

REPORT TO ENVIRONMENT AND TRANSPORT COMMITTEE

COMMUNITY BUS SERVICE

Report Reference ET-26-05
Meeting Date 8th June 2026
Agenda Item 11
Prepared by A Keppel-Green, Town Clerk



1.0 BACKGROUND

1.1 INTRODUCTION

In 2018, the 300 Town Circular bus was withdrawn. This service had operated a half hourly service around the town, starting and ending in Canute Place and connecting the town to the town centre. It was withdrawn as it was no longer a commercially viable bus service. The withdrawn was much decried at the time, and has continued to be highlighted in discussion of public transport.

Cllr Johnson attends virtual meetings of the Rural Market Towns Group, a stakeholder representative body which brings together representatives of town and parish councils serving rural areas. At a recent meeting, there was a presentation from Faversham Town Council on their community bus service scheme; Cllr Johnson requested the Town Clerk look into the scheme and bring a report to the committee.

1.2 EXISTING BUS SERVICES

There are currently four bus routes serving Knutsford:

Service	Frequency (first/last)	Days	Destinations
86	Twice daily (1030/1235)	M-F	Over Peover Cricket Club, Seven Sisters Lane
87	11 times daily (0730/1810)	M-S	Radbroke, Chelford, Macclesfield Hospital, Macclesfield
88	12 times daily (0710/1855)	M-S	Mobberley, Wilmslow, Hale Barns, Altrincham
89	Four times daily (0910/1640)	M-S	Lostock Gralam, Northwich

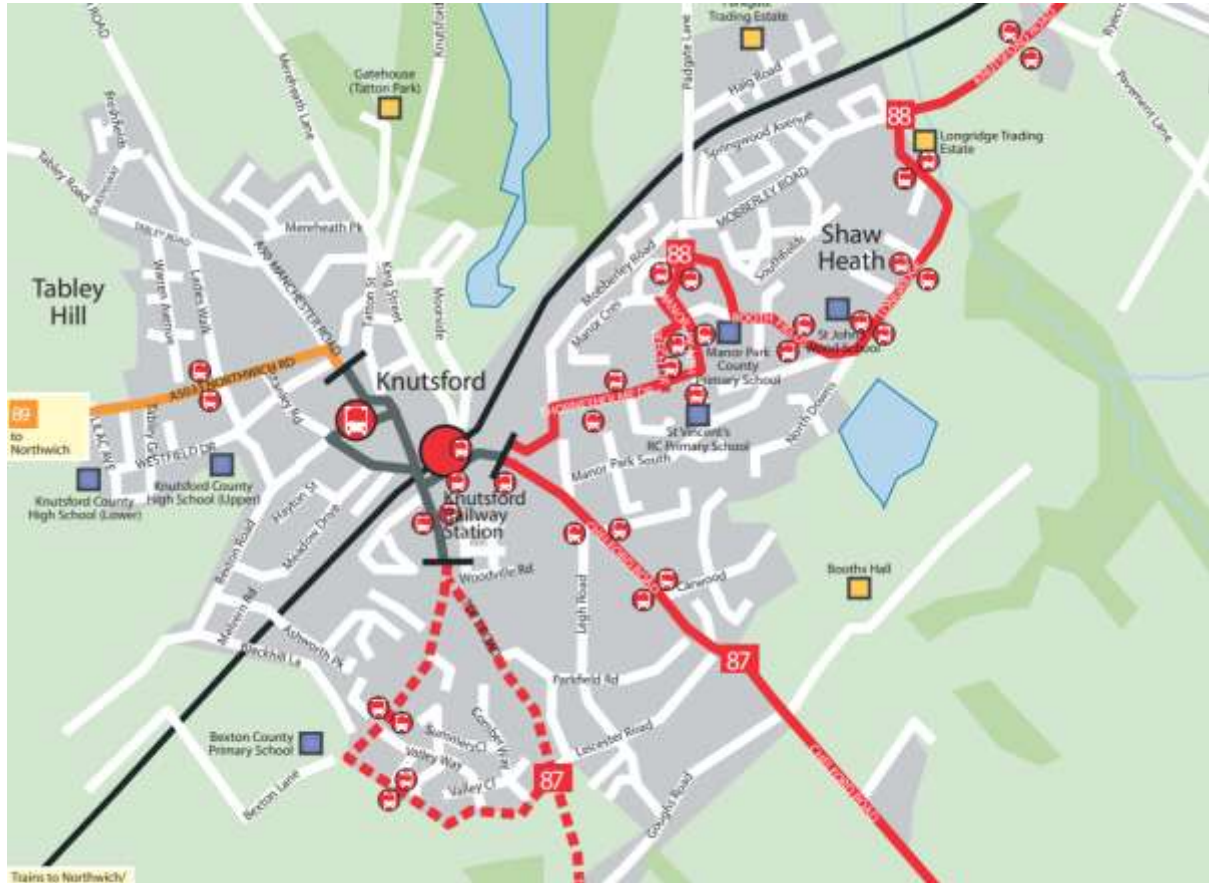
NB:

- First and last buses from Knutsford Bus Station
- Times given for M-F service, Saturday varies
- 88 final bus terminates at Wilmslow
- 87 service only operates four times on Saturdays

Additionally, the 188 service operates from Mobberley to Knutsford Academy each morning and afternoon.

1.3 EXISTING BUS COVERAGE

The map below shows the current coverage of bus services. The section of 87 which is shown with the dashed line is now served by the 86 once per day, and not the 87 at all.



2.0 ABOUT THE FAVERSHAM SCHEME

In 2023, Kent County Council cut bus subsidies which saw the withdrawal of bus services within Faversham (pop 23k). In response, Faversham Town Council developed a community bus service. It received a grant of £75,000 from Kent County Council which funded the lease of a Mercedes Sprinter minibus and obtained a section 22 community transport permit, which enables it to operate like a normal bus service, collecting passengers from bus stops.

The council undertook consultation with the community to develop the scheme. The service currently operates from 0930 – 1700 Tuesday to Saturday. The scheme relies on around volunteer drivers and operates capped fares of £2 within the town and £3 to the surrounding villages. The bus is a mini-bus with tail lift for wheelchair users.

The scheme took time to develop, but now around 80 journeys per week are made. The council note that it operates as more than a mode of transport but has supported tackling social isolation.

The scheme has around 20 volunteer drivers who volunteer for morning/afternoon shifts, drivers require a D1 entitlement on their licence (which is automatically granted to those who passed a standard driving test before 1997) and volunteers undertake MiDAS training (Minibus Driver

Awareness Scheme).

The scheme is registered to be reimbursed for concessionary passes; around 90% of users are concessionary pass holders. The service accepts cash and contactless payments.

The scheme costs approximately £35k to operate and generates around £5k in income. The costs include the vehicle lease, fuel, insurance and repairs. The council employs a part time (8hr) Community Bus Officer who manages the scheme, including overseeing volunteer recruitment, training and rotas.

More information can be found at: www.favershamtowncouncil.gov.uk/active-travel/community-bus-service/



The Faversham Hopper Community Bus

3.0 LINK TO STRATEGY

3.1 STRATEGIC PLAN

The council has a strategic aim to promote active travel and public transport. During consultation on the plan, the inadequacy of public transport was noted. Objective T6 of the plan outlines that the council strives to see the reintroduction of a town circular service.

4.0 DISCUSSION

This item is tabled for the committee to consider whether it wishes to further explore developing a community bus service as a new town circular. This is an initial paper and there is much detail that would need to be understood; including:

- a) Impact of introducing the service on the commercial viability of the existing bus services
- b) Demand from the community
- c) Likely support from volunteers
- d) Preferred routes and practicality

The council would also need to develop more detail on the operational, financial and management implications of the service through a detailed business plan.

It should be noted that the recent approval of the Booths Hall outline application included an s106 funding obligation of £320,000 to “fund a new Knutsford circular bus service for a two-year period”. The committee may wish to consider if a community bus service could be a longer-term solution; it may be possible to seek the s106 contribution being used to cover upfront costs and ongoing operational costs of a service. Using the Faversham costs, this could fund a service for c. 10 years.

The purchase of a bus could also/alternatively be covered by CIL funding, to reduce ongoing operational costs. Noting the potential benefit to local business, the Knutsford Business Improvement District would also be engaged to investigate if they wished to support a scheme.

If the scheme was funded through the precept and operated on the same financial basis as the Faversham scheme, a £30k per year cost would equate to a precept requirement of c. £4.75 per year.

As part of further research, the following would also be explored:

- Interest and practicality to link to surrounding parishes which are not well connected to the town via existing services (e.g. Rostherne)
- How a scheme could support connectivity with Tatton Park

5.0 CONSULTATION

The committee should firstly consider whether it wishes to further explore the development of a town circular community bus scheme.

If the committee wishes to explore this further, the next steps would be to:

- a) Undertake a public consultation to understand demand. This would be to ascertain likely passenger numbers and where the demand for services exists. This would be used to inform preliminary route design options. The consultation would also look to understand if there was likely to be sufficient volunteers to operate a scheme.
- b) Undertake engagement with Cheshire East Council with regard to the s106 funding to identify if it could be utilised for a community led scheme
- c) Engage with D&G and Cheshire East Council to understand existing bus service use and any potential implication these services from a community service

This would inform the development of the business case.

6.0 DECISION REQUIRED

The committee should consider:

- a) Does it wish to explore developing a town circular community bus service
- b) If so, authorising officers to develop and undertake a consultation and undertake further research to develop a business case for a scheme.