



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

Councillor Stewart Cursley,  
Mayor of Wells,  
Mayor's Parlour,  
Wells City Council,  
Market Place,  
Wells, BA5 2RB.

Our Ref: JH37778

23 August 2022

Dear Councillor Cursley

**Re: Bus Services**

Thank you for your letter on the threat of cancelled bus services from Wells. I share your concern that these services must be protected.

I met with the management at First Bus last week and I'm afraid the situation is still not as we would want it to be - on both the 126 and the 173.

Contrary to what some local councillors have claimed, there has been no "victory" on the 173. Indeed it's not absolutely clear what engagement councillors have had with First Bus as neither the local nor regional management have been engaged by them. I don't tell you this to make a political point but because there is a danger that thinking the service has survived for the wrong reason might lead to a complacency that does eventually see it axed.

The truth is that the 173 was never seriously lined up for deletion as the recovery of that route from the pandemic was on a trajectory that suggested it would be financially viable in a reasonable timeframe. First Bus have also been able to more successfully recruit drivers in Wells which means services that operate from the Wells depot are attractive. The 173 is one of these.

However the 173 needs to continue to recover from the pandemic so it can achieve commercial viability. The City Council will want, therefore, to make sure residents aren't misled by stories of a great political victory and instead make sure they use the service regularly to prove its viability. First Bus have said the route is running on a "use it or lose it" basis - we've been warned!

On the 126, First Bus gave notice to the County Council and North Somerset Council of their intention to cease operating the route earlier in the month. The councils will need to decide in the coming days whether they wish to subsidise it in a bid to keep it running.

With drivers and vehicles now allocated elsewhere in their network, it's possible that First Bus will be unwilling to reconsider even with the offer of subsidy but it is my strong view that the County Council should seek to do so anyway. Similarly, I hope the County Council will be exploring with alternative operators whether a subsidised route could be provided by them instead.

Member of Parliament for the Wells Constituency

[www.jamesheappey.org.uk](http://www.jamesheappey.org.uk)

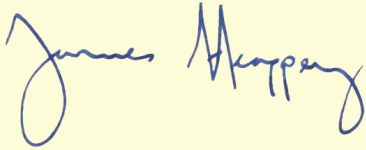
Thousands of local residents have now signed my petition to the County Council – <https://www.jamesheappey.org.uk/campaigns/save-126-wells-weston-bus> – and I'll be presenting it this week. Residents who have not yet signed it should please take this last opportunity to do so. It is only through the intervention of the council that the route will be saved.

In your letter you asked me to pursue with the Government the extension of the Bus Recovery Grant. I'm delighted to say that last Friday Grant Shapps announced that it would be extended for six months. This means that Somerset County Council and North Somerset Council do now have the money to fund the 126 for another 6-12 months if they choose to do so. If they were to do so, I know that local residents who've mounted such an impassioned defence of the 126 in recent weeks will be keen to use the route to show its viability for the future.

I hope this is helpful and look forward to working with you to make sure both routes are saved - the 173 through rewarding First Bus's decision through custom and the 126 through pushing the County Council into saving it.

I've copied this letter to all parish councils within the Wells Constituency on the route of the 126.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "James Heappey". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'J' and a long, sweeping underline.

James Heappey MP