

Public Transport in SWT Task and Finish Group

02.02.21 at 3pm

Attendees: Cllr Derek Perry, Cllr Keith Wheatley, Marcus Prouse (Specialist – Democracy and Governance), John Abbott (CEO- Richard Huish College), Stuart Todd (College Travel Access Lead – Richard Huish College)

Notes of Discussion

- All attendees introduced themselves and the reason behind the meeting.
- This was an area that had been a problem for the last two years in particular, and would welcome input from the Council. To contextualise, since September 2020 there had been a management restructure and Mr Abbott had moved from his role as Principal of the College (in post since January 2013) to CEO and a new principal appointed, due to the growth of the Educational Trust in recent years. A particular challenge for the College is Car parking and has been for the past 20 years since worked for the College, in having some but not enough. It has got worse but the College felt it was doing everything it could to resolve it. A Travel Plan created in 2013 was not a living and breathing document, it had complied with Planning rather than an embedded document on how to travel to the College. Stuart Todd – had been hired as a consultant to assist on this matter and had worked for 8-9 months on a new Travel Plan in a formal capacity, with the aim to bring the Travel Plan to life and reality. Had worked for previous two Councils and had a background in Active Travel and Planning. The timing of the approach was good from the Task and Finish Group as the conversations between Public Health, SCC and the College were taking place. Also referenced the Taunton 2040 vision, various strategies and targets on emissions.
- Aware of a new parking scheme in the area – with Letters from SCC going out to residents last week.
- How many students? 1900 16-19 year olds with 400 apprentices.
- Proportion of those that use Public Transport and other modes? Attendance of Richard Huish had remained fairly level in the last 8 years despite a perceived increase due to a £13m spend on building footprint increase. Growth of schools in next 3-4 years expected to have a concurrent increase.
- In 19/20 – 319 County Tickets were purchased. Task – Primary data on student travel – car share/dropped off by friends. The County Ticket used to be seen as really good value, free anywhere even over the weekend. Anecdotally, the price increase and cuts to its benefits has led to a decrease in take up.
- Around 500/600 students from North Devon travel to come to Richard Huish College. Anecdotally they found ways to share costs such as Car Share. Issues with buses and trains – North Devonian students could catch train from Tiverton, the bus has become less attractive over the years e.g. Uffculme takes 20/25 mins by car but 1hr plus with the winding routes on a bus. Other barriers are the 20/25 minutes' walk from the Train Station to the College.
- Car parking in the college currently was run on a permit scheme, with no one living in a TA1 post code allowed a permit. The permit cost was £1 a day. There was no limit on how many permits could be issued but there were only

200 Car Parking Spaces and 12 moped spaces. The College could make it more expensive however you would then see a further impact on the residential streets. The College would be really keen to see better links with the Park and Ride and discount parking costs for students in the Town Centre, e.g. capacity expected to be lower coming out of Covid – could students be given a discounted rate? It was not only students who used the residential streets around Huish – it had been observed that significant members of the public parked there and cycled into town using the back lane, with the pressure of the costs of Town Centre Parking a significant issue. The Council was considered to have tools at its disposal to tackle these displacement issues, with pros and cons to the Residents Parking Schemes. Did the issues with Public Transport effect enrolment? E.g. cost. The College does worry about this – the further rural you lived the more difficult it was, with an attritional effect on retention. The College had looked at supporting/putting on its own transport arrangements, however, the College wasn't big enough to afford individual bus routes – costs prohibitive.

- Looked at specific bespoke – do have a means tested bursary fund. Some challenges were not always financial. Good high quality accessible affordable public transport improves Colleges. County Ticket – stayed away – told Huish students were propping up scheme – volume made it a scheme that worked – costs gone up and numbers gone down. SWT had a role in the running of the Park and Ride and Cllr Perry had spoken with Cllr Rigby, the relevant PFH around Musgrove and Richard Huish College opportunities. Questions around the Park and Ride stopping at college and being more affordable. Specific college buses 1 in 5 or at specific times such as 8.30am were mooted.
- The College had trialled with SCC a train station bus to the college, which had a reasonable take-up. Some funds had been provided by Julia Ridgeley and the West Somerset Opportunity Area/SCC to develop those educational links. Reference to the Connected Taunton 2018 Workshop and the 2040 vision. There was a need to change behaviour and ensure using the bus became a habit. There were economic benefits as well as health benefits to greater bus usage. Understand the macro value of education and value in the long term. A suggestion was made that SCC were talked to see if they could modify bus routes to terminate routes at the College instead of the Town Centre. Was terminating in town a problem for the College? Confirmed it was.
- Issues with old buses, reduced times, services and wrong places served. The College were happy for Councillors to talk to a group of students about their experiences. The students themselves had raised that they felt they were subject to a postcode lottery e.g. in Birmingham and Manchester they would get their public transport free of charge. Evidence on poor public transport affecting attendance, and travel to learn was one of the issues alongside poverty and lower grades. Those that travel from further away tend to outperform those that live closer. We do have students from West Somerset – issue is that even with a regular bus service it does not get here any faster. Discussion around Remote Learning centres e.g. one on Exmoor and virtual classrooms in the pandemic. Planning for a future where students attend once or twice a week rather than five days. In 2/3 years' time could see outreach centres in localities.

The Clerk left the meeting at 4pm and the meeting closed at 4.40pm.