

Your buses – the good news, the not-so-good news and the bad news

Confirmation from Essex County Council that the Saturday 21 service, which it supports financially, will now continue until 2020 is welcome news. This is a good deal better than earlier information that the service was under review and might terminate in September this year.

The less good news, revealed when ECC announced the outcome of its tender round for contracts due to expire in August, is that Stephenson's will no longer operate the 71/72 service from Stondon Massey to Brentwood via Kelvedon Hatch. From September this will be operated by Regal.

Many villagers will know the regular driver employed by Stephenson's who has done much to build the reputation of the service for reliability and more importantly has shown considerable consideration for users, particularly the more elderly ones, over a number of years.

Essex's decision was purely motivated by cost saving. At a meeting with parish transport representatives in June, officers confirmed that past performance does not enter into the tendering process, which is purely driven by price.

It is a matter of regret that ECC did not consult users when making its decision. The Parish Council has taken up the issue with our new County Councillor, Cllr Lesley Wagland, but it is difficult to see a tender decision, presumably based on confidential financial grounds, being reversed.

At that meeting, Brentwood Community Transport announced that, as a consequence of the decision to award a three-year contract to run the 61 service from Blackmore through Doddinghurst to Brentwood, it had no option but to withdraw the 898 service at the end of August.

BCT's decision is understandable, but it is disappointing that Kelvedon Hatch residents should lose a service as a consequence of Essex's support for the 61, which does not serve our village.

Essex will have to examine the impact of BCT's announcement, and the Parish Council will seek to ensure that its obligations under its Public Sector Equality Duty are fully met.

David Jobbins

Transport Representative