

STATEMENT BY PAT MASON FOR THE SAVE OUR 6-7 BUS CAMPAIGN COUNCIL MEETING THURSDAY 13 JULY 2017

I'm here to speak about the petition of the Save Our 6-7 Bus campaign, which was organised in response to the withdrawal of the subsidy. This Council debate has been long postponed owing to four elections. However, the daily misery for our community continues. The 2400 plus signatures were collected over a few weeks last Autumn from forms distributed to local shops and businesses in Larkhall and the London Road, and on a few bus journeys. There would have been many more signatures but the forms were collected early in the attempt to get the matter on a Council Agenda.

We believe the speed with which people responded to the Petition and attendance at a standing room only Public Meeting showed the strength of feeling and support for the old bus route more than a Council Survey which was conducted before the fourth bus was withdrawn. We believe the Survey was flawed for many reasons. One of our Campaigners did some extensive research showing this and is willing to present it again to the Council. On this flawed evidence it was decided that the subsidy "did not represent value for money". Is this decision based on commercial or social values? Surely a subsidy that promotes all the aims of the Council is value for money, i.e. social resilience, promotion of local independent shops and reducing congestion on the roads? It is hard to disentangle the social and commercial values of the subsidy in that, in the long term, there will be costs in terms of isolation and loneliness leading to ill health, damage and loss to the independent shops and businesses, pollution due to increased car use. It is very hard for people in our area to see the council promotion of a month for "indie shops" when they are oblivious to the damage done to those in our locality.

The Council says that the Survey shows that the changes affect only a small number of people but the evidence of the Petition disproves this. Even residents who do not need the bus signed because they were aware of the damage to their community. The council claims that the changed route is effective because people can take two buses but, again, a number of our Campaigners have proven that this can take an hour for a 10 minute journey plus the cost of two buses. Our route struggles to be fully commercially viable because its steep hills and narrow streets necessitate smaller vehicles which of course carry fewer passengers. We hope the Council will reconsider all the information available and realise that our bus subsidy is necessary to provide an essential front-line social service which also affects our local economy.