



## **Draft Bus Strategy**

**July 2013**

### **1 Overview**

- 1.1 The purpose of this Bus Strategy is to set out what is needed in Bracknell Forest over the next five years to ensure that high quality bus services address the needs of both current and potential passengers and deliver the local and national transport objectives, particularly the Council's Local Transport Plan. It is a five year plan to guide bus provision in the Borough.
- 1.2 The principles of the Draft Bus Strategy will help to determine an Action Plan that will direct the Council's future investment in supporting bus services. The initial Action Plan will identify a specific network and a series of contracts for the provision of bus services that will be agreed when the strategy is adopted.
- 1.3 The Bus Strategy will determine the overall priorities, vision and principles, but it is expected that the Action Plan may change over time. These changes may be required to enable the Council's supported bus services to respond to future changes, such as the redevelopment of Bracknell Town centre or increased financial budget pressures on the Council.
- 1.4 The Bus Strategy has been prepared for consultation with a wide range of stakeholders including residents, users, other local authorities, bus operators, other interest groups and potential partners.
- 1.5 This strategy deals specifically with the contribution bus services make in providing an effective overall transport network. A key focus of this Strategy is on the

requirements for bus services which the Council supports with a financial subsidy that will allow delivery of the Council's **priorities**:

- A Town Centre fit for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century;
- Protecting and enhancing our environment;
- Promoting health and achievement;
- Create a Borough where people are, and feel, safe;
- Sustain economic prosperity; and
- Provide value for money.

## **2. The Council's Statutory Duty**

- 2.1 The Council is required under the 1985 Transport Act to *"...secure the provision of such public passenger transport services as the council consider it appropriate to secure to meet any public transport requirements within the county which would not in their view be met apart from any action taken by them for that purpose"*, and *"...to formulate from time to time general policies as to the descriptions of service"*.

## **3 National Context**

- 3.1 Buses are the most used mode of public transport in the UK. Around 5 billion journeys are made in the UK on buses each year. Nationally, concessionary passes are now used on 30% of all bus journeys (44.7% in Bracknell Forest).
- 3.2 Bus services are provided either on a commercial basis by private operators or through the provision of financial subsidy from Councils where a service is not a commercially viable proposition for an operator to run. For commercial services, bus operators choose the route and timetable whereas for supported services the Council decides the routes and timetables on the basis of 'social need' and then seeks tenders from operators for the right to receive the subsidy and run that route.

## **4 Bus Operations in Bracknell Forest**

- 4.1 Commercial bus services form the core of the Bracknell Forest bus network. The commercial routes provide for approximately 70% of all bus passenger journeys. To ensure that bus services are provided to other parts of the Council's area and to important destinations outside the Borough not served by the commercial bus network, the Council procures additional bus services through competitive tenders.

The supported bus services account for the remaining 30% of bus passenger journeys.

4.2 The current level of bus use is affected by the range of destinations served, the quality of the bus services on offer and high car usage. For example, only 7% of work journeys in Bracknell Forest are made by bus, compared with 80% by car.

4.3 An improved bus network will be essential if the objectives of the Bus Strategy to enable people without access to a car to easily reach a wide range of education, training, employment, shopping and leisure opportunities and to reduce congestion are to be achieved. In considering the need for a better bus network, it is important to identify the challenges that will need to be addressed and the opportunities that will create increased demand for bus travel:

## **5 Challenges**

- The adverse impact of road congestion on bus service reliability, passengers views of bus travel and operators' costs;
- The bus network in the Borough, in terms of coverage, frequency, journey times and hours of operation, is not closely matched with existing and potential future demand for travel by bus;
- The bus network is not always effective in meeting the existing and future needs of dispersed and hard-to-reach groups and communities;
- Whilst the need for small scale revisions to services to react to changes in demand is appreciated, at a strategic level the bus network is not sufficiently stable for people to make longer term 'life-style' decisions - such as where to live and where to work;
- The bus network does not respond to new sources of potential demand sufficiently early to influence travel patterns;
- Bus services are often expected to meet conflicting travel demands which can lead to a view that services are unsatisfactory;
- Lack of integration between bus and rail services and lack of effective multi-operator and multi-mode through ticketing;
- Lack of awareness of benefits of using public transport or motivation to use bus services where they exist as a real alternative to car journeys amongst some members of the public;

- Lack of knowledge of local bus services amongst some members of the public; and,
- Impact of reducing council budgets on the ability to subsidise large parts of the networks.

## 6 Opportunities

- The redevelopment of the town centre represents a major opportunity to generate increased demand from workers and shoppers for bus services and to shift socially supported services to becoming commercially viable routes;
- New residential developments will generate increased demand for bus services and short term funding support; and
- The use of 'smartcards' and other modern technology can remove barriers to using public transport.

## 7 Vision

7.1 To guide the Bus Strategy and Action Plan, a **vision** for the Strategy has been developed:

*To establish and support an affordable, accessible, safe, convenient, environmentally friendly and integrated network of supported bus services, capable of attracting an increasing commercial market share for buses thereby contributing to the achievement of the objectives in the Local Transport Plan 2011 and the re-development of Bracknell town centre'.*

7.2 The **vision** will be achieved through the following **objectives**:

- Offer accessibility and availability to the widest cross section of the population, particularly for the young and old, to increase bus use;
- Give people more travel choices to access work, services and leisure activities;
- Offer and promote affordable fares to passengers;
- Provide passenger satisfaction with an attractive, reliable and sustainable travel alternative;
- Support vibrant and successful town centres; and
- Encourage integration with other modes of transport.

## **8 Principles**

8.1 The following key principles have been developed which will link the Action Plan developed to implement the Bus Strategy, with the objectives above:

### **Principle 1 – Partnership**

8.2 The Council recognises that it cannot fully meet its obligations without closely working with local residents, businesses and stakeholders including operators of all services.

8.3 Consultation among bus users and interested groups in 2012 identified that the supported bus service network is highly valued by users with the current bus services in Bracknell Forest being well used and relied upon in the community. Many of the consultation respondents stated that the Council's supported bus services are essential to their daily mobility, quality of life and health and wellbeing.

8.4 An understanding on what constitutes a realistic and affordable supported bus network that meets stakeholder aspirations is a fundamental basis for this strategy.

8.5 The Council will also look to enlist support for provision from other public sectors including Health and Education.

### **Principle 2 – Quality Supported Network**

8.6 For the supported bus network to be successful in promoting the wider objectives of the Borough such as redeveloping the town centre, attracting new business investment and providing a stable environment for service provision in the Borough the Council will aim through this strategy to facilitate/commission a network that is:

- **Affordable** – the cost of travel should be comparable to commercial bus services and where possible seek to at least match the whole cost of an equivalent car journey. The supported network will accept all concessions required and will participate in any Council led schemes that may be introduced to widen the scope of the current arrangements
- **Acceptable** – the supported services should deliver a quality of service at least comparable with commercial network in the Borough. National targets for punctuality should be achieved and the vehicles used meet the relevant

emissions and safety standards. The Council will encourage the use of CCTV and real-time information systems to vehicles operating supported services. Passenger satisfaction will form a key element of the monitoring process.

- **Accessible** – the supported network should be operated where possible by easy access vehicles that meet the relevant accessibility standards e.g. bus stops may have raised kerbs and information provision for passengers.
- **Available** – the times of operation should provide for needs of the whole community in accessing work, leisure and services (within and near to Bracknell Forest). A key target will be to increase evening and weekend services where demand warrants such provision.

### **Principle 3 – Response to commercial bus service changes and tendering**

8.7 The Council's criteria for the provision of financial support for bus services will seek to ensure that minimum levels of service for essential transport links can be achieved within the budget available.

8.8 For people without access to a car, the lack of appropriate transport links restricts the possibilities of benefiting from a wide range of facilities, including work, education and training, healthcare, shopping, social activities and leisure. The key features behind the criteria are:

- A minimum level of accessibility should be provided for all the residents of Bracknell Forest. The criteria does not seek to constrain higher service levels, but establishes the provision of the minimum level of bus service for all as a first priority; where this is provided commercially by bus operators the Council will generally encourage use of the bus as preferred method of travel and where supported the Council will seek to ensure that service coverage is appropriate to the demographics and needs of each area in the Borough.
- Accessibility levels will consider levels of transport need at a local level.

8.9 The Council will frequently review the wider bus network and plan its network of supported services according to the general criteria set out above. Services that provide this level of accessibility will generally be procured by open tender among bus operators on the Council's Framework list; however, where short term changes in services need to be addressed the Council may seek to provide a service by 'emergency contracts' or through direct agreement with a specific operator which are

subject to strict controls on value (“de-minimis” contracts). While the Council’s general requirement is to secure the best value for money, it will also consider the potential of social value when supporting passenger transport services i.e. the opportunity for supported bus services to improve accessibility for people in the more deprived areas, or to particular groups (e.g. youth).

#### **Principle 4 – Serving new developments**

- 8.10 In Bracknell Forest a number of developments are expected to occur within the lifetime of this strategy including new housing provision and the redevelopment of the town centre.
- 8.11 Where possible the Council will expect bus operators to respond to new development with new commercial services or changes to existing services. Where this is not possible the Council will review the options available and where appropriate and affordable, procure revised or additional services. The Council will seek to secure, where appropriate, funding from developers towards the costs of providing appropriate bus services to serve the development. However, it will need to be demonstrated that such subsidy will most likely lead to commercial services being declined after the subsidy runs out and not just add burden on our existing subsidised network.

#### **Principle 5 – Supporting Young and Older Populations**

- 8.12 The Council is committed to providing a robust transport network within our financial limitations, which serves all parts of our community. However, there will be particular focus given to support young and older age groups and we will work with the operators, community partners and these groups to ensure access for them is improved.

#### **Principle 6 – Monitoring and performance of the tendered network**

- 8.13 The supported bus network represents a significant investment by the Council in terms of money and resources. It is therefore necessary for the Council to ensure the network performs well and continues to represent good value for money. As such, a thorough and effective use of smartcard technology or other systems will ensure that we can accurately monitor and measure performance on our network rather than just relying on bus company data and spot surveys. A robust monitoring process is needed to ensure standards are maintained and the services deliver what is

expected. The monitoring process should include regular punctuality and passenger satisfaction surveys.

- 8.14 Nationally, central government require the Council to indicate the number of people using buses in its area each year. The Traffic Commissioner who regulates bus operators require that 95% of all buses arrive within a window of 1 minute and 5 minutes late at key locations on each route (“timing points”). Central government also require the Council to assess the general punctuality of the bus network each year. These indicators form part of the Local Transport Plan’s annual report on the transport system in Bracknell Forest.
- 8.15 In addition to these national requirements, the Council have the right to carry out spot checks and surveys on supported bus services to allow monitoring of standards. The operators of Council supported services may also make their own checks; where problems are found the Council requires that these are declared.

## **9 The Action Plan**

- 9.1 The Action Plan will be completed when the Bus Strategy is adopted. The role of the Action Plan is to identify specific contracts to provide Council supported bus services from April 2014.
- 9.2 It is expected that the majority of the bus network in Bracknell Forest will continue to be commercial. The Action Plan contracts will specify the supported bus services, including:
- Route details;
  - Places to be served; and
  - Bus frequency
- 9.3 It is intended that the Action Plan will bring about a simpler and easier to understand bus network and be in line with the approved Bus Strategy.
- 9.4 While the Bus Strategy will determine the overall priorities, vision and principles, it is expected that the Action Plan contracts may change over time. These changes may be required to enable the Council’s supported bus services to respond to future changes, such as the redevelopment of Bracknell Town centre.