

Item 9 – To consider any questions by Members under paragraph 19.3 of Part 2 (The Council and District Council Members) of the Constitution, notice of which have been duly given.

"My ward of Ash and New Ash Green, as well as neighbouring villages like West Kingsdown and rural settlements like the hamlet of Hodsoll Street suffer from a significant lack of bus services. This lack of connectivity reduces employment opportunities, restricts access to health services and exacerbates social isolation.

Two weeks ago, I had a 16-yr old work experience student with me for a week. She told me that the lack of buses prevents her and her friends from accessing the shops, cafes and other facilities they want to access and that this has a negative impact on their mental and physical wellbeing.

Last week, I received an email from a resident who works in the Emergency Department at Kings College Hospital. He wanted to share his despair at the lack of bus services in the early mornings and late evenings to help shift workers get to and from work; a particular problem for those who have no option but to navigate poorly lit, narrow country lanes on foot.

I have a friend who, in addition to carrying out his own full time job, has to drive his wife to and from the train station and his daughter to and from Bluewater every day so they can all access their workplaces. This is a huge strain on his time and productivity.

I understand that Public Transport isn't in this Council's remit but we have a People and Places Committee, a Housing and Health Committee, a Cleaner and Greener Committee and a Homelessness Review Board. Supporting our residents to get to their place of work or leisure in an affordable, safe and sustainable manner should fall under those banners somewhere.

In 2022, the Government provided a local authority toolkit for transport in rural areas which shows how local authorities can support schemes like car sharing and electric bike hire. Kent County Council has created a walking bus initiative. The campaign group Living Streets provides information on creating traffic-free School Streets. There are hundreds of case studies and ideas out there. Does the administration of Sevenoaks Council see an opportunity to support the rural communities around Sevenoaks District to get better connected?"

Cllr Manston

Ash and New Ash Green