

Evidence ET-6:

Regarding a Sustainable Plan and Funding for Bus Services on NW Bicester Ecotown

*This document has been prepared by Elmsbrook Traffic and Parking Group (ETPG), May 2023
for the Appeal regarding*

LAND AT ELMSBROOK, BICESTER: PROPOSED RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT

Planning Inspectorate Ref.No. APP/C3105/W/23/3315849

Cherwell District Council Application No. 21/01630/OUT

Cherwell District Council Appeal No. 23/00062/NON

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Reviewed by E Toutain

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Appellant only *suggests* additional bus stops within the estate, and does not have any sustainable funding and public transport plan in light of existing bus services ending in 2023.

The contribution proposed by the Appellant, per dwelling for their homes, is 48% of the same value paid by A2Dominion for the Exemplar phase – and this percentage is prior to monetary correction (from 2011 to 2020) – so it will in fact be even less.

This does not seem fair or reasonable, since A2Dominion also paid for the infrastructure and roads, and were providing the bus service for significantly less homes than the Appellant's proposed development: the total number of homes using the bus service would increase from 393 to 923, an increase of 135%. This will therefore fail to support any viable bus service; and no other forms of support are proposed.

1.0 BACKGROUND

- 1.1 Policy Bicester 1 requires that "Good accessibility to public transport services should be provided for, including the provision of a bus route through the site with buses stopping at the railway stations and at new bus stops on the site."
- 1.2 In addition, the NW Bicester Supplementary Planning Document requires that:

"4.142 [...] The public transport service needs to be fast reliable, affordable and direct.

"4.143 The masterplan proposes a bus network through the site designed to transport passengers directly and efficiently to their destination and give the bus priority over other road vehicles.

"4.146 [...] The final public transport solution must be attractive to all future residents and provide a viable and efficient alternative to car travel."
- 1.3 The Original NW Bicester Ecotown Masterplan contained a Bus Strategy (NW Bicester Masterplan Appendix 3 – Bus Strategy). This contains the clause: "1.4.5 Frequent The bus service needs to be [...] a minimum of 15 minutes frequency, with a 10 minute frequency in the peak times/ potentially at full development to encourage use."
- 1.4 In the Original P3C/Hyder/A2Dominion Transport Assessment for the Exemplar development, it restates the reason for the above, then notes in Section 5.6 that it would initially use a half-hour stopping service, followed with a trigger to every 15 minutes:

"The developer is committed to providing the 30 minute service and seeking ways to achieve a more frequent service and one that extends to the early mornings, evenings and weekends as the Exemplar site develops."
- 1.5 This was originally targeted to occur after either (a) 200 homes being occupied, or (b) 3 years passing since the start of the service – which would have been May 2019; however, this change in frequency was never made. (The Section 106 Schedule 21 agreement for the bus service states that the Transport Provision Co-ordinator for Elmsbrook [Mode Transport] should conduct surveys and reviews not less than six months apart, yet – as far as residents are aware – a separate detailed survey of bus usage *has never been carried out*, and OCC Highways have not noticed/or no one has enforced this condition. This is unfortunate, because many suggestions made to A2Dominion by ETPG regarding *ways to improve the bus service based on feedback from residents and our own June 2018 survey* have all been acknowledged by A2Dominion but never actioned.)
- 1.6 While the E1 bus service usage increased steadily between 2016 and early 2020, unfortunately, the usage levels *have never returned to pre-COVID-19 levels* since the first lockdown – even now, in 2023, with Phases 1-3 completely occupied and Phase 4 almost complete. Sadly, the E1 bus service through the Exemplar Phase will cease to operate in May 2023, as there is no remaining fund from the Exemplar Phase S106 contribution to cover its loss-making position.
- 1.7 There is a proposal for the 505 bus service from Brackley to Bicester to run through the Elmsbrook. Renamed the 500, it will be an hourly service instead of half-hourly, which will generate additional car trips. This is currently operated with a very large internal combustion engine bus not suitable for low-traffic residential streets in an eco-town. It is unclear if this is a sustainable long-term solution.

2.0 THE CURRENT NEW PROPOSAL

(a) FINANCE

- 2.1 The Appellant's Design and Access Statement mentions the E1 that will cease, does not mention the 505 and mentions 7 other services which stops are a 25mn walk or more from the site.
- 2.2 The Exemplar Phase's S106 contribution for bus services was **GBP 1,000,000, which is equivalent to GBP 2,545 per dwelling (Q3 2011 value)**.
- 2.3 This has proved insufficient to fund a sustainable bus service. The service was not serving Bicester Village Station outside early morning and later afternoon (5 times in total), therefore not being viable for workers seeking to commute to Oxford by train. The operating hours were also not extensive enough for a commuter to London or Birmingham to take the bus in the morning and the evening on the way out to and back from Bicester North rail station. The service could have modified the route to better serve Caversfield a few times per day, and thus also benefit from resident and Gaggle Brook Primary School pupil/parent patronage from there. *There are clearly many options not taken to date, whereby the bus services can be improved.*
- 2.4 The S106 contribution to bus service sought from the Appellant is **only GBP 696,118, which is equivalent to GBP 1,313 per proposed new dwelling (2020 value) which is 48% lower than the Exemplar Phase - before monetary correction (2011 vs 2020)**, and before correction for the number of homes using the service (since there are more homes on the proposed Western and Eastern Parcels than in the whole of Elmsbrook).
- 2.5 This does not seem fair or reasonable, since A2Dominion also paid for the infrastructure and roads, and were providing the bus service for significantly less homes than the Appellant's proposed development: the total number of homes using the bus service would increase from 393 to 923, an increase of 135%.

Conclusions:

- 2.6 [i] This significantly lower amount of contribution will therefore fail to support any viable bus service.
- 2.7 [ii] There will consequently be an increased share of individual car trips that is not considered in the traffic modelling.

(b) OTHER SUPPORTING CONSIDERATIONS

- 2.8 There are none; the Appellant proposed financial support only via S106. There are no other proposals regarding support for or encouragement of public transport usage.

Conclusions:

- 2.9 [iii] An increased S106 contribution to the bus service is required.
- 2.10 [iv] There is an Obligation on the Appellant to arrange a sustainable bus service with an obligation of result, not just means.

References:

CDC Local Plan 2011-31, Policy Bicester 1

NW Bicester SPD

Original NW Bicester Masterplan Appendix 3 – Bus Strategy

Original P3C/Hyder/A2Dominion Transport Assessment for the Exemplar Phase [now Elmsbrook]

Exemplar S106 Agreement, Schedule 21 – Bus Service

Appellant's Design and Access Statement [DAS]