

# Item 5: Queries on Bus Provision and Access to SUE Phase 1A

GTDP Community Sub-Group Meeting, 20th March 2019

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## 1 Bus Provision and Use of Joe Blunt's Lane Underpass

**Questions asked of Breckland** (sent by email 5th November 2018, in response to a previous reply that did not address the specific questions I had asked):

*I would like simple “yes” or “no” answers to the following:*

*(a) Whether Thetford Area Action Plan Policy TH26 “Buses” is still in force as a planning policy, and*

*(b) If there are any planning conditions or s106 provisions on the Kingsfleet Outline and Phase 1A planning permissions to ensure “New bus services to the town centre and to the existing employment areas on Mundford Road and London Road will be in place from the first day of occupation by a resident in the Thetford Urban Extension.” as required by TH26(a)?*

*And then, if the answers to the above are yes and no, I asked if you could explain why this is the case, and what alternative steps (if any) are being taken to ensure that the policy TH26(a) (i.e. bus services are running from the first day of occupation) is implemented? This appears to be “none”, from the information you have provided so far, but could you please confirm that this is the case?*

*Secondly, it appears from the information you provided that Breckland is accepting a plan from the developers to allow regular bus services to use the road between the main road in the development and the Joe Blunt's Lane. I assume this is the case because it seems to be the only way to provide bus stops within the specified distance of each of the houses. But if the required regular services are to use this route, they would then have to use the Joe Blunt's Lane underpass. This would contravene TAAP Policy TH 11, parts iv and v, which state, in relation to the Joe Blunt's Lane railway underpass:*

*iv. Buses only operate for school use and for no other purposes;*

*v. Buses operate in term time only and not at weekends, on bank holidays nor outside of term times and for a limited time at the start and end of the school day;*

*So can you also please also confirm the following:*

*(c) Whether Thetford Area Action Plan Policy TH11 “Joe Blunt's Lane” is still in force as a planning policy?*

*(d) Whether the travel plan you have accepted from the Developers relies on regular bus services using the underpass in contravention of TH11?*

*If the answers to (c) and (d) are yes and yes, could you please explain how this has come about? Was it a conscious decision to ignore TH11, or were those who decided to accept the plan unaware of TH11 at the time?*

## **Answers received from Breckland** (by email, 18th March 2019)

### *Bus Route & Service Requirements*

*A single track bus way with a separate 2m wide combined footpath and cycle path is proposed and approved for Joe Blunts Lane, which will use the railway line underpass. The S106 requires this is available for use prior to occupation of any dwellings in Phase 2. Then prior to occupation of 25 dwellings in Phase 3 an alternative crossing has to be provided to the north via a bus bridge. Whilst not expressly written in the S106, we would be looking for the Joe's Blunts Lane to be revised to pedestrian and cycle only once the bus bridge is operational. We can seek to secure this via various conditions.*

*There is a clause where the bus bridge requirement can be removed, but only if it is demonstrated that it is not deliverable. This would be if National Rail would not agree to it, or that the cost are so high that it would make the development unviable. We would of course investigate this thoroughly if the developer seeks to trigger the clause, and the end decision is with the Council.*

*For Phase 1, the bus service does not need to be provided until 80% occupation. It would not be feasible for the developer or bus service to start a service on first dwelling occupation, there would not be enough residents and it would not be reasonable to require several bus services to be operation for 1 house, or even a small number of houses. If the TAAP Policy TH 26 (a) was reviewed by an Planning Inspector today, it would be highly likely that the requirements of Policy TH 26(a) would not be found sound.*

*There are two Outline Planning Conditions 4 and 29 which detail further bus delivery requirements prior to commencement within a phase or sub-phase. This is for a bus service enabling scheme and detailed phasing delivery. There is no specific requirement for a new bus service to the town centre or existing employment areas. However, we can secure this via Condition 29 in due course.*

*I have not found any documentation which sets out the Joe Blunt's bus route will be for school buses only. We will need to consider this again in due course prior to occupation of 80% of Phase 1.*

### *Thetford Area Action Plan 2012 (TAAP)*

*The Thetford Area Action Plan was adopted at the time when the Outline Planning Permission was determined and continues to form part of the Adopted Development Plan including Policy TH26. The Committee Report details the main planning consideration that led to the recommendation of approval, and this report specifically lists the TAAP Policies at paragraph 5.31 to 5.60.*

*An assessment of the proposal, which subsequently went onto be secured within the S106, against policy TH11 is detailed at paragraph 8.2.15 of the committee report. The TAAP therefore was considered as part of the application assessment and afforded due weight as part of the adopted development plan. The committee report concludes that as the use of the lane will be temporary and excludes other non-bus vehicular traffic, it was thus considered acceptable even though the policy was not fully complied with. If it was to become permanent, then this would need to be justified, otherwise, a new route will be delivered to the north via the bus gate. The Planning System requires the adopted policies to be complied with unless material consideration indicate otherwise. On this occasion there were material considerations. Furthermore, with developments of this scale and complexity it is not always possible to foresee all issues when Local Plan Policies are being prepared.*

*Link to committee report: <https://democracy.breckland.gov.uk/documents/g3399/Public%20reports%20pack%2004th-Apr-2014%2010.00%20Planning%20Committee.pdf?T=10>*

### *Travel Plan*

*The Travel Plan we have approved is for Phase 1a which shall be the first Phase to be built and occupied for 343 new homes. The Travel Plan did not include the new bus service through the site via Joe Blunts Lane as it is less than 80% of Phase 1 (Phase 1 has 1,058 dwellings). So whilst we know the physical layout of the road and pedestrian path, the exact bus services and restrictions is still to be determined which will need to be done before Phase 1c (i.e. sub phase 3 and before 846 dwellings are occupied).*

## **2 Pedestrian and Cycle Access to/from SUE Phase 1A**

**Questions asked of Breckland** (first posted at the Board Meeting on 27th November 2018. The text below is from an email I sent to Breckland 12th March, after I followed up and they asked for clarification on exactly what we wanted to know.)

*Secondly there was another query raised by the Sub-Group over pedestrian and cycle routes to and from the SUE site. In particular, members of the public had noticed that the plans showed no hard-surfaced accessible route from Phase 1A to neighbouring admirals estate, and no convenient (i.e. direct and safe) pedestrian or cycle routes linking Phase 1A to Tesco and the Green Lane route into town. At the GTDP Board meeting in November, Rob Walker said Breckland was aware of this issue and was investigating. I'd like an update on where things have got to with this please.*

**Answers received from Breckland** (by email, 18th March 2019)

### *Pedestrian Connections*

*There is no proposed and approved direct connection between Phase 1a and the existing Admirals Estate to the south. There are formal hard surfaced connection to Joe Blunts Lane, however, these do not extend southward to Cunningham Close and Benbo Road. There is an informal existing unsurfaced cut through. I do not know definitively, however, they may not have formalised connections to the Admirals Estate for the benefit of existing residents, to reduce the amount of people using this as a cut through to the detriment of the amenity of the residents on what is currently quiet cul-de-sac streets.*

*There is a connection to the north of The Red House to the Norwich Road/ A1075, with a staggered pedestrian refuge to enable safe crossing to Tescos.*

*Residents (pedestrian and cyclists) could use Joe Blunts Lane alternatively which would be relatively convenient.*