

Village Transport Research Project

Devon consortium local infrastructure plan: 13.1

Contents	Page
1. Introduction	
1.1 Background	4
1.2 Project Description	4
1.3 Benefits and Outcomes	4
2. Case Studies: Background Information	
2.1 Buckfastleigh	5
2.2 Cheriton Fitzpaine	5
3. Methodology	
3.1 Research Scoping Meeting	6
3.2 Buckfastleigh approach	6
3.3 Cheriton Fitzpaine approach	7
4 Key Issues	
4.1 Buckfastleigh Street Survey – Key Findings	8
4.2 Cheriton Fitzpaine Street Surveys – Cross cutting themes	9
4.3 Recommendations	10
5. Bibliography	11

Rory Cunningham
Rural Officer
Community Council of Devon

1.Introduction

1.1 Background

It is widely accepted that public transport in smaller rural communities is poor, leaving those without access to a private car seriously disadvantaged. Typically these groups include:

- Children and young people
- parents at home with children
- low paid workers and their families
- older people
- people with particular mental and physical health problems

Devon has seen many creative community transport solutions to these problems of disadvantage and access, and a good deal of volunteer input and community enthusiasm applied to the issue. However most such solutions are not financially viable without subsidy, and there is a tendency for such initiatives to eventually struggle for funding, wear out their local volunteers and fold.

In research undertaken by Devon Forum under the South West voluntary sector 'early spend' programme, these issues were highlighted by the vast majority of the 14 villages surveyed. However in one of the most remote, access and transport issues were not felt to be a problem. The reason appeared to be the 'social capital' available in that community in terms of extended families, strong neighbour support, and effective local community organisations.

1.2 Project Description

This project aims to explore the factors that contribute to effective community transport in two contrasting Devon communities. The proposal is to contrast an urban fringe settlement with good transport solutions with a more remote community with some community transport ideas with the potential for further development. This project takes the form of action research, to first assess the level of support for community led transport solutions in each community, then to explore the potential transfer of effective, community led solutions.

The communities selected for focus are Cheriton Fitzpaine (Mid Devon) and Buckfastleigh (Teignbridge)

1.3 Benefit and Outcomes

The perceived outcomes and benefits of this research project are as follows:

- Two Devon communities maximising the use of existing resources in order to solve transport and access problems for the disadvantaged in their communities
- A transferable approach to community-based solutions to rural transport problems at the village level, which avoids the need for significant external funding.

2. Case Studies: Background Information

2.1 Buckfastleigh Background and Transport Links

Buckfastleigh is an historic mill town and Abbey site situated on the southern edge of Dartmoor National Park. The town is well equipped with amenities - two public parks, a swimming pool, skate-park, tennis courts, a bowling green and local shops. The Town holds local events throughout the year - such as the Farmers Market every Thursday. Buckfastleigh Railway Station is now the terminal of the South Devon Railway steam trains -the railway is run in traditional style by a registered charity.

Buckfastleigh is situated in the district of Teignbridge. Teignbridge is served by three main trunk roads; the A30 which services the northern part of the district on its way to Oakhampton and Cornwall; the A38 expressway which is a dual carriageway link to Plymouth, and the A380 which is a dual carriageway link to Torbay. All of these roads feed into the M5 at Exeter which provides good onward connections to other parts of the motorway network and to other parts of the United Kingdom. The main settlements of the district; Dawlish, Teignmouth, Newton Abbot, Ashburton, Buckfastleigh & Moretonhampstead have all got good road communications with all other parts of the district and easy access to the main arterial trunk roads.

The district is served by the mainline from London Paddington Exeter to Plymouth, and Newton Abbot serves as the junction station for Torquay and Paignton. The mainline services are provided by First Great Western and there is an hourly service to London through the day. Services to other parts of the United Kingdom are provided by Virgin Cross-country and through services are available to Scotland, the North West of England and the North East of England. There is an hourly service to Birmingham on Virgin Cross-country Trains. Local services are provided from Newton Abbot to Exeter. This stops at Teignmouth, Dawlish, Dawlish Warren and Starcross and an hourly service is currently provided by Wessex Trains.

2.2 Cheriton Fitzpaine Background and Transport Links

Cheriton Fitzpaine is situated in the heart of Mid Devon and was once a thriving farming community, supporting over 1200 inhabitants. There are currently 750 residents with a Primary School, an Alms House, two Inns and a post office stores, Doctors Surgery, Anglican and Methodist Churches and a variety of businesses. Information is provided by the monthly newsletter *Cheriton News* and a monthly Church magazine *Cross Country*.

212 households responded to the Parish Plan questionnaire (68% of those in the parish) – the outcomes of the parish plan highlighted a number of transport needs/concerns which have helped to focus this research.

The Transport section of the Cheriton Fitzpaine parish plan strongly indicates that it is essential for the vast majority of local inhabitants to travel out of the parish for employment which means accessing transport services that the community find difficult to sustain. The majority of these journeys are made by car. There is a tangible interest in reducing the number of solo car journeys (perhaps through car – share), and in achieving better organisation/timing of existing public transport provision.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Scoping Meeting

In the initial stages of the research, a project timeline was agreed and project case study areas were confirmed by confirmed by a Rural Transport focus group. This group consisted of Rory Cunningham (Community Council of Devon) Lesley Smith, Devon Association of Parish Councils/CCD, Lynn Thornton, Devon Rural Transport Partnership and Duncan Wood, 'Involve' – (Voluntary Action in Mid Devon). An initial mapping exercise had been carried out by Jack Harris (Student Researcher) detailing Traffic and Transport issues arriving from Devon Parish Plans. This mapping exercise provided an overview of key transport concerns and aspirations for future development. The Rural Transport focus group used the mapping exercise as a tool for discussion and made the following decisions about the project:

- Cheriton Fitzpaine displayed the relevant characteristics of a remote rural community that had taken some steps towards resolving local transport solutions. It was agreed that this Parish would become the first case study area and that the Parish Plan Steering Group for Cheriton Fitzpaine should be contacted accordingly.
- Buckfastleigh was perceived to be relevantly 'Urban Fringe' with good Transport infrastructure. It was felt that Buckfastleigh would be a strong case study comparison for potential transfer of ideas and good practice.
- It was noted that some transport research had recently taken place in Buckfastleigh through the ongoing work of the South Devon Rural Transport Partnership. The focus group decided that, due to the relatively short time period for the project, It would be most beneficial to liase with Zoe Harris (Transport Research & Development Officer) and explore ways to compliment existing research - In this way, duplication of work could be minimised and key findings from each partner could be shared. This level of

partnership working would also allow a larger proportion of research time to be focused in Cheriton Fitzpaine, which the focus group agreed would provide more overall benefit to this particular case study area.

3.2 Buckfastleigh - Case Study 1: Research Methodology

- Review of Information Booklet:

A meeting took place with Zoe Harris to explore the transport research recently carried out by the South Hams Rural Transport Partnership (SHRTP). The latest project had focused on the effective promotion of existing transport services within the Buckfastleigh area, through the development of a bold, concise transport information booklet. It was agreed that the best way to collaborate, given time limitations, would be to use the Rural Transport Project to review the effectiveness of the Transport Booklet. This evaluation would assist SHRTP in gauging the impact of their project. The evaluation would also highlight a variety of Transport services that could have district equivalents in the Cheriton Fitzpaine area –‘kick starting’ a second mapping exercise.

- Farmers Market Interviews:

Buckfastleigh Farmers Market was chosen as the venue for a series of sample interviews to ascertain the effectiveness of the Transport Information Booklet. The interview explored the effectiveness of the booklet *and* the impact of the transport services highlighted within. It was felt that the Farmer’s Market had the appropriate demographic mix to fairly assess the impact of the booklet.

- Evaluation:

Interview findings were fed back to SHRTP to be fed into their evaluation process.

3.3 Cheriton Fitzpaine - Case Study 2: Research Methodology

- Parish Plan review:

Cheriton Fitzpaine’s Parish Plan was examined in more detail to explore what the main traffic and transport issues were. These issues were explored more closely with members of the Parish Plan steering group.

- Steering Group Interviews:

A series of telephone interviews were arranged with three members of the Cheriton Fitzpaine Parish Plan Steering group – Ellen Saunders, Pete Dunn and Mike Beresford. These initial interviews were used to assess which Transport issues had been resolved since the publication of the parish plan. It was felt that such interviews would also give an overview of current Transport issues – helping to shape the major questions that would be asked at a wider level through street interviews.

- Street Interviews

Street level interviews took place on two occasions. (The first series of interviews being less effective due to bad weather) These interviews were designed to explore the public perception of existing Transport provision in and around Cheriton Fitzpaine.

- Evaluation

The main themes that emerged from the street level interviews were fed back to the steering group for wider discussion and the exploration of potential next steps.

4. Key Issues

4.1 Buckfastleigh Street Survey – Key Findings

The following questions were asked of a sample of 46 individuals during the Buckfastleigh farmers market. The questions were focused on the Buckfastleigh Travel Information booklet which was compiled by SHRTP and delivered to every household in October 2005. (Numbers in brackets indicate multiple comments)

1. If you have seen the leaflet, did you find it useful?

Yes: 96% No: 4%

2. Has the booklet made you aware of any transport services you did not know about before?...

Yes: 82% No: 18%

If so, which services?

- Car Share Schemes (11)
- Shop Mobility (10)
- New Taxi services (4)

3. Have you used any of these new services yet?

Yes: 22% No: 78%

4. Do you feel you will use any new services in the near future?

Yes: 77% No: 23%

5. Any other comments you would like to make about the booklet?

- Clear, concise information (39)
- Simple bus timetables a big benefit (26)
- Positive to hear about 'new' services, also great to be *reminded* of more familiar ones (23)
- Nice large font size! (19)
- A 'good size' booklet – easy to carry (15)

4.2 Cheriton Fitzpaine Street Surveys – Cross cutting themes

1. Communication and Promotion

At the beginning of this research It was suggested by the project focus group that transport provision in rural areas could be maximised through improved promotion of existing resources. This instinct was backed up by the street interviews in both case study areas with a significant number of respondents unaware of the extent of existing support. The review of the Buckfastleigh flyer showed strong support for better advertising, with many respondents having considered new transport methods as a result of the information

2. A 'Close Knit' Community?

Cheriton Fitzpaine was selected as a case study area on the basis that it appeared to have the appropriate 'social capital' to resolve *some* of its own transport solutions. A combination of street interviews and meetings with the Parish Plan steering group revealed two main reasons for this. It was primarily felt that the high concentration of dwellings within the centre of Cheriton made it easier for informal car sharing to take place, both in terms of closer social networks and the availability of public buildings as meeting places (the roadsides were not considered safe enough places to assemble). There was some acknowledgement that there was no satisfactory indication that the transport needs of parishioners on the outskirts of the parish were being met through informal networking.

3. Local Expertise

The expertise of Ellen Sanders, Crediton District Community Transport Association (CDCTA) as a councillor and Parish Plan steering group member – was a clear benefit to addressing community transport issues.

4. Car Share and Employment

Car share schemes have been useful in tackling short gaps in rural public transport. The issue of car sharing and employment was a reoccurring issue with the research, with a feeling that conflicting working hours were a major barrier to effective car sharing. Part-time working was deemed particularly difficult. Many without a car would not even consider part time work for this reason.

5. Formal or Informal networking?

There was a feeling that input from outside agencies had to be carefully monitored. The Parish Plan steering group was seen as the best 'hub' for regulating future potential car sharing.

6. Using Parish Plan Steering groups to negotiate

Parish Plans were repeatedly acknowledged as a key, independent forum for negotiation with agencies and authorities, such as the Highway Authority. Highway Authorities were considered particularly difficult to negotiate with, though the steering group provides a consistent force for lobbying.

7. The Importance of Incentives

Several interview comments were made about incentives for community-based transport solutions. There was an attitude that such solutions effectively 'did the council's work for them' and that communities should receive more straightforward support – especially financial.

4.3 Recommendations

1. Better promotion for existing Transport services

Although it is clear that there is more scope for increased and improved transport provision in Devon, this report also suggests that existing transport services (delivered by communities *and* public services) need to be more effectively promoted and advertised. The review of Transport promotion in Buckfastleigh and the review of transport provision in Cheriton Fitzpaine highlighted multiple examples of a lack of awareness of local transport provision.

2. A new promotional flyer for Cheriton Fitzpaine

Cheriton's Parish Plan Steering group were impressed with Buckfastleigh's information flyer and are now exploring funds to help produce their own. This flyer will enable them to informally promote the transport services available to Cheriton and ascertain interest in a more formal car share scheme.

3. Social Inclusion

The steering group acknowledged that a leaflet drop of the planned promotional flyer would ensure that those living on the outskirts of the parish would be included. The steering group also discussed the possibility of having the leaflet displayed in relevant community buildings.

4. IT potential

The local Methodist Church in Cheriton has weekly public computer access. The Parish Plan steering group have decided to explore use of the computer to formalise a more inclusive car share scheme (perhaps via the Carshare Devon Website). It is hoped that a more formal approach to car share may also resolve the concerns over practicality of car-sharing for part time workers.

5. Promote local Expertise

The presence of specifically skilled members on the parish plan steering group has clearly helped cultivate local talent and contribute to Cheriton's 'social capital'. This issue should be highlighted and promoted by the research report.

5. Bibliography

- 'It's Not Just About Transport, Is It?' (Oct 05) – James Shorten, 'Land Use Consultants – Bristol', Commissioned by the Commission For Rural Communities.
- Glastonbury Festival: Sustainable travel and traffic management (April 05) Commissioned by the Energy Saving Trust.
- The Cheriton Fitzpaine Parish Plan (Oct 04) – Cheriton Fitzpaine Parish Plan Steering Group, funded by the Countryside Agency.
- Mid Devon Bus Times, (From April 24th, 05) – Devon County Council
- Teignbridge Bus Times, (From Sept 25th, 05) – Devon County Council
- Devon Bus Map, (2005-06), Devon County Council.
- Buckfastleigh Transport Information Leaflet (Oct 05) – South Hams Rural Transport Partnership.