# **Brighton Area Buswatch**

Representing local bus users



A branch of Bus Users UK

# **Buswatch News – May 2017**

The Big Lemon solar bus launch



Photo courtesy of The Big Lemon

A very successful event took place at the Big Lemon Community Interest Company on 28 April to launch the first two solar powered buses. Solar panels have been installed on the roof of the depot near Marine Gate which should provide sufficient power for the buses on most days. Invited guests were shown the recharging facilities, which provided around 75% of the energy needed even on a mostly cloudy day. The plan is that on sunny days, excess solar power can be fed into the grid to compensate for days when other sources are needed as a top up facility. The bright yellow zero emission bus in the photo was named "Om Shanti' and it will soon become a regular sight on route 52 between Brighton and Woodingdean. We were given a ride on on what is thought to be the first solar powered bus in the UK, if not the world! It bus was smooth and quiet and it managed hills without difficulty. Free wi fi is available for passengers.

It was very impressive to see the commitment of the company towards providing sustainable transport and the enthusiasm of staff. The solar roof is a joint project with the Brighton Energy Coop which raised £13, 325 through crowdfunding and it attracted enough votes from members of the public to win £12,500 of funding from the M&S Community Energy Fund to cover the other half. The launch attracted much press interest including ITV Meridian news. Congratulations to all involved.

#### Valley Gardens feedback

Our Committee remains very concerned about the Valley Gardens scheme which would reduce the capacity of the main A23/270 roads between St Peter's Church and the Royal Pavilion/Edward Street. We had an opportunity to express our doubts at a meeting with Council Officers recently. They listened carefully to our concerns and suggestions which are:

- Traffic modelling does not take account of peak weekend or summer traffic flows so the Council's consultants have not been able to measure Brighton's unique conditions. This situation is not likely to change but it remains a major concern. We believe traffic congestion will get worse during these periods if the scheme proceeds as planned.
- There is insufficient junction capacity at the London Road/St Peter's Place junction where most northbound buses towards Lewes Road will have to turn right and thread through other traffic. At present Lewes Road bound buses can use a short link road south of St Peter's Church which works well and should remain.
- There is a need to address the difficult right turn for southbound vehicles turning into Church Street. We feel a new right turn should be added further north taking general traffic to the western side of the gardens. This would enable two southbound lanes to be available through the traffic lights at Church Street reducing conflicting flows.
- The 'shared space' plans for Church Street need to be defined to improve clarity, safety and the pedestrian/cycle route between Pavilion Gardens and Valley Gardens.
- Consideration should be given to a new northbound lane on the east side between trees and an 'overflow lane' on the west side which could be used at peak times (including busy weekends). This would eliminate the single lane proposals for general traffic and would not need to involve the loss of trees.
- Right turning traffic to/from Morley Street and Kingswood Street could create delays if vehicles following are unable to pass.
- Moving the St Peter's Place taxi rank is unnecessary and would create new problems. We suggest is retained in its current location but redesigned to avoid taxis blocking passing vehicles.

Brighton Area Buswatch is preparing a detailed report on the Valley Gardens scheme and it implications. This will be available on our website shortly: <a href="https://www.brightonbuswatch.org">www.brightonbuswatch.org</a> We welcome your comments.

#### **Brighton & Hove electric bus**

Not to be outdone by The Big Lemon, our largest bus company Brighton & Hove Buses also has two electric vehicles at the moment. In addition to the one featured in Buswatch News last month, a two door red single decker built by Chinese manufacturer BYD is about to be tested on route 25 between Old Steine and the Universities. It will run as an extra bus during the daytime.

#### Improving air quality

On 5 May the Government published its long awaited strategy to tackle Nitrogen Dioxide levels in towns and cities. It proposes Clean Air Zones in targeted areas where action is needed. Brighton & Hove is not included in the list, perhaps an indication that much has already been achieved. An accompanying consultation proposes to delegate much of the responsibility for implementation to local authorities and it stops short of recommending a national scrappage scheme for owners of diesel cars. A final Government strategy must be published by 31 July to meet a High Court ruling.

Brighton & Hove Buses is investing heavily in new Euro VI standard diesel buses which are up to ten times cleaner than the equivalent measure for cars. The company has also upgraded many older buses to reduce emissions. As mentioned above the company is also trialling electric buses. B&H Managing Director Martin Harris says he has doubts about the widespread use of electric vehicles because of the need to use electricity generated elsewhere which may not involve renewable sources and the relatively short range of current electric buses.

#### North Street to close for 8 weeks from September

According to reports in The Argus, North Street will be completely closed from mid-September to allow Southern Water to undertake works and resurface the street. We understand the bus company is involved in discussions with Southern Water and is developing plans to divert services. Brighton & Hove Buses will need to weigh up the benefits and disbenefits of shortening some bus routes against the risk of sending up to 100 buses an hour along the already congested seafront or along Queens Road and North Road.

The decision to remove some bus routes from Churchill Square during the roadworks in Western Road has worked very well with minimal delays. We think most passengers would prefer to have a reliable service even if it means changing buses or using different bus stops, to one where buses get stuck in long traffic queues and is unreliable. Good publicity will be essential to keep passengers informed. You may disagree or have different ideas. If so, please let us know as we will be discussing traffic issues with the bus companies and a representative from Brighton & Hove City Council at our July meeting.

#### **Preston Barracks development**

The proposed development in Lewes Road involves the construction of a new 600 space multi-storey car park for Brighton University along with a new access road and a pedestrian footbridge. We believe this could have a detrimental impact on bus users by encouraging more cars and installing an extra set of traffic lights with new lanes for cars which could affect the existing bus lanes. We are keeping an eye on this development which has yet to be approved by the Council's Planning Committee and will press for bus priority measures to be retained.

### New opportunities for days' out

Summer is approaching and there are a number of improvements to highlight this year. Firstly, Metrobus route 270 from Brighton to Haywards Heath and East Grinstead now has a limited Sunday service. Use the 270 to go to the Ashdown Forest and to Horsted Keynes or East Grinstead for the Bluebell steam railway. The 77 which links Brighton Palace Pier and the i360 to Brighton Station and Devil's Dyke runs daily from 10 June, every 30 minutes. Until then it runs at weekends every 45 minutes. The i7 service from Brighton Station to the seafront and the 7X Brighton Station to the Marina which were little used last summer will not run this year.

Further afield the 349 Sunday bus link between Hastings station and St Leonards, Sedlescombe, Staplecross, Ewhurst, Bodiam, Sandhurst, Hawkhurst and Cranbrook has been restored, at least until March 2018 with support from East Sussex and Kent County Councils and local community groups. This is an excellent way to reach Bodiam Castle, the High Weald area of outstanding natural beauty and the Kent & East Sussex steam railway. Sunday buses leave Hastings Station at 0752 and every two hours until 1552 returning from Cranbrook between 0905 and 1705. From Brighton you can reach Hastings on just two buses using Brighton & Hove routes 12, 12A, 12X or 13X to Eastbourne and changing onto Stagecoach route 99 to Hastings. A Discovery ticket covers all these buses. It costs £8.50 for adults and a family ticket is also available at £16 for up to five including two adults. Buy it from the driver.

## Congratulations to the Seagulls!

Well done to everyone involved at the Albion for winning promotion to the Premier League and for bringing a fantastic atmosphere to the city. Buses wrapped in blue and white played a big part in the promotion parade. Next season our local buses will be transporting home and away fans from the biggest clubs to the Amex stadium.

#### **Brighton Area Buswatch meeting**

The next meeting with bus company managers and Brighton & Hove City Council will be on **Wednesday 12 July 2017** at 5.15pm in Brighton Town Hall, Bartholomew Square. Meetings are open to all members and supporters but please let us know in advance if you wish to attend as space is limited.

Buswatch News is produced and edited by Andrew Boag, Chair, Brighton Area Buswatch. We welcome your contributions and suggestions. Printed A5 copies of this newsletter are available from Hove town hall reception and a pdf or large print versions are available on request. The next issue is due in mid-June 2017.

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Brighton Area Buswatch is a branch of Bus Users UK bususers.org