

Agenda Item No:

Report To: Joint Transportation Board

Date: Tuesday 9th December 2014

Report Title: Park Farm Order 2014 (Bluebell Road & Violet Way) Update Report

Report Author: Ray Wilkinson, Engineering Services Manager



Summary: The Board took the decision at its meeting of 9th September 2014 to defer decision on the proposed parking controls for Bluebell Road, Ashford pending a Members' Site Visit, scheduled to take place between publication of this report and the JTB meeting of 9th December 2014.

This report summarises the results of the previously held formal consultation on the proposals for Bluebell Road and presents details on the B-Line bus service, the intention behind extending this service into Park Farm South and East and assessments of two alternative routes (paragraphs 10-24).

Key Decision: YES

Affected Wards: Park Farm South, Weald East

Recommendations: **That the Board considers the results of the formal consultation and findings of the Members' site visit of 4th December 2014 and recommends implementation of the restrictions proposed.**

Background Papers: 'Prioritised List of Requested Parking Controls for Investigation and Possible Implementation' report to JTB 11th March 2014
'Park Farm Order 2014 (Bluebell Road & Violet Way)' report to JTB 9th September 2014, minutes of JTB 9th September 2014

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Purpose of the Report

1. The Board took the decision at its meeting of 9th September 2014 to defer decision on the proposed parking controls for Bluebell Road, Ashford pending a Members' Site Visit scheduled to take place between publication of this report and the JTB meeting of 9th December 2014.
2. This report summarises the results of the previously held formal consultation on the proposals for Bluebell Road and presents details on the B-Line bus service, the intention behind extending this service into Park Farm South and East and assessments of two alternative routes (paragraphs 10-24).

Issue to be Decided

3. The Board is asked to consider the proposed restrictions for Bluebell Road in light of their observations of the area at the Members' site visit which is scheduled to take place between publication of this report and the JTB meeting of 9th December 2014 and decide whether to approve the proposed restrictions for implementation or reject the scheme.

Background

4. The Ashford Borough Local Plan (adopted in June 2000) outlined that development at Park Farm South and East should feature a dedicated pedestrian/cycle/bus link between the two parts of the development site as part of the transport infrastructure and as part of a wider network of bus routes linking to Cheeseman's Green.
5. The Pelham Homes Park Farm South and East Development Brief (2001) detailed that the accommodation bridge would provide a bus priority link between the two parts of the development and function as either a dedicated bus/cycle/pedestrian link or be open to all vehicle movements.
6. At a meeting of the Planning Committee held on 17th December 2003 it was clarified that the accommodation bridge would be designed for buses, cycles and pedestrians rather than accommodating all traffic. The use of the accommodation bridge as a link for bus traffic between Park Farm South and East has been identified as a key infrastructure component of Park Farm South and East since the earliest days of the development.
7. A scheme designed to address obstructive parking issues within two specific areas of Park Farm South and East (Bluebell Road and Violet Way, shown in appendix 1) was put forward to consultation between 24th July and 15th August 2014, during which 14 objections (from 421 properties directly consulted) were received, principally citing the unsuitability of off-street parking provision in the area, the desire to retain existing parking practices and concerns over the displacement of parked vehicles. At its meeting of 9th

September 2014, the Board recommended implementation of the restrictions proposed for Violet Way but deferred a decision on the Bluebell Road proposals pending completion of a Members' site visit.

8. 7 responses received during the consultation also cited objection to running buses over the accommodation bridge, and in response to resident comments Stagecoach have carried out assessments for two alternative routes, including running via Kingsnorth village (as suggested at the Board's meeting of 9th September) and connecting with Finn Farm Road through Park Farm South rather than via the accommodation bridge, which are detailed below.
9. Owing to concerns over delays in the delivery of bus services between Park Farm South and East, a provision of service involving buses entering the estate from the A2070 Hamstreet Bypass at Violet Way was previously assessed for feasibility as an alternative to running buses via Bluebell Road, however investigation demonstrated significant concerns over the long-term financial viability of this route.

The B-Line bus service extension

10. The bus route to Park Farm started in the 1990s as a subsidised route provided by Kent County Council. In 2009 Stagecoach invested in the route with improved vehicles, an increased frequency, buses on Sundays and extended coverage of the estate. As a consequence this route is operated on a commercial basis by Stagecoach with revenue from passengers more than covering the operating cost.
11. Additional journeys are provided for Kent County Council at 1810, 1910, 1925 and 2132 from the town centre to Park Farm at an annual cost of £27,450. As with all bus routes Stagecoach receives a rebate on part of the fuel tax paid and reimbursement for free travel by young people and pensioners – i.e. KCC elects to pay their fares for them.
12. The extension to Park Farm East not only offers the opportunity to provide a convenient bus service much closer to people's homes but also an enhanced frequency of service to the Park Farm estate as a whole. This will ensure that the service, once demand patterns have changed as people move house or change job, will have enough potential users to ensure its long term viability.

Alternatives considered

13. Stagecoach understands that an alternative route has been proposed by residents keen to avoid the bus using the extreme eastern end of Bluebell Road, and note that they would agree with them that the design of the road is odd for a bus route, understanding that the parking restrictions proposed are not convenient for the home owners.
14. This road was always intended as the through route for buses, which is why it was built up to the bridge. Stagecoach note that it is very disappointing that the route was not made available for buses by the local authorities many years ago as naturally those who live there at present plan their lives without the need for a bus service and are not surprised at the concerns expressed.

15. However, in the longer term Ashford needs to have more people travelling by bus if gridlock is to be avoided and this initiative is designed to help everyone by improving public transport and keeping the roads free for motorists who need to drive.

Route 1- via Kingsnorth crossroads, Church Hill and Finn Farm Road

16. Whilst fully understanding that this moves the route away from Bluebell Road, Stagecoach have noted that there are serious potential problems in Church Hill. The crossroads (adjacent to the Queen's Head) has poor visibility and restricted space for large vehicles to turn into Church Hill and highways specialists have raised concerns. In addition there are regular problems with parking around the Primary School, Church and Village hall, and no doubt residents would have similar concerns to those in Bluebell Road.
17. This route could not be operated as an extension of the existing B-Line route to Park Farm to (as it is not an extension from the end of the route but a diversion from the middle) and would require a separate bus from those used on the B-Line. It would probably only be possible to provide one bus an hour on this route for the same cost as four buses an hour could be provided with the original proposed route via Bluebell Road.
18. Usage from Park Farm East would only be about a quarter of that anticipated in the original plan, as the service would be much less frequent and take much longer to reach the town. Given the pressure on public finance, it is essential that once developer funding runs out the service must be commercially viable in order to continue running, and Stagecoach cannot see that this is likely.
19. There would be no improvement to the frequency of the existing Park Farm route, which would remain separate and the opportunity to provide a link from Park Farm through Finberry to the Hospital (which can be introduced as soon as the road to Finberry is completed without additional subsidy by diverting the K-Line) would be lost.
20. The appropriateness of using the southern part of Finn Farm Road for a bus route is questionable, and the lack of development in this area results in the bus covering extra miles where there are no people to pick up. Additionally, using the southern part of Finn Farm Road for buses would require many trees to be cut back and would fundamentally alter the character of that road.

Route 2 – via Poppy Mead, Violet Way and Finn Farm Road

21. Significantly more householders in Poppy Mead, Violet Way and Finn Farm Road would be inconvenienced by parking restrictions along the revised route, which has about 6 times as much frontage and which uses roads even less suitable (as a result of width and corners) than the eastern end of Bluebell Road.
22. The original development plan envisaged the bus service dissecting the development area and bringing the bus within easy walking distance of as many properties as possible, but passing directly outside as few of them as possible.

23. The extra distance would mean that the three buses in use would take longer to complete the route and consequently it would not be possible to increase the frequency of buses in Park Farm from every 20 minutes to every 15 minutes, and reduce the attractiveness of the service for users from Park Farm East as the route would be longer. The planned improvement to frequency of service is likely to make bus travel much more attractive for additional users who will consequently contribute to the financial viability of the operation as developer funding reduces
24. As noted in paragraph 20, use of the southern part of Finn Farm Road for buses would require many trees to be cut back and would fundamentally alter the character of that road.

Officer's Recommendation

25. The alternative route assessments provided by Stagecoach (and that carried out at an earlier stage in the development as discussed in paragraph 9) shows that running buses via the accommodation bridge as originally envisaged constitutes the only viable means to provide an improved frequency service through Park Farm which encompasses Park Farm South and East.
26. The future extension of bus services from Park Farm East to Finberry (and eventually onto the Hospital) will also be most readily enabled through use of the accommodation bridge linking Bluebell Road with Finn Farm Road as envisaged in the original development brief.
27. The restrictions proposed in Bluebell Road will only prevent parking which occurs in contravention of the Highway Code and thus should not take place. A Member site visit has now been completed and the Board are asked to consider the restrictions proposed in light of their observations during this visit.
28. On consideration of the route assessments provided by Stagecoach and the comments made during the consultation period, it is the recommendation of Officers that the restrictions for Bluebell Road should be implemented as proposed.

Conclusion

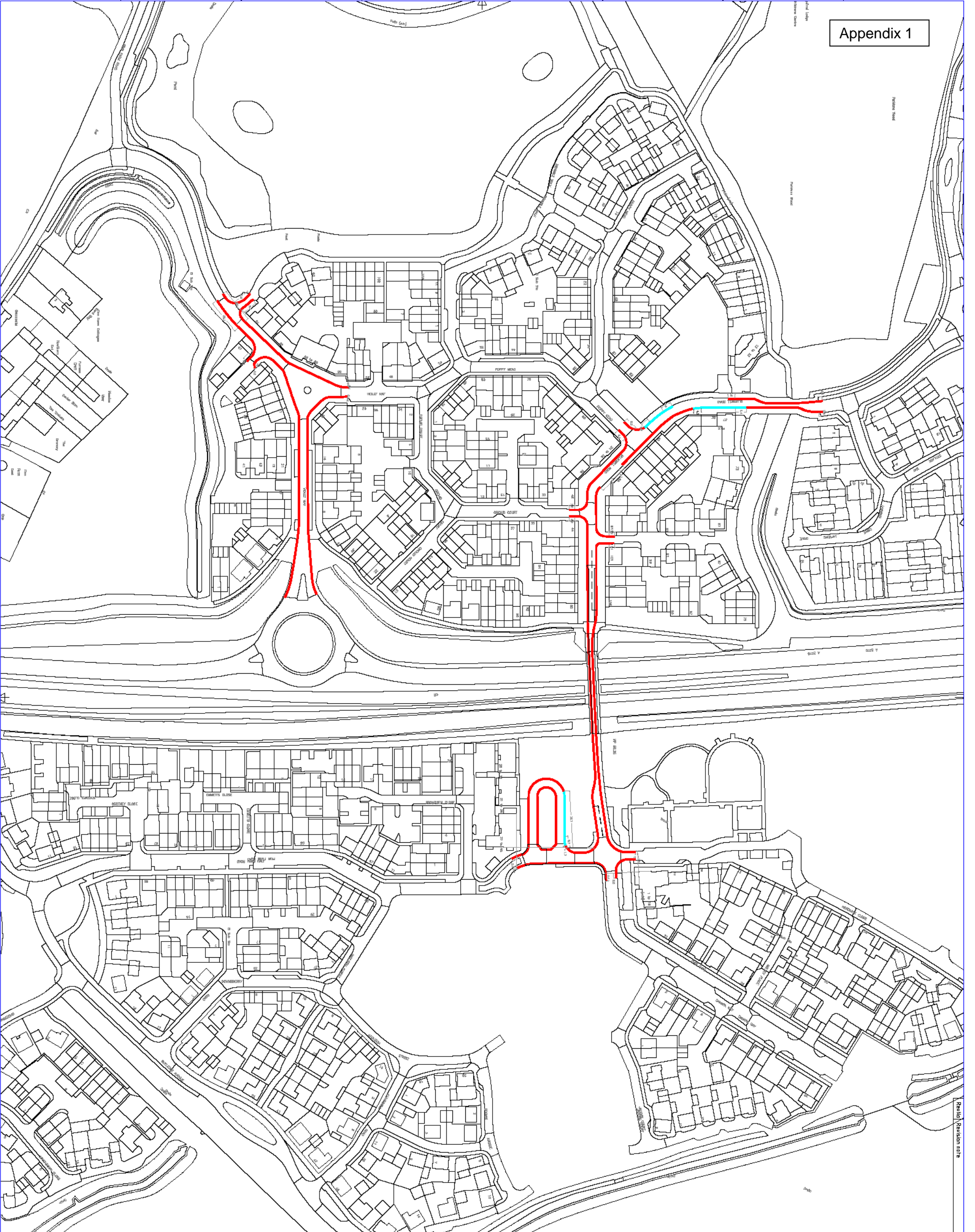
29. Assessment of the comparative viability of alternative routes has shown that the originally identified bus route utilising the accommodation bridge to link Bluebell Road with Finn Farm Road represents the most practical means of providing an extended bus service to Park Farm South and East.
30. On consideration of this assessment and the results of the consultation it is the advice of Officers that the benefits of this proposed scheme outweigh the merits of the objections received, and implementation of the restrictions proposed for Bluebell Road should be recommended.

Portfolio Holder's Views

31. To be provided at the meeting.

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Revised/Revision sets

Date

Signatures/Checked

KEY	
PROPOSED NO WAITING AT ANY TIME	—
PROPOSED NO WAITING BETWEEN SPECIFIED HOURS AT ANY TIME	—
PROPOSED BUS STOP CLEARWAY	—
EXISTING BUS STOP CLEARWAY	—

PROPOSED WAITING RESTRICTIONS	
SCALE	1:1000
DATE	JULY 2014
BY	RJW
FOR	ASHTON

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PROJECT
 PARK FARM, KINGSNORTH, ASHFORD SCHEME