

Berkhamsted Town Council Environment Committee

Dear Mike Davey,

ACQUISITION BY ARRIVA PLC OF SOVEREIGN BUS AND COACH COMPANY

I would like to make the following comments based on my work with the Berkhamsted Town Council Environment Cttee in researching community and environmental aspects of improving bus services in Berkhamsted.

1. It would have been useful to have information on the Hertfordshire routes of the company concerned.

2. It would also have been useful to know *why* the takeover is proposed. If the company concerned is failing in its ability to provide a necessary service, and Arriva is stepping in to prevent the total loss of a community service it may be possible to agree with the action. But if it is more in the nature of a buy-out to secure a monopoly or to secure other interests entirely in favour of Arriva, then we are likely to oppose.

3. Our experience of monopoly bus services has been frustrating. We have considerable community support for a town bus service which would operate on a circular route; exploratory discussions with Arriva have shown there was little interest in moving to a feasibility study on this.

In my role as a borough councillor attending Environment Scrutiny Cttee., I have heard similar complaints of lack of readiness to discuss improvements to existing subsidised routes.

It is difficult not to ascribe this complaisant attitude to the monopoly situation.

4. The absence of competition is further enhanced by the rule by which an operator has exclusive use of its routes.

In our case we cannot go to another operator to run our circular route because bits of the route are already part of established Arriva routes.

5. In conclusion, there should be no monopoly of local bus services that leaves the community entirely in the hands of one operator. This is especially so when the operator is also in receipt of the huge public subsidies Arriva receives from Hertfordshire taxpayers.

In our case it should be possible for us to use another operator if Arriva are uninterested.

Yours sincerely,

Cllr Elizabeth Patterson.

Dacorum Borough and Berkhamsted Town Council