



Committee	Full Council / Agenda Item 12
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Appendices	None

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1. Summary

At the July 2026 Full Council meeting, Council agreed to provide a community bus service, to include serving the outer lying areas of town and surrounding villages.

The primary purpose of the bus service is to bring residents into Saffron Walden on a Tuesday, being a market day. The report from July 2026 explained the rationale behind the scheme, with the primary purpose of supporting the local economy, and in particular SW market. These details are not repeated here and a copy of the report from July 2026 is available online: [Full Council Meeting - Saffron Walden Town Council](#)

This report provides Council with an update on the trial bus service, in operation every Tuesday since 4th August 2026 for 12-weeks.

2. Participating Councils

In July 2026 and following the Council's resolution to trial the bus service, several Parish Councils were invited to be part of the scheme. Those contacted are approximately within a 5–10-mile radius of SW, save for Clavering who were contacted following notification to SWTC they may be interested in the scheme (this turned out not to be the case).

The following responses were received from the Parish Councils:

Parish Council	Response
Parish Councils Participating in Scheme	
Littlebury	Three pickups: 1. Green Triangle in Littlebury village 2. Canmere End 3. Littlebury End
Hadstock	Pick up at the Village Green
Newport	Two pickups: 1. Station Road by Village Hall 2. High Street
Parish Councils declined Participation	
Great and Little Chesterford	Noted the current service serves the village well
Debden	Noted the current service serves the village well
Wimbish	Noted the current service serves the village well
Sewards End	Noted the current service serves the village well
Clavering	Noted the current service serves the village well
Other Reasons	
Ashdon	No response received
Wendons Ambo	No response received
Radwinter	Would like to participate but not included at present time, as route already established before Radwinter PC met to discuss and bus does not stop at Sewards End (as they do not wish to participate). Radwinter as a stand alone stop considered too far from SW

3. Marketing and Promotion

In aligning with usual custom and practice used to promote events and activities, the Council has undertaken a comprehensive marketing campaign, including:

- (a) Paid adverts in the Walden Local newspaper (one advert provided FOC)
- (b) Promotion across social media
- (c) Promotion on the Council's websites (SWTC and TIC)
- (d) Promotion through the Council's community contacts (approx 200 email addresses)
- (e) Visits to care homes across the town
- (f) Promotion via Uttlesford's Health and Wellbeing Board

Further promotion is planned across social media, through the community contacts and to local care homes.

4. Support from Local Businesses

Through the SW BID, all businesses within the BID area were contacted to firstly advise them of the new service and secondly, to ask if they wished to offer any incentives to bus passengers. There has been a relatively healthy take-up from local businesses, offering the following incentives to bus passengers:

1. Monty's - Unlimited Breakfast £10.95 (served until 11.30) on Tuesdays
2. Sage and Saffron - 10% off Fruit & Veg on Tuesdays
3. Waffle & Co - Classic Waffle with choice of milk chocolate, salted caramel or maple syrup + Coffee or Tea
4. Goose - £2 Coffee Offer (10am-2pm) Tuesdays
5. Chloe's Jewellers & Repairs - 10% discount on all silver and watches to anyone with a bus ticket.
6. Plant Pantry - 10% off on Tuesdays
7. New World Wine - "Tuesdays For Two" - TWO Glasses of House Wine + Cheese & Meat Board £25
8. Casa Luxe - Complimentary Blow Dry with or without any service with Maddy (incl a complimentary glass of Prosecco)
9. Cook - 10% off
10. Smokin Roses - 10% off
11. Lloyds Family Butchers - 15% off
12. Arts Decoratif - 10% off Cash purchases
13. Game ON - 5% off most items in store (excl. Gift Vouchers, Electronic Vouchers and Consoles)

Recognising that the primary objective of the bus service is to increase footfall and support the local economy, local businesses have responded positively and embraced the spirit and aims of the scheme.

5. Financial Information

5.1 Expenditure

At the July Full Council meeting, Council agreed to set aside a budget of £6,000. In recognising this is a new initiative which is not within the core 2026/27 budget, Council approved funding through the virement of the monies from the following budgets:

- (a) EMR 9017 Climate change - £3,000
- (b) Code 4640 Inflation adjustment - £1,500
- (c) EMR 9015 Rates reserve - £1,500

It is anticipated spend expenditure to the end of the trial period, will be within the £6,000 budget.

5.2 Income

Integral to the scheme, was an assumption that participating Parish Councils would financially contribute towards the service. Funding has also been sought from third parties, with confirmed funding given below:

- (a) UDC - £2,000
- (b) SW BID - £500
- (c) Littlebury PC - £500
- (d) Newport PC - £500
- (e) Hadstock PC - £500

Total income received = £4,000 against an anticipated expenditure of £6,000 leaving SWTC liable for £2,000, as opposed to the whole cost of £6,000

As advised in the July 2026 report, it is likely that future funding could be sought for a continued and sustainable service; this is subject to a funding application to Essex County Council under their 'Love your Bus' grant scheme.

6. The Bus Route

The specific route has largely been informed by the participation of Parish Councils as the route needed to ensure collection from their defined pick-up locations. In addition to these locations, the route has included retirement complexes and areas on the periphery of town.

After the initial 2-weeks, the route timings (but not the route), were revised to better reflect the time taken in between each stop. A copy of the revised route and promotional materials are available online at: [SWTC Shopper Bus Service - Saffron Walden Town Council](#)

Two Parish Councils have contacted SWTC requesting inclusion on the bus route (Radwinter and Elmdon, Duddenhoe End & Wenden Lofts PC). These areas have not been included in the trial scheme as the requests were received after the service had gone live; their communication is indicative of a wider need for a reliable community bus service.

7. Passenger Numbers to Date

		SWTC Weekly passenger numbers - Tuesday Shopper Bus											
	Week One Pick Up 4 Aug	Week One Return 4 Aug	Week Two Pick Up 11 Aug	Week Two Rtn Up 11 Aug	Week Three Pick Up 18 Aug	Week Three Rtn 18 Aug	Week Four Pick Up 15 Aug	Week Four Rtn 15 Aug	Week Five Pick Up 1 Sept	Week Five Rtn 1 Sept	Week Six Pick Up 8 Sept	Week Six Rtn 8 Sept	
Littlebury Green triangle junction	1	1	3	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	
Littlebury Catmere End, beside post box	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Littlebury Green opposite St Peters	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Newport High Street by the village hall	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Newport Wicken Road junction by the bench	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Newport Road Beeches Close	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Hadstock Village Hall	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	
Little Walden The Crown	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	
Little Walden Rd Limefields	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	
Goddard Way	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	
Highfields	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Ashdon Road Elisabeth Way (former Homebase/Wickes)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Smallbridge Road Cornell Court car park	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	
Leveret Way McCarthy Stone site	2	2	2	2	9	7	10	10	11	10	0	0	
Shire Hill Thaxted Road Junction	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	5	
Thaxted Road Rhylstone Way Junction	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Peaseland Road Hopfields / Crabtrees	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Debden Road The Avenue (off Debden Road)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Debden Road Fulfen Way (by the green)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Totals	6	5	6	5	11	7	12	10	13	10	9	6	

Whilst initial uptake of the service was modest, there is evidence that targeted promotion can significantly increase usage. This is demonstrated by the rise in passenger numbers at the McCarthy and Stone retirement complex on Leverett Way following a visit by a SWTC officer. As residents became more aware of the service and how to access it, usage at this pick-up point increased considerably. This suggests that this target demographic may be less likely to engage with social media, and that direct, face-to-face engagement is a more effective means of communication.

Further visits are planned for the other retirement complexes in Saffron Walden. This may result in timetable changes for the service to accommodate interest from these areas whilst maintaining services to the Parish Council areas and established pick-up points.

8. Evaluation

8.1 Evaluation by Passengers

From the launch of the service, evaluation forms have been given to passengers. Forms are distributed on the bus and can also be collected from the Tourist Information Centre (TIC), which serves as the collection point for completed responses.

Evaluation to date evidence the service is well used, respected and valued amongst users, especially favoured by those less able and without their own transport. Some residents cited the bus service as a 'lifeline' as they are less able and no longer have their own vehicles; one lady noted this was the first time she had left the retirement complex for 8 weeks.

8.2 Evaluation by SWTC with Uttlesford Community Travel

A meeting was held between SWTC and UCT on 27.08.26 to review the service to date. At this meeting it was agreed a more targeted approach was needed to local residential homes as this demographic appears to be the greatest users of the service; at time of writing this report, visits have been completed to most retirement complexes.

There is no known detriment or effect of the shopper bus on any regularised bus service.

8.3 Conclusions from 12-Week Trial

- (a) Usage from surrounding villages has been much slower than anticipated.
- (b) Interest has been registered by two Parish Councils who are not currently participating in the scheme.
- (c) Children and families did not utilise the service during the summer holidays as anticipated.
- (d) The greatest usage has been from those living in retirement complexes.
- (e) Marketing and promotion to the retirement complexes has been most successful as 'in-person' events.
- (f) Users note the bus service has enabled them to live more independently.
- (g) Future timetabling should consider the time from drop-off to return (ie some users advise the stay in SW is too long).
- (h) Anticipated use has changed from outer-lying villages to town centric.
- (i) The bus could be operated as a shuttle system in and around the town centre.
- (j) The bus could include a pickup and drop off at Swan Meadow car park and Premier Inn (both are relatively outer-lying parts of the town).
- (k) The bus could coincide with any known coach company visits, taking the group from the coach at Swan Meadow and dropping them in a more convenient place in the town centre.

9. Recommendations

- (a) To note and receive this report.

- (b) To continue the trial scheme, through to conclusion of the 12-week trial period, ending on 20th October 2026.
- (c) Subject to the continuance of the trial period, to authorise Officers to enact changes to the service and/or timetable as appropriate.
- (d) Subject to the continuance of the trial period, to approve the principle of submitting a 'Love your Bus' application to ECC, once the application process is open. It is anticipated this will be spring 2027.
- (e) To consider allocation of monies in the 2027/28 budget, required as part of any grant application.

Monies set aside in the environment and climate change budget can be used for this purpose, acting as evidence of SWTC's commitment to the service. Should Council be minded to continue, no specific additional monies need to be set aside in the 2027/28 budget as balances in the environment and climate change budget will be utilised, along with sponsorship and/or payment from participating town and parish councils.