

Revised Brentwood Local Development Plan

Brentwood Bus and Rail Users' Association

The Brentwood Bus and Rail Users' Association represents the interests of users of public transport in the Brentwood district.

Its aims and objectives are fourfold:

- To make representations on behalf of Brentwood's bus and rail users on the local services that are currently available and to campaign for new services to be developed.
- To campaign for more investment in local bus and rail services.
- To have regular dialogue with the local transport providers and Essex County Council.
- To work with other organisations and individuals to improve and develop local bus and rail services in our area.

In pursuit of these aims and objectives it wishes to comment on the implications of the Local Development Plan as amended by the Extraordinary Council Meeting on 8th November 2018.

The Plan will clearly have far-reaching implications for Brentwood's public transport network. First, it changes significantly the size and distribution of the borough's population and the consequent additional requirements for ways to access work, health and education, shopping and leisure. Secondly it will add to the already problematic traffic congestion issues at known pinch-points in the borough, which are already making it very difficult for bus operators to maintain a regular and efficient service.

It is therefore a matter of extreme concern for the Association that there are only four references to public transport in the document citing preferred allocations.

Most are in the aspirational vein of the Strategic Objectives

- Improve public transport infrastructure and ensure development sites are well connected to bus and/or rail connections.
- Secure the delivery of new infrastructure to support a lower carbon future including electric vehicles charging points and other measures.
- Improve cycling and walking facilities across the Borough and establish a grid or network of green transport corridors.

This contrasts with health and school capacity, which are dealt with in some detail.

There are no references to traffic congestion, to which the Plan will clearly contribute. There are three references to bus services, one in the strategic objective and two in relation to one preferred site for an employment site which "has the potential" for development of bus services i.e. there are none at the moment.

It is difficult to see how a plan can be called strategic without proper consideration of public transport (i.e. buses as rail transport relates to travel in and out of the borough) within the borough. There is no mention of how congestion, which already inhibits travel within the borough and is predicted to increase even without the additional housing and business development.

There is limited scope for road improvements in the borough and additional developments are outside the control of the planning authority. Increased congestion will impact on the ability of bus operators to provide a regular and efficient service, reducing the extent to which they will be taken up by users and increasing the likelihood that they will prove uneconomic and be withdrawn.

The impact of the proposed allocations

Central Area

The Ford Offices are excluded from this section and allocated to the Outer Area in the table below as the site, although served by buses, is too far for most people to consider the station walkable while Brentwood High St most certainly is not.

It is assumed that most people would find it possible to walk to Brentwood station and to the High Street. A regular bus service is available from Warley (Council Depot) and from close to the Shenfield sites (Priests Lane is walkable to Brentwood High Street but probably closer to Shenfield Station).

Outer Area

The sites in the outer area (beyond reasonable walking distance) present some difficulty. Some (Sow & Grow and the three Warley sites (Ford Offices, Mascalls Lane and Pastoral Way) are close to bus routes to Brentwood Station and High Street. For convenience, residents may choose to drive rather than wait for the regular bus services (to which they have to walk). Brook Street has a regular bus service to the High Street but not to the station and people are likely to drive there rather than change buses in the High Street.

Ingatstone

The Ingatstone developments are just about walkable from the station and the limited number of shops in Ingatstone High Street. The train service from Ingatstone is less frequent than from Shenfield and people are therefore likely to drive there rather than use their local station. There is a half-hourly bus service into Brentwood but many people are likely to opt to drive.

Northern Villages

Existing bus services are not sufficiently attractive to residents to persuade them to use them rather than to drive. The addition of 169 additional units is unlikely to change the economics until bus companies can justify later evening services for returning commuters and socialising residents. It is likely that buses will remain very much the less favoured option. The consequence is higher volumes of traffic on feeder roads into Brentwood such as the already-congested A128 and Doddinghurst Road.

Dunton Garden Village

It is likely that residents of the proposed Dunton Garden Village will look towards Basildon and Lakeside for their shopping and leisure activities, meaning that the injection of consumer spend in the core settlement of Brentwood is likely to be minimal. The demand for public transport will reflect this, with the benefit of increased capacity and potential new routes spread laterally along the A127/A13 corridor than northwards into the rest of the borough.

Congestion

Any additional or enhanced bus services into Brentwood will have to cope with increased congestion in the mornings on the A128 through Herongate and Ingrave – in fact it is difficult to see how much more traffic can be accommodated on this section of road even without additional developments.

Brentwood's centre is already heavily congested at peak times, especially since the County Council's revised school transport policy has left many parents from the Northern Villages in particular reliant on private transport. The congestion is acute on the A128 from Pilgrims Hatch into Brentwood and from Herongate/Ingrave, with consequent congestion on Shenfield and London Roads. There are other bottlenecks in Kings Road and around the cluster of schools in Sawyers Hall Lane.

All of this will only get worse as the number of vehicles follows the predicted increase and the addition of more than 2,000 homes around Brentwood but outside walking distance (and excluding Ingatestone and Dunton) will only make things worse.

There will be consequences for parking (already barely adequate at peak times), pollution with the levels of gases and particulates increasing to the detriment of people's health, and for the viability of commercial bus services as their reliability and regularity is challenged.

All this makes the Plan's strategic objective ("to improve public transport infrastructure and ensure development sites are well connected to bus and/or rail connections") a massive challenge. Commercial partners will not join until the revenue benefits are clear and the costs defined. It is unlikely this will precede the developments. In some cases (Northern Villages) the proposed developments are too small to make more than a marginal difference to the economics of public transport but they will suffer most if the road system is catastrophically congested.

The Other Strategic Objective

The Plan offers the following objective: "to improve cycling and walking facilities across the Borough and establish a grid or network of green transport corridors".

Cycling and walking are technically possible in the central and outer areas now. In practice Brentwood is a hostile environment for both cyclists and pedestrians. For the former, pavements are in a degraded state across the borough and the County Council's belated allocation of £700,000 across the County in reality allows little scope for massive improvement. Opportunities to negotiate crossings in the High Street and immediate area are few and far between, with the priority always seeming to be swung towards motorised traffic and the mantra of keeping traffic flows constant.

For cyclists, Brentwood is a potential death trap, with the residual potholes that fail to meet ECC criteria for repair a constant and potentially lethal hazard. The general absence of cycle lanes militates against safe use of the main roads; junctions are structured for vehicles and not bicycles. For the outer areas, the high speed of traffic on the main routes, the narrowness of lanes and the absence of cycle lanes militates against their use.

Conclusion

The Brentwood Bus and Rail Users recognises the imperative on Brentwood Borough Council to provide additional housing in the area. It is, however, deeply concerned that the number and distribution of proposed new dwellings will, if car ownership remains unchanged, place an impossible burden on the existing road system and in particular on the existing network of bus services. Delays to buses caused by congestion will not encourage greater use – and we fear the reverse, with proportionately more people using private transport.

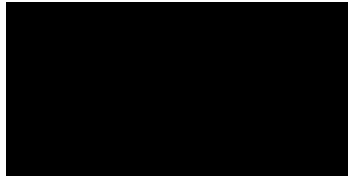
With no reference in the Plan to innovative solutions such as park-and-ride, and only lip service paid to the encouragement of cycling and walking as an alternative, the Association fails to see how the requirement that delivery of the Plan is environmentally sustainable can be met.

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Appendix 1 – the impact of the allocations on private and public transport

The following table makes a number of assumptions about (a) the propensity of households to have access to private transport; (b) the probabilities of residents favouring personal over public transport; and (c) the transport requirements of households. The firm points are the number of allocations and the current availability of proximate bus and rail services. It does not take account of the likelihood that units will have more than one car but this probability is high.

Site location	Central	Outer	Shenfield	Ingatestone	N Villages	Dunton GV
Total allocation	857	1545	825	218	169	2500
Walk to central shops	857**	0	825 (to Shenfield)**	218 (to Ingatestone)**	0	0
Walk to rail stations	857**	930*	825**	218**	0	2500 (subject to provision of station)
Bus to central shops	0	565*	825 (notionally to Brentwood)**	218 (to Brentwood)**	169**	2500 (likely to Basildon)
Bus to stations	0	440*	0	218**	169***	2500 (see above)
Car to central shops	0	577*	825 (in probability)*	218*	150*	unpredictable
Car to stations	0	577*	0	100*	150***	unpredictable
Extra no of cars	800	1000	1000	220	200	3000

* Prediction based on likely behaviour

**Notional maximum

*** Most people commute from Shenfield – no direct bus service