

Villages cut off as 'lifeline' bus services are cancelled

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Rural villages between Bury St Edmunds and Stowmarket will be left with no buses when two services are cut next month.

The decision, which will see routes 377 and 386 cease on September 21, could hit thousands of residents, including those who rely on buses to get to work, college or hospital.

Service 377 starts in Rattlesden and finishes in Bury, while the 386 runs from Stowmarket to Bury. Both Suffolk County Council subsidised services, operated by Galloway, run Monday to Saturday.

The communities affected include Rougham, Drinkstone, Hessett, Felsham, Gedding, Thorpe Morieux, Brettenham, Rattlesden and Bradfield St George.

Some still have a Wednesday service, operated by Chambers, while others have been left with no bus services whatsoever.

This week, Suffolk County Council said it was

hoping to launch a route connecting Rougham, Blackthorpe and Bradfield St George with Sybil Andrews Academy and Bury, which would be part-funded using a Section 106 grant from the Lark Grange site. If an operator is found, the service would start on September 22.

However, no solution has been found for the other communities affected.

Gilly Morgan, of Gedding – which will be left with one Wednesday service following the cuts – said: “The daily bus picks up in all the little rural villages and it is essential. It is a lifeline.”

Michael Poulter, chairman of Hessett Parish Council, said: “If you look at the information the council issues it gives the impression that very few people actually use the bus.

“This decision leaves the village without any transport and we know there are people who use it for work, there are pensioners who use it on market days and there are students who are going to have a problem getting to college.”

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Bus routes axed: 'We can see Bury, but we can't get there'

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"This will have an impact and is a detrimental step. It seems short-sighted to just stop the buses," added Mr Poulter.

Peter Langdon, Rougham Parish Council chairman, said there were 'no alternatives' if a service was not reinstated.

"We will be completely cut off," he said.

For Rougham resident Linda Barnard, the news was an unwelcome shock when she arrived home following four-and-a-half months in hospital and rehabilitation battling guillain barre syndrome.

The mum-of-three is unable to drive as a result of her illness and is worried her 16-year-old daughter

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Michael Poulter
Hessett Parish Council

Amber will be unable travel to West Suffolk College, in Bury, when she starts a course next month.

"We are so close to Bury we can see it, but we can't get there," said Linda.

"I have no idea how Amber will get to college if the buses stop. She would have to walk to Thurston to catch a bus, but that is miles away and there

are no footpaths. I'm sure it's not just Amber who is affected by this.

"At least there is hope for Rougham now, but what about the other villages? I don't think the council had the faintest idea of the impact this would have on people."

Sara Mildmay-White, West Suffolk district councillor for Rougham, described the decision to stop the routes as a 'real blow' and criticised the lack of warning.

Bill Hiron, director at bus operator Galloway Travel Group, said: "We are naturally disappointed, but Suffolk's cabinet decision to cut its public transport budget is well-known and these routes were on the 'hit list' due to their high subsidy cost per passenger journey."

Suffolk County Council confirmed it was working to put a new bus route

for the Rougham area out to tender.

"Galloways served early notice on the contract and despite discussions with the operator and other parties, it has not been possible to continue these routes," said a Suffolk County Council spokesman

"We are working with parish councils to develop alternative funding options for a sustainable bus service at the Stowmarket end of the route.

"Additionally, there are Connecting Communities options available in this area which may be more suitable for some users."

Connecting Communities is transport provided by the county council to help people without access to a regular bus service.

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