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## ***138 Bus Service – Horsley Woodhouse.***

### ***After October 2025 Consultation paper***

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#### Summary

Not long after the government published its Bus Back Better (BBB) policy, Horsley Woodhouse lost its only bus service – The Amberline. Subsequently, Derbyshire County Council announced its Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) in response to Bus Back Better and at the same time instigated a new bus service, the No. 138, through Horsley Woodhouse. It is not clear whether the 138 was intended to be part of the BSIP, nor was it clear whether the subsidies necessary to run the service are sourced from the Governments BBB funding.

The new 138 service, is unfortunately not an equivalent to, nor an adequate substitute for the Amberline. Nor does it reflect any of the targets or aspirations of the BBB. It also measures poorly against the intents of the BSIP. The service is unlikely to attract enough patronage to continue in its present form, should the funding cease in October 2025.

This document has been written by Horsley Woodhouse Parish Council in order to present the situation with regard to access to public transport in Horsley Woodhouse, and to ask all parties involved, to formulate a plan for the continuation of an improved bus service after October 2025. In particular it appeals to Derbyshire County Council to use BBB funding to commission a thorough market research and continuing monitoring operation, involving 'Big Data', to provide the basis of a sound modern bus service.

That market research may show that the 138 is the optimum route. It may also recommend other routes to include other villages, or leave out current 138 patrons. Therefore other parish councils will want to be included in the discussion.

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## Introduction

Until October 2022, Horsley Woodhouse had an hourly bus service, the Amberline, which ran from Giltbrook to Derby via Heanor, Langley Mill, Horsley Woodhouse, Kilburn Coxbench, Little Eaton and then on to Derby. In mid 2022 the bus operator, Trent Barton announced the Amberline route would be halted as it was not financially viable. This left Horsley Woodhouse without any bus service.

Fortunately an agreement was reached between Derbyshire County Council (DCC) and the Notts and Derby Bus Company to ‘replace’ the Amberline with a new 138 service, but the route of the 138 is quite different from the Amberline, and the frequency is limited. The new service runs from Heanor to Belper and back every TWO hours and runs through the following settlements:

- Langley Mill
- Heanor
- Loscoe
- Denby
- Kilburn
- Horsley Woodhouse
- Woodside
- Horsley
- Rawson Green
- Holbrook
- Bargate
- Belper Estates
- Belper

Unlike the Amberline route, the 138 service does not travel via Smalley, nor does it provide a service for residents at the eastern end of Horsley Woodhouse from Wood Lane to Smalley village. This means that almost half of Horsley Woodhouse is outside bus service coverage i.e. within a reasonable walking distance (400 Metres).

From the outset it is important to be clear that the contract for this new service may expire in October 2025 and there has been no further discussion about what may happen after that date. Additionally, there does not appear to be any consideration given to anything beyond ‘replacement’ as opposed to ‘improvement’, nor has any further consideration been given as to how the 138 service may become commercially viable to allow it to continue beyond 2025.

Whilst the new service is a lifeline to residents who do not have the choice of using an alternative, the disadvantages of it are likely to dissuade any growth in passenger numbers.

The aim of Horsley Woodhouse Parish Council, as outlined in this document, is to create a service that meets the broader objectives –

1. Secure the bus service beyond the current 3 year contract;
2. Provide a bus service to serve all parishioners needs, not just gold card users. To achieve this the bus would need to run into the evenings and weekends. It would also need to run more often than every two hours, and link to other bus and rail services (See HMG paper 'Bus Back Better, page 47);
3. Use buses that are up to Euro 6 emissions standards and are better suited to the roads and rural lanes than the current vehicles, and which will reduce emissions in line with the national policy.
4. To make the bus a viable and attractive alternative to cars, thereby saving parishioners money, reducing congestion, and easing parking issues.

Although Derbyshire County Council instigated the 138 service, and are continuing to support it, it appears that the council believes that its obligations have now been met. Horsley Woodhouse Parish Council are quite sure that is not the case, and that further improvement to the provision of public transport in Horsley Woodhouse and the surrounding villages is required to make it successful.

The aim of this document is not merely an appeal from a parish for the restoration of a significant lost amenity, but a call for the County Authority to commit to its obligations. Firstly, as demanded by Government policy, and secondly as stated in its own transport plan.

Improvement in line with the Government BBB, and the county council BSIP, will result in a rural service that resembles an urban or metropolitan transport system, that is comfortable, frequent, rapid, available day and evening seven days a week, links seamlessly with further transport, with a through ticket scheme, has net zero emissions and not least, gets people within 400m of where they want to go. The parish Council believes that this can be achieved, given a modern approach to designing routes and timetables, making full use of digital technologies and 'Big Data', and professional marketing.

#### National, Regional and Local strategic context

Following the pandemic, the government recognised that the use of public transport had decreased. Some of the previous users may not have returned due to home working, and some understandably have turned to other means of transport, but quite rightly the government established a wish to not only return old customers but to attract new ones. This was part of its desire to reduce car use in order to assist in hitting its carbon emission targets which seek to reduce national emissions by 78% by 2035.

## Bus Back Better

The government produced its strategic document, 'Bus Back Better' in 2021 and this was linked to a budget of £3billion, available over five years to encourage local authorities to create a Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) and to create a viable network of buses.

Bus Back Better recognised the problems in areas (mainly rural) where there were problems in providing services that were commercially viable. It stated;

*“Currently, Local Authorities can step in to ensure that ‘socially necessary’ services are provided where there are gaps in the commercial network. But outside specific categories, there is no obligation on local authorities to fund these crucial services. Across England, there are significant differences in provision, from reasonably generous to almost nothing, but the trend is sharply downward. Many communities have lost their daily bus services altogether. Others have services for only a few hours a day, suitable perhaps for a short shopping trip but not for work or longer distance journeys. Others might have relatively good services in the daytime but no service at all in the evenings. This has a serious impact on people’s ability to find and travel for work.*

*Partnerships and franchising arrangements must deliver more comprehensive services, including those which are socially or economically necessary. This includes services to smaller and more isolated places and more services in the evenings and weekends”.*

Whilst helpful in outlining the national problems in terms of access to work and social amenities that are 'necessary', we believe the document could have said more about access to the broader range of social activities and amenities. Part of the government’s objectives were to create a network of public transport that is linked together in a comprehensive, understandable and affordable fashion, but the current transport system in the UK (unlike other countries) is not structured to achieve that objective. Local buses need to be better linked to other bus services, with carefully co-ordinated timetables and routes, making sure that those linked services take the traveller on to other modes of transport (mainly rail stations). Many foreign examples show that this is achievable.

## Bus Service Improvement Plan.

Derbyshire County Council has now created a BSIP for Derbyshire, in response to the governments Bus Back Better, and in doing so have stated that they have “consulted extensively”. No doubt this is the case, but Horsley Woodhouse Parish Council can find no record of any invitation for comments or consultation. It is accepted that the production of the BSIP had to be completed quickly due to government pressure.

There are some expectations of the BSIP as required by government:

1. To set targets for journey times and reliability.
2. Identify bus priority routes and work to improve traffic management around bus routes, to improve speed etc.

3. Set out pressures on the road network, air quality issues, and carbon reduction targets which improved bus services could address and set out actions to transform the local bus fleet to zero emission.
4. Drive targets for passenger growth and customer satisfaction.
5. Set out plans and costs for fares, to enable simplification and multi-operator ticketing.
6. Consider the impact of roadside furniture such as bus stops.
7. Consider how a coherent and integrated network should serve schools, health, social care, employment and other services.
8. Take into account the views of local people.
9. Commit to a bus passenger charter to raise and maintain high standards of customer service.

These Government targets give no guidance as to how they can be achieved, or to any particular timescale. There is no expectation that the content and tactical delivery of the BSIP will remain 'cast in stone' but that it should be reviewed annually and amended where evidence suggests a need to do so.

The Derbyshire BSIP has some key objectives, which in part match the Bus Back Better targets namely;

1. To make buses the first choice for existing and new customers
2. Available for more journeys
3. Affordable
4. Environmentally sustainable
5. Welcoming
6. A connected network
7. Better frequency of bus services
8. Wider network coverage and connectivity between bus and rail
9. Preventing a scaling back of services to just the most profitable
10. Ensuring bus services do not change suddenly and unexpectedly
11. Joint ticketing arrangements to ensure simplicity of use across the network

The national strategy recognises that, at present, parts of the bus network are not working to the key principles of 'economy, efficiency and effectiveness'. Its desire is to provide an 'efficient network which in turn reduces costs and ensures affordability'.

The issue of affordability should not just be focused on the customers but also on the bus companies who need to be able to run a profitable company. In the UK the transport system is only partially nationalised with Network Rail and some of the rail franchises now falling under public ownership. The bus network does not have the comfort of consistent national government support but some of its services are subsidised or fully funded by the local authority. The financing model of the national transport network is complex.

Therefore, with regard to local and rural bus services, there are some key factors that need to be recognised by the public:

1. Bus companies are not charities and have to make their books balance or they will cease to exist to the detriment of bus service provision. They are in competition with each other, and need to maximise profits and eliminate costs. They are at liberty to cut unprofitable routes in an unregulated business.
2. Local authorities do provide support from their own budgets but there are limitations on what can be provided.
3. National government is currently providing further support over five years but there is no guarantee of similar levels of funding after that time.
4. Within the government funding provided for the delivery of the BSIP there are a number of competing demands, not least of which are those which demand the achievement of targets. (Government targets have, in the past, produced counterproductive behaviours but DCC have an obligation to meet them in order to maintain the funding stream).

The 'Bus Back Better' document specifically recognised the issues in rural or semi-rural areas such as the area that stretches between Heanor, Belper and Derby, by introducing the concept of a Superbus. It stated:

*"A Superbus network provides higher frequency, lower fare services; it can deliver the type of change we want to see. Places such as South Northumberland, County Durham, Lancashire and the East Midlands with their patchworks of small industrial towns and large villages have not had the advantages of metropolitan transport authorities but are ideal territories that could benefit from the Superbus concept".*

It would appear that Horsley Woodhouse and the villages around it would be ideally suited to this type of concept but currently any such provision for the area has been dismissed by Derbyshire County Council despite requests to consider significant change to the current service. The argument appears to be that parishioners should be grateful for any service provided and should not press further for any improvement to the service despite the demand to do so from government.

'Bus Back Better' makes the duty of local authorities and bus franchises very clear;

*"Partnerships and franchising arrangements must deliver more comprehensive services, including those which are socially and economically necessary. This includes services to smaller and more isolated places and more services in the evenings and weekends".*

Quite clearly the current 138 service does not meet the requirements of the national strategy and there is a need to reconsider the provision of adequate bus services along the 138 route in plenty of time to affect change before the end of the current contract in October 2025.

#### Current service provision

As previously outlined, the parish of Horlsey Woodhouse and others are served by the 138 bus service that runs between Heanor and Belper. The route is lengthy and slow, and passes through a number of narrow country lanes. The buses used on the route are dated and too large for many of the roads along which it passes. The frequency of the service is poor as it only travels each way every two hours. This is very limiting especially when compared to the

north-south services through Smalley or Kilburn, which run at least every 15 minutes. An argument could be made that parishioners can walk east or west to Smalley or Kilburn, to catch these more frequent buses. However, from the centre of Horsley Woodhouse, that involves a walk of a mile in each direction and the route to Smalley is very wet and muddy in poor weather. It is also too far for elderly or vulnerable residents. Other countries such as Switzerland have made the provision of adequate and frequent bus services to within 400 metres of every resident a legal requirement. In doing so they conducted detailed analysis of what distance was deemed 'reasonable'.

The frequency of the 138 service is also viewed as problematic by many residents. One elderly resident stated:

*"Although the current 138 service is better than nothing, it certainly is not ideal. Most residents feel that the 2 hour service is grossly inconvenient when travelling for Hospital/Dental/Optician appointments. Having to factor in a journey there and back to fit around connecting with the 138 service causes anxiety and stress having experienced it recently myself. By way of explanation I had to attend an appointment in Nottingham at 11am. This meant catching the 138 service at 8.30am to get to Heanor connecting with the H1 service to Derby and then the Red Arrow to Nottingham. I had to make the same journey back aware that I would need a connection from Derby to Heanor or Kilburn in order to link with the 138 service back to the village. (Others have experienced the same problem) Surely this cannot be acceptable, having to wait around for several hours in order to get a connecting service and this will certainly be much more inconvenient/difficult for many as we approach the Autumn/Winter months...the government is encouraging us all to get out of our cars, use public transport, get out in the open...the general consensus of other residents is that we are prisoners in our own homes."*

This is the opinion of just one elderly resident but many others have expressed similar views about service frequency.

A further issue lies with the lack of service provision into the evenings and weekends. In those places in Europe that have dealt with this issue robustly such as Switzerland and parts of Germany, buses run in rural areas frequently and from 6am to 2am each day including weekends. This provides a reliable service that integrates with other transport (trains and trams) throughout the day and is able to provide, not only for the elderly and disabled, but also for workers including shift workers and allows residents to reduce car use, thereby reducing emissions and improving road safety. It also allows for improved access to social facilities and this supports local businesses.

The 138 bus service runs from Langley to Belper from 7am with the latest arrival in Belper being 7.15pm. The route from Belper to Langley runs from 8.15am to 6.45 pm. There is no late service at weekends and no service at any time on Sundays. This service is therefore significantly limited in terms of serving workers needs, and so is not effective in providing a real alternative to car use. The 138 appears to have been rushed into place due to the sudden removal of the previous service, and having been brought into service, there has been little effort to improve it or to consult with residents. In fact, to date, Derbyshire County Councils

attitude has been dismissive. There also appears to have been no further consideration of improving the route within the context of the Bus Service Improvement Plan.

Therefore the benefits and drawbacks of the 138 service can be laid out as follows:

Benefits:

- A bus service exists.
- The Belper/Heanor route is welcomed by many as it provides access to Belper which was previously inaccessible.
- The temporary £2 fare introduced by Government is welcome.

Drawbacks:

- The type of vehicles used are not suitable for the 138 route which passes along many narrow roads.
- The service is not frequent enough to provide good connectivity to other transport links.
- The service does not run late enough during the week to provide good transport for workers including shift workers.
- There is no Sunday service which limits use for weekend workers and for access to social amenities (pubs, restaurants sports venues etc).
- The service provides little incentive for residents to use it instead of their cars.
- The service is doing little to provide any environmental benefits.
- The contract runs out in October 2025 and there is no clear view as to what happens after that date.

### Data analysis

It is accepted that DCC are subsidising the current 138 bus service, but it is not clear as to how the considerable amounts of government funding provided to the council to deliver the BSIP are being prioritised. We are lead to believe the 138 service is subsidised from existing funds outside those provided by central government. The residents are grateful that a bus service has been provided, but many are either becoming disenchanted with the quality of the service (as evidenced above) or are not of the view that the frequency and length of daily service provision provide a viable alternative to car use.

It would be useful if DCC could conduct or commission a research exercise, using some of the BSIP funds, to find out how many residents would consider changing to more bus use if the service was improved.

Little is known about how residents use their vehicles, for what purposes and to what destinations, appropriate surveys and data searches have never been carried out. A 'Travel and Transport' survey with a wider brief, that consulted both within Horsley Woodhouse and also across other adjacent parishes, may provide valuable information not yet identified. For example,

- When are journeys made?

- What means of transport; Car, Bus, Taxi, Bike, horse?
- Where did the journey actually start, if by bus how far was that from the bus stops.
- The actual destination rather than the point of alighting.
- Whether further transport was taken.
- The duration and preferred time of return journey.
- How often is this journey taken?
- If it was a car journey, were there further cost such as parking, or tolls.
- Would the journey be better if the roads were less congested?
- Would a bus be used more often, if the service and cost allowed.
- Is the bus ride in itself a social occasion, a chance for 'a chat'? - For many people the bus is as good as the pub for catching up with friends.

At the same time it may be useful to provide information to residents about the costs of bus use versus car use. Cars are costing ever more to run with the annual cost at present believed to be in the region of £3500 to £4500 per year to keep a car on the road, before counting additional motoring costs such as tolls and parking.

There are more means for gathering travel data in addition to counting heads on buses, or interviewing travellers, survey forms, or door to door resident interviews. All of these methods remain useful, but in today's world of 'Big Data' there exists huge datasets full of high quality information and statistics. The rise of smart phones and travel Apps has persuaded all of us to unwittingly not only 'log' the journeys we make, but also to tell big brother what journeys we would like to make. One of the most useful features of Apps such as Google Maps, Waze or Amigo, is the Sat Nav with which people plan their journey. Different means of transport can be tried; Walking, cycling, bus/train, or car, and at any time – present or future. We willingly but unknowingly volunteer this information. Big Brother may not be permitted to retain individual data, but he knows the density of demand for routes and destinations at the various times of day or week, both actual and potential. Many newer cars are equipped with Sat Nav and trackers. They are all capable, cumulatively, of acquiring massive amounts of car journey data. Many other Phone Apps are extensively used to help with bus journeys. Apps such as Hugo, Moovit, MoreBus etc. provide customers with planning tools to find suitable buses and routes for their journey. These tools quite obviously can be used backwards to provide service operators with information about where and when people want to use a bus. All this 'Big brother' data is collected because it has commercial value. By definition commercial operations like bus services or even local authorities should have access to it (for the right price). A service provider that can only assess demand by counting heads is 100 years out of date. There is no excuse for being unable to run a thoroughly joined up modern bus service, efficient at getting people where they want to go at a reasonable price and in adequate comfort.

### Potential Way Forward

'Bus Back Better' states;

*"Buses are the easiest, cheapest and quickest way to improve transport. Building a new railway or road takes years, if not decades. Better bus services can be delivered in months. Experience shows that relatively small sums of money, by the standards of transport spending can deliver significant benefits".*

The 2021 Campaign to Protect Rural England paper, “Every Village, Every Hour” modelled the provision of bus services to service all the parishes in England and found that such a service could be provided for everyone to have an hourly bus service from 6am to midnight seven days a week at a cost of £2.7 billion per year. Whilst a substantial amount, this figure is less than the government allocated for Bus Back Better. If we are serious about reversing car usage, the funds could be diverted from current road building budgets.

Horsley Woodhouse Parish Council believes that an efficient bus service routed through the community is not only a reasonable expectation, but simply a right for its population, and no less a right than other Derbyshire communities. The council believes that routes through, and local to Horsley Woodhouse are prime candidates on which to implement the Bus Service Improvement Plan. The Parish Council also believes that the climate emergency demands that all steps should be taken to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emission and that provision of buses in order to reduce car use, is an important contribution to that goal.

It is easy to believe that in the natural evolution of everything, the bus has had its day and we should be resigned to accept cars as providing the main means of transport and that government or charity will step in to help those who can't afford a car, or cannot drive. But to believe that, you need to be blind to the social injustice, and destruction of the planet, that this 'natural' car model inflicts. The bus can be part of our redemption, but it is not sufficient to merely regress to a business model that has failed. The future bus service needs to progress, to a model that operates efficiently and flexibly in response to journey demand, rather than as an ambulance service picking up the 'dis-car-ded'.

The Bus Back Better targets, and the Bus Improvement Plan declare seemingly reasonable aspirations, but other than throwing a limited amount of money at the problem, they do not have any sound strategies, plans, or business models by which any 'Improvement' can be realised. Topping up the losses on unprofitable routes is an unsustainable business model. In the current unregulated free market, support for one route and business has the effect of disadvantaging another. Then further routes need to be cut in the race to the bottom to stay profitable. Prior to de-regulation bus companies were obliged to cross-subsidise the unprofitable routes with the profitable, and competed on a level playing field, avoiding the race to the bottom.

It appears that the Amberline service needed more than a simple subsidy and was ruled out. Hence the 138 was brought in on a fresh route that perhaps was seen to offer a service to fresh people and journeys for which there was perhaps some latent demand. We have not been shown the evidence for this alternative latent demand. Finding a new line on the map where there was none before seems attractive, but the 138 weaves a tangled path around that line, resulting in a less attractive, slow and uncomfortable offering. It does not appear to resemble anything modern or progressive.

Other routings are clearly a possibility, for example, some of the super numerous north-south routes through Kilburn and Smalley could be slightly cross-routed into the wedge between the B6179 and A608 to capture villages such as Loscoe, Denby, Horsley Woodhouse,

Woodside, Morley, and Breadsall Village. A thorough gathering of journey demand data should be carried out to establish the potential latent business from these places.

Needless say, DCC should consider every means in working towards making the 138 route as financially viable as possible. One idea is to have more frequent, smaller buses that are Euro 6 compliant to reduce emissions and to be easier to use on rural roads. For example, The Mountain Goat Bus Service in Cumbria, using modern Mercedes vehicles, is successful in serving a dispersed rural community over narrow challenging roads. To improve financial viability the company also runs additional services providing airport transfers, wedding transfers and tourism services. There is no reason why DCC cannot form its own company, or franchise a local bus company to provide all these services, using a similar business model.

Derbyshire County Council should investigate every avenue of modern methods of market research, particularly those making use of 'Big Data', in addition to interviewing the population, in order to design and maintain the most appropriate routes and frequencies. It is clear that a 21<sup>st</sup> century bus service must employ 21<sup>st</sup> century methods of management.

More could be made of marketing the bus service for access to social amenities thereby improving road safety and increasing money spent in local businesses. Efforts should be made to piggy back advertising of sporting events, concerts, and other attractions, with details of the bus services that connect with them. (This in itself may highlight opportunities for improvement in the bus service routes).

Buses need to link to other bus and transport services. Marketing the link to Belper train station with its access to Derby, Nottingham and elsewhere is one example.

It would also be helpful to attempt to design a route/routes that pass within a few hundred metres of all houses in the area (This may involve the provision of two small buses). One key area with no provision at present is the area between the junction of Main Street and Woodside up to the boundary with Smalley (a distance of about one mile).

### Conclusions

Horsley Woodhouse Parish council is disappointed with the DCC leadership in carrying out its duties to the residents of Horsley Woodhouse in three respects, and asks for a response outlining how it will correct these shortfalls;

1. Duty to its residents to support and maintain a significant amenity at an adequate standard of service.
2. Duty in following government policy to formulate and put into action a Bus Improvement Plan, when in receipt of government funds for that purpose.
3. Duty in respect of it's own declaration of a climate emergency, to strive towards zero emissions.

The 138 bus service was welcomed when introduced in 2022 but this was always a 'replacement' and cannot be considered as an 'improvement' as required within the government strategy.

- The bus service is not frequent enough to meet the needs of even those who use it between 9.30am and 4pm (Not meeting BSIP requirements).

- The buses used are not in good condition and are too big for the chosen route.
- The 138 route does not provide a service to a significant part of Horsley Woodhouse.
- The service does not run late in the evening or seven days a week so does not provide a viable alternative to the car for shift workers. (Not meeting BSIP requirements).
- The service does not go to, or easily connect with links to Derby or Nottingham, the main transport hubs, commercial centres, universities and location of the main hospitals.

In order to provide the type of service that is not just needed but demanded by central government, Horsley Woodhouse Parish Council would ask Derbyshire County Council to consider the contents of this document and provide a long term view as to how the Bus Service Improvement Plan and the funds that go with it can either make the much needed improvements to the current 138 service or instigate new routes and services.

We ask that a "Transport and Travel" survey be conducted by DCC or by suitable researchers using all up to date techniques, and proposals for improvement be brought back for local consultation. If this matter is addressed effectively, not only will it resolve the current failings of the 138 service, it could provide noticeable economic social and environmental benefits, deliver on emissions reduction, and provide significant research opportunities for the DCC as part of their BSIP delivery.