



# TISBUS, Wiltshire



### Location

Tisbury, Wiltshire

### Founded

First vehicle purchased in 2000

### Legal structure

The Tisbury and District Community Minibus Ltd, known locally as TISBUS, is a registered charity (1085583)

### Description of activity

Provision of affordable, door-to-door, wheelchair-accessible transport for everyone in the Tisbury and Nadder Valley region

### Key assets

Four 16-seat minibuses, two of which are wheelchair-accessible

### Staff and volunteers

TISBUS has no employees but uses an external coordinator to orchestrate trips. Eight trustees and eight volunteer bus drivers.

## Overview

In 2000, a member of the community, John Herbert Meade, 7th Earl of Clanwilliam, became aware that there was government funding and support available for the provision of community transport services in rural areas. Having undertaken some research into the funding possibilities, as well as local need, he and a few other local people decided to set up a charity in order to offer a community transport service to the area.

Following some successful grant funding, TISBUS purchased a second-hand, wheelchair-accessible minibus at a cost of £12,859, which it used to provide a regular, door-to-door community transport service within the Tisbury and Nadder Valley region. Unfortunately, there were breaks in service when the vehicle broke down, and the trustee board had to look at ways to purchase another second-hand vehicle. At this time, TISBUS was fortunate to work with a local member of the community who was *“amazing in the way he found cheap, or even free, second-hand buses”* which, in conjunction with grant funding and local fundraising efforts, ensured that TISBUS could purchase additional vehicles more suitable to the area, thus enabling an increase in service.



The trustee board has continually worked hard to submit grant applications to improve and increase its fleet of minibuses. This included the purchase of a brand-new minibus following a significant grant from the Gannett Foundation. Having a brand new vehicle meant happier drivers and happier customers, resulting in an increase in the use of the service. It also meant that income generation through private hire of the vehicles, using TISBUS volunteer drivers, became possible.

Since then, TISBUS has been able to provide a door-to-door, wheelchair-accessible service to the local community, offering regular shopping outings as well as one-off day trips to places such as the coast and local garden centres. TISBUS also provides an affordable transport hire service to the local community, which is currently used, for example, by a local school, a local group for people with dementia and a local addiction facility.

## Financial health

TISBUS is in a stable position financially, with surplus income recorded at the end of March 2018, along with a healthy set of reserves.

### Three key factors that have affected its development and financial health:

#### 1. Provision of an essential service

TISBUS provides an essential service that is highly valued by the community. In 2017/18, passenger trips totalled 8,387 – 161 per week on average – demonstrating the high demand for the service. As a result, TISBUS is able to claim for all concessionary fares provided – a £3 flat rate per journey for those with a bus pass – as well as fuel subsidies from the Department of Transport's Bus Service Operators Grant. TISBUS is also able to claim some grant income from Wiltshire County Council via its Community Transport Grant scheme, and was recently gifted a new minibus via the Department of Transport's Community Transport Minibus Fund. In 2018, not accounting for the cost of the new minibus, this income totalled £15,862, which guaranteed a healthy contribution to the charity's total turnover.

In addition, TISBUS has been able to successfully bring in grant funding because of its history. Arguably, this has been successful because of the very real social problems that the service addresses, particularly for older people. These include social and rural isolation, inactivity, and the consequent mental and physical health problems that can result.

#### 2. Managing itself like a business

TISBUS is very aware that *"it has to be run as a business."* The trustee board is constantly ensuring that its income matches expenditure, and that it has in place a means by which to generate a surplus that can be used to maintain and improve the charity's assets. To support this, TISBUS has in place a minibus replacement plan, which ensures that no minibus is over seven years old, thus reducing the maintenance costs that can occur after this time. It also means TISBUS has an opportunity to create some income from the sale of the residual assets. Last year, for example, TISBUS sold one of its retired minibuses for £3,500. TISBUS also does a lot to advertise the minibuses locally, ensuring that it can maximise its income via private hire in order to supplement the charitable purpose. This is beneficial as it means that TISBUS is not solely reliant on grant income. Finally, TISBUS holds quarterly members' meetings to ensure that the service continues to be responsive to the customers' needs. For example, people are able to suggest day trip locations, and the meetings act as a way to encourage continual community buy-in to the service.

#### 3. Access to skilled and dedicated trustees, volunteers and a paid coordinator

TISBUS has access to a skilled and dedicated board of trustees. For example, it embodies skills such as: accountancy; IT; public relations; project management; and organisational and communication skills. Each of these skills enables the charity to keep on top of its daily responsibilities while ensuring the organisation is well known and supported locally. The ongoing commitment provided by these people supports the organisation's financial viability, ensuring that concessionary payment claims are made, grant applications are submitted and ongoing reporting requirements for grants are met. *"It takes all different types of skills and man hours to achieve it ... it's quite a commitment in terms of time and effort ... we try to take a professional approach ... things have to be done properly. You can't do it half-heartedly."*



Access to enough volunteers has often been a challenge for TISBUS, but thanks to the financial health of the organisation it has been able to buy in drivers to cover some of the sparser times. However, it currently has a healthy pool of volunteer drivers, thus reducing the costs associated with paid drivers. Having volunteer drivers is also important for TISBUS as it ensures that the door-to-door service can continue to be provided even if it is more expensive to run.

Having a paid coordinator also ensures that there is always someone available for existing and potential customers to contact should they wish to book a slot, which means that TISBUS does not lose out on any custom, and can also deliver a friendly and accessible service.

### Future direction

TISBUS is very optimistic about its future and believes strongly that there will continue to be a need for its service in the years to come. However, the trustee board is very aware that there is a “black cloud” hanging over the organisation given the increasing pressure that commercial bus companies are putting on the government to increase restrictions on charitable organisations. In particular, some commercial bus companies are lobbying the government to require charitable community transport services to use licensed drivers, as required under the full Public Service Vehicle Operator’s Licence.

This could threaten organisations like TISBUS, increasing their costs substantially. Subsequently, this may put pressure on the organisation to increase income generation through increasing the use of private hire. However, it would not want this to impact on its charitable service, not only because this may make the organisation vulnerable to mission drift, but also because it would potentially reduce the income that it currently receives through subsidies and grant income.

TISBUS does not believe that this will happen as it feels that it, along with many other community transport organisations, provides a valuable service, which is only possible because of the use of DBS-checked volunteers. In the meantime, it will watch the debate carefully and continue to provide a well-used door-to-door service, supplemented by private hire.

### Financial information

The following table provides an overview of The Tisbury and District Community Minibus Ltd’s income, expenditure and assets for the year ending 31st March 2018.

Income	£57,888
Expenditure	£48,063
Difference between income and expenditure	£9,825
Surplus/deficit on ordinary activities before taxation	£9,825
Annual income from grant or subsidy	£19,471
Fixed assets	£70,772
Current assets (Debtors; cash at bank and in hand)	Debtors: £14,578 Cash at bank and in hand: £36,577
Total	
Net assets	Creditors: £10,469

Source: TISBUS Financial Accounts 2018, Charity Commission