

Bus service between Sudbury and Hadleigh saved, following cancellation concerns caused by 'administrative oversight'

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Green Party county councillor Robert Linsley at the bus stop in Bildeston. ...A celebratory picture - as Suffolk County council has decided not to axe the Norse 112 bus - which goes twice a week from Bildeston to Sudbury. Robert with passenger Theresa Wallis who use's service twice a week. Picture by Mark Westley. (10282831)

A twice-weekly bus service, described as a vital lifeline to rural villages, has been saved.

Despite bus users being told their Suffolk Norse 112 bus from Hadleigh to Sudbury was being axed, Suffolk County Council has said the service will not end after all.

Councillor Mary Evans, cabinet member for highways, transport and rural issues, said: “Due to an administrative oversight, we failed to respond to the operator before they gave notice on the service.

“Our passenger transport manager has been in contact with the operator today, and the service will continue to run as normal, so there is no change in provision for the communities. We apologise for any upset this has caused.”

She said she will be presenting a criteria for assessing funding for subsidising bus services in the future at a cabinet meeting on May 21.

Villagers, who set up petitions to save the service, had accused the council of rushing through the decision to axe the service without first consulting parish councils.

The bus service, which runs on Tuesdays and Thursdays, connects people in Kersey, Semer, Bildeston, Chelsworth, Monks Eleigh, Brent Eleigh, Little Waldingfield and Great Waldingfield with Hadleigh and Sudbury.

Robert Lindsay, county councillor for six of the eight villages on the route, said: “I’m delighted this bus route is being saved after all.

“The clear message I got last week from county council officers was that Norse was not renewing and there was serious doubt whether the council would retender for the contract.

“I hope the new methodology for subsidising buses will be approved by cabinet, since I think if it had been in force, axing the 112 would never have in question.”

He added: “There are a high proportion of passengers on that bus who are either disabled, elderly or from low income families who simply have no alternative way to get into town. The council has a duty to provide transport to them.

“Unfortunately, the Conservatives who run the county council have decided to cut £30,000 from the rural bus subsidy this year, so the axe is going to fall on bus routes elsewhere.”

Monks Eleigh resident Kathy Haddow, who was involved in a campaign to save the service several years ago, had written to Suffolk County Council’s chief executive Nicola Beach to complain.

She said: “The county council has a duty to be efficient, but it also has a duty to monitor and oversee essential services and find ways to resolve issues before they arise.

“For the driver to announce to passengers on May 7 that there will be no more buses after June 27 is totally unacceptable – not even parish councils were informed.”