

Joint Transportation Board
9th December 2014

Addendum Paper

Agenda Item 8

“Formal Consultation on Traffic Regulation Order – Bluebell Road”

In accordance with the resolution of the Board at its meeting of 9th September 2014 (minute 138 refers) a Members’ Site Visit to Bluebell Road was held on 4th December 2014, which is summarised below:

Present:

Mr C Simkins (Chairman);
Cllr. Heyes (Vice-Chairman);

Cllrs. Burgess, Feacey, Mrs Martin, Robey, Yeo
Mr M J Angell, Mr J N Wedgbury, Mr M A Wickham

Apologies:

Cllr. Davey, Mr P M Hill, Mr D Smyth

Also Present:

Ray Wilkinson (Engineering Services Manager - ABC); Jo Fox (Assistant Health, Parking & Community Safety Manager – ABC); Sheila Davison (Health, Parking & Community Safety Manager – ABC); Mark Carty (Head of Culture and the Environment – ABC); William Train (Technical Administrative Assistant – ABC); John Pugh (Roadside Infrastructure Manager – Stagecoach); Dutch Docherty (Operations Manager – Stagecoach).

Mr Wilkinson outlined the intention of the site visit, which was to show Members the areas of Bluebell Road for which restrictions had been proposed and consulted on, observe the current parking practices within these areas and if possible, stop the bus in a suitable position and allow Members the opportunity to experience the visibility afforded to a bus driver (owing to the level of obstructive on-street parking in practice, this was not possible).

The site visit commenced from Park Farm Tesco, with all present (excepting Mr Wedgbury, who joined the site visit at Bluebell Road) travelling via bus along the existing B Line bus route (Moatfield Meadow > Roman Way > Sheepfold Lane > Bluebell Road) to the roundabout junction of Bluebell Road and Reed Crescent, where the bus continued south along Bluebell Road towards the accommodation bridge.

The bus attempted to draw parallel with the kerb at the proposed outbound stop outside No. 41 Bluebell Road; however this was prevented by parked vehicles. It was explained that drawing parallel at a bus stop was necessary to enable safe, step-free access for passengers who required it (and so ensure compliance with the duties placed on service operators by the Equalities and Disability Discrimination Acts). The site visit continued on foot, with Members being shown the accommodation bridge, its approaches, the temporary bus turnaround constructed by the developer on the eastern side of the bridge and the parking facilities for residents to the rear of the properties.

In response to questions from Members, the following points were advised:

- The intention was for use of the bridge to be limited to buses, taxis, emergency service vehicles, cycles, pedestrians and equestrians.
- The implementation of ANPR camera technology to regulate use of the bridge remained an aspiration as with the existing and other planned bus gates in Ashford, however in the absence of an agreement from KCC regarding this technology other systems (such as the vehicle activated traffic signals in place at the Godinton Road bridge) could be utilised.
- Traffic signals were necessary on the bridge approaches to control flow across the single lane width of the bridge and so prevent vehicles meeting 'head-on' when wishing to cross the bridge from both directions.
- Placement of the signals in close proximity to the bridge (and so widening the carriageway on the approach) would mean that buses on the western side could wait to cross the bridge on the western side without obstructing the junction of the access road serving Nos. 63 – 99 Bluebell Road.
- Although relocation of the signals further from the bridge may not necessarily require the carriageway to be widened, resident vehicles would not trigger a demand within the signals to cross the bridge and as such any vehicle driving beyond the controls (to park on the footpath to the front of the properties adjacent to the bridge) would be committing offences under sections 34 (driving elsewhere than on a road) and 36 (failure to comply with the indication given by a lawfully placed traffic sign) of the Road Traffic Act 1988.
- A plan (dated March 2003) showing widening of the approach road on the western side and installation of traffic signals close to the bridge was included in the section 106 agreement for the development.

Officers can now advise that planning permission for the development was secured in December 2005, with the section 106 agreement signed shortly after and registered as a Local Land Charge on 20th January 2006. Results of the Local Land Charges Register (LLC1 or personal search) for properties in the area to which the charge applies would have revealed this section 106 agreement.

Prior to this, any solicitor enquiring into the development would have discovered the planning history of the site to date. The first occupation of the Bluebell Road properties along the route of proposed extension in Park Farm South took place in November and December 2007.

Following completion of the on-foot observations, attempts were made to turn the bus around utilising junctions onto side roads; however these were made impossible

through the presence of illegally parked vehicles which residents were unable or unwilling to move. The bus was left with no alternative but to reverse to the roundabout junction of Bluebell Road and Reed Crescent, where the bus was able to execute the necessary turn to allow it to return to Park Farm Tesco.

Subsequent to the Site Visit, Mr Wedgbury raised the following questions:

1. *How much extra money are the bus company getting for extending the bus through Bridgefield (and removing it from Reed Crescent)?*

The figures for an SPG6 fund subsidy of the extended B Line service are already in the public domain, having been the subject of a report to the Cabinet at its meeting of 10th July 2014 which advises the following provision of SPG6 funding:

“...support for the new service at £240, 000. This is broken down into support of £100K in the first year, £80K in the second year and £60K in the third year. Following that, Stagecoach are expected to undertake to run the service for until 31 March 2018, subject to passenger targets being met and costs not increasing significantly, without support even if not totally viable at that stage.”

2. *How many passengers to the bus company pick up in Park Farm outside of the morning and evening peak rush hours?*

This information is commercially sensitive and as such the bus operator is not prepared to release this information for public consumption. As outlined in the report to the JTB of 9th December 2014, four evening services are presently subsidised by KCC on a £X per passenger journey basis. Therefore the usage during these hours must fall within the criteria for subsidy utilised by the County Council in order for a subsidy to be provided.

3. *I have been told that everybody should be a maximum of a 5 minute walk from a bus stop, but changing the route as proposed will mean that people in **other** areas will now be more than 5 minutes away. How does that reconcile?*

As pedestrian speeds will vary significantly dependent on an individual's level of mobility, time is not used as an effective benchmark for assessing catchment areas for bus stops. The Department for Transport circular 'Inclusive Mobility' advises that "In residential areas bus stops should be located ideally so that nobody in the neighbourhood is required to walk more than **400 metres** from their home".

Kent County Council has adopted a policy in the 'Kent Design Guide' which is in line with that of the Department for Transport and advises that "Generally, walking distances to bus stops in urban areas must not be greater than 400m and desirably no more than 250m. In rural areas the walking distance should not be more than 800m."

It has been expressed by Members both at the Board's meeting of 9th September 2014 and the subsequent site visit of 4th December 2014 that the delays in implementing this bus service (and the resulting delay in advancing the proposed controls to consultation) have led to the current situation observed in Park Farm, and that the difficulties encountered during the recent consultation could have been averted had these elements been implemented at an earlier stage in the life of the development.

In light of the history of this proposal and the desire to avoid similar situations occurring within future large-scale developments, it may be prudent for the Board to recommend to the Head of Planning and Development that a requirement is included in future section 106 agreements (such as that for Chilmington Green, which is currently being written) for developers to co-operate with the Borough Council in the pursuit of any necessary Traffic Restrictions within future developments which will feature bus routes as integral to the development.