



## **Stranded When The Bus Stops**

Residents in Stratton St Margaret have lost the fight to keep their bus service going but the battle is not over. The Stagecoach No 26 bus service ground to a halt on Tuesday, never to run again, much to the dismay of a throng of passengers who are determined to campaign for its return. The hourly bus service was very valuable to the local community and we are appalled that it has been withdrawn, said Patricia Turner, one of the residents affected by the cancellation. We will be writing to Stagecoach and doing all we can to see it reinstated. The No 26 was one of the main services which ran to the Sainsbury's superstore on Oxford Road, and store manager Zen Karasinski has added his voice to the chorus of concerned locals. He said: The customers made good use of the service and there were always queues waiting at the bus stop. Many of our staff used the bus as well and colleagues have already begun to raise the problem of getting to and from work. It is a big dilemma and I am worried about the knock-on effects. The No 26 ran through Gorse Hill, Kingsdown, Stratton, and onto the town centre, providing an essential link between Stratton St Margaret and the rest of the town. It had been under threat for months, because Stagecoach claimed that the number of passengers using the service was too small to make it worthwhile. Residents, local councillors and businesses have campaigned hard to save it, but Stagecoach says the bus service has reached the end of the road for good. Although a replacement service is being provided by Thamesdown Transport, it will take a different route, omitting some of the stops formerly served by the No 26. Residents are now unable to reach Merchiston's doctor's surgery on Highworth Road, and one part of Ermin Street, near the Wheatsheaf pub, has been completely cut off. Isolated residents have to walk half a mile to the nearest bus stop on Oxford Road. Mrs Turner, 59, lives in Park Street, the area most affected by the loss of the bus. She said: There are a lot of elderly people who live around here, and without the No 26 bus, they are stranded. Some people just cannot walk that distance to a bus stop so far away. We are all very worried. Stagecoach operations director Phil Stockley admitted he was sorry to see the bus service go, but it was an unavoidable outcome. He said: Most of the time, there were only five or six people on the bus every trip, and it just wasn't feasible to keep the service going. We did run the bus for some time, in the hope that it would take off, but it never reached sensible numbers. We do regret that we had to stop the service, but difficult decisions have to be made sometimes.

**Extract from Evening Advertiser 2nd June 2000**