

# Arriva bid puts focus on 'mega grot spot'



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Picture: GOOGLE

QUESTIONS have been raised about the future of the bus depot in St John's Road, Tunbridge Wells.

It comes as owner Arriva stands poised to be taken over by German travel giants Deutsche Bahn. Stakeholders at the UK train and bus operator have been mulling over a £1.59 billion deal and if they give their approval it would create one of Europe's biggest public transport groups.

Daniel Bech, of the Royal Tunbridge Wells Town Forum, questioned what the deal could mean for what he labelled the "mega grot spot" depot.

"It is a fantastic opportunity for a developer," he said. "There is green space and a recreation ground and I think getting rid of the bus depot would stop a lot of misery in St John's Road with the turning and the waiting of the buses. They hinder the flow of the traffic."

Arriva is one of the largest transport operators in Europe and runs bus and train services in 12 countries, employing more than 44,000 people.

If shareholders agree, Arriva will be made a wholly-owned subsidiary of Deutsche Bahn, which runs Germany's national rail services, as well as Chiltern Railways and rail freight services in the UK.

Mr Bech speculated that Deutsche Bahn would want to review Arriva's assets.

"If it is sold then this company, Deutsche Bahn, would first want to assess what they have," he said.

"I don't know whether we are number one or at the bottom of their list of interests. But to have this site developed and to have the depot somewhere else would revamp the whole area."

## Earmarked

He said the area behind the depot was littered with beer cans and other rubbish. He said the depot was unsuitable for a residential area and would be better placed in an industrial estate.

It is understood that previous owners of the bus depot had considered moving it to the North Farm industrial estate in the past.

Mr Bech added: "I do believe this land must be earmarked for development otherwise we are never going to get rid of it."

"We need a bus depot at the right place and in the middle of a residential area is not right, especially with St John's Road being a main route into town."

"It is not a transport hub because people do not catch buses from it. If they wanted to create a transport hub it should be near the station. I don't think this idea would ever happen, but the derelict Morrisons site would be ideal."

But Arriva's marketing manager, Richard Lewis, played down the claims: "We have no plans to relocate our Tunbridge Wells base from the site in St John's Road which has been in continual use as a bus depot for the past eight decades."

Meanwhile, the Sunderland-based company's board has recommended the takeover deal to shareholders, who will make a decision over the coming weeks, an Arriva spokeswoman said.

TICKET TO RIDE: Arriva's St John's Road bus depot could be sold if deal goes ahead

# £1.59bn deal may end bus depot blight