

**AARON BELL MP**  
Member of Parliament for Newcastle-under-Lyme



**HOUSE OF COMMONS**

LONDON SW1A 0AA

Ms Clare Withington  
The Croft  
Barthomley Road  
Audley  
Stoke-on-Trent  
ST7 8HU

30th August 2023

Dear Ms Withington

**Re: No4 Bus Service to Audley and Wood Lane**  
**My ref. AB26447/GE**

Thank you for contacting me regarding the cessation of the First Bus service to Wood Lane and Audley. I appreciate you and the Parish Council taking the time to write to me, and I apologise for the delay in responding.

I share your concerns about the impact that the cessation of this service will have on villagers and their families. Considering the work that Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council has been carrying out through the Future High Streets Fund and Town Deal, where almost £35 million of funding has been secured from the Government, this decision risks keeping the future viability of Newcastle-under-Lyme town centre more difficult.

Indeed, part of the bids that secured the funding was to improve local public transport links, especially bus routes, as it is recognised that more people coming to the town centre will result in more businesses opening, meaning even more people coming to the town and, thus, more bus routes becoming viable in the future.

In June, I was also delighted to welcome the Transport Secretary, Rt Hon Mark Harper MP, to Newcastle-under-Lyme, where I discussed the reduction in First Bus' number 4 service from 2nd July. I raised the concerns both the Parish Council and constituents have raised with me, people having to give up their jobs or move their children to different schools. I am thankful to him in giving his support in resolving this issue.

I also raised this issue in the House of Commons, where the Leader of the House, Rt Hon Penny Mordaunt MP, agreed that more consultation should be carried out before any changes to bus routes are implemented. The following day I had a meeting with the Interim Managing Director of First Buses for Yorkshire and the Midlands, Mr Mike Watson, to challenge the decision, voice my strong disapproval over the lack of notice for customers, and look whether it would be possible to postpone the changes until alternative arrangements could be put in place that help residents.



In addition to this, I will also be meeting with Ms Zoe Hands, the recently appointed Managing Director of First Buses for Manchester, Midlands, and South Yorkshire in the coming weeks to discuss options moving forward to improve services.

Whilst the two additional 1A services before 9am are welcome, in the meantime, I have also been working with Staffordshire County Council to discuss what we could do to support this route to ensure residents who rely on the bus are not cut-off.

Thank you for raising this matter with me and I will write to you further once I have met with Ms Hands.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A Bell', written in a cursive style.

**Aaron Bell MP**  
Member of Parliament for Newcastle-under-Lyme