can cost anything between £15 and £26!!!).

ASSISTANCE OF 3VA AND FORMATION OF H-TAG

Staff of 3VA knew of my concerns about transport issues and encouraged me to set up H-TAG.

We wanted to make sure that any organisation in the area had no political direction and was for the benefit of the community. We work in collaboration with the parish council for the benefit of all residents.

Without the support of 3VA and Sheila Charlton we would not be where we are today.

WEALDEN BUS ALLIANCE

Rather than re-invent the wheel we sought guidance from the WBA, who have been very helpful in getting us under way.

WHAT WE HAVE DONE

We arranged an informal survey of the three communities proffering the idea of a shuttle bus service to Hailsham, where the bus hub has links with many location – Heathfield, Tunbridge Wells, Uckfield, Polegate and Eastbourne. From these destinations there are further links to Gatwick, Brighton and westbound coastal routes.

Hailsham is only 3.5 miles from Herstmonceux but to many it could be the other end of the world!!

The survey confirmed that there was a desire for improved links, especially with the elderly, those requiring medical facilities and the young wanting to do things outside the parish and be able to get home after 7pm!!

WHAT WE ARE CURRENTLY DOING

We discovered that we needed to conduct a formal transport needs survey in order to get any form of grant funding or support.

With the help of 3VA and the WBA we were fortunate to gain an award from the National Lottery of £ 10,000 to conduct a survey.

We received tenders to undertake the work for us and after consideration appointed The Right Hon Norman Baker, an ex-MP and a past Minister of Transport.

The survey has been delivered to all residents to gauge our transport needs.

A public meeting will be held at Herstmonceux Village Hall on March 30, 2020.

At that meeting the results of the survey will be given and there will be opportunities for residents to ask questions of local representatives, Stagecoach and ESCC.

SOME OF OUR VISIONS FOR THE FUTURE

Our definitive visions will be defined by the outcome of the survey results.

But visions include –

A voluntary car service to take patients from Herstmonceux to either Hailsham to connect with other Eastbourne destination routes, or to Ninfield/Sidley where route 95 bus goes to the Conquest.

The idea is for the driver to collect on return but save time and energy waiting for appointments to conclude.

A shuttle bus service to Hailsham, Ninfield or even Pevensey.

Negotiate an improvement to the 98 service – longer hours or even a special fare for selected routes.

A pool car club service. Centrally parked electric car(s) to enable those without their own vehicle to borrow a vehicle for a time.

Encourage the use of energy saving modes of transport – and environmentally friendly.

Link with other organisations link Sustrans, ESCC, Wealden and our Integrative Health Centre to improve access to healthy ways of travelling.

WATCH THIS SPACE

We are open to ideas and more volunteers to guide us forward.

Malcolm J Bradshaw FCCA, Chairman January 2020