



BEDFORD
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Enhanced Partnership Plan for Buses

March 2021

The Bedford Borough Council Enhanced Partnership Plan for buses is made in accordance with Section 138G(1) of the Transport Act 2000 by: Bedford Borough Council

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Introduction

Drawing on the BSIP, this document fulfils the statutory requirements set out by the Bus Services Act 2017 of an Enhanced Partnership (EP) Plan for Bedford Borough. Initially, this will facilitate the introduction of an EP Scheme aimed at supporting and developing bus services across Bedford, with the aim of starting to achieve the objectives set out in the BSIP.

In accordance with statutory requirements for an EP Plan, this document includes:

- Details of the area covered;
- Factors affecting the local bus industry;
- A summary of passengers' experience of using bus services and the priorities of users and non-users for improvements;
- Trends in bus journey speeds and the impact of congestion on bus services;
- Objectives that are sought for bus service provision;
- Interventions needed to achieve the desired outcome.

Overview

Bedford Borough is a unitary authority, within the county of Bedfordshire. The borough of Bedford lies mid-way between the M1 and A1 about 30 miles north of the M25. Circa 168,000 people live in Bedford Borough; two thirds of whom live in the main urban area.

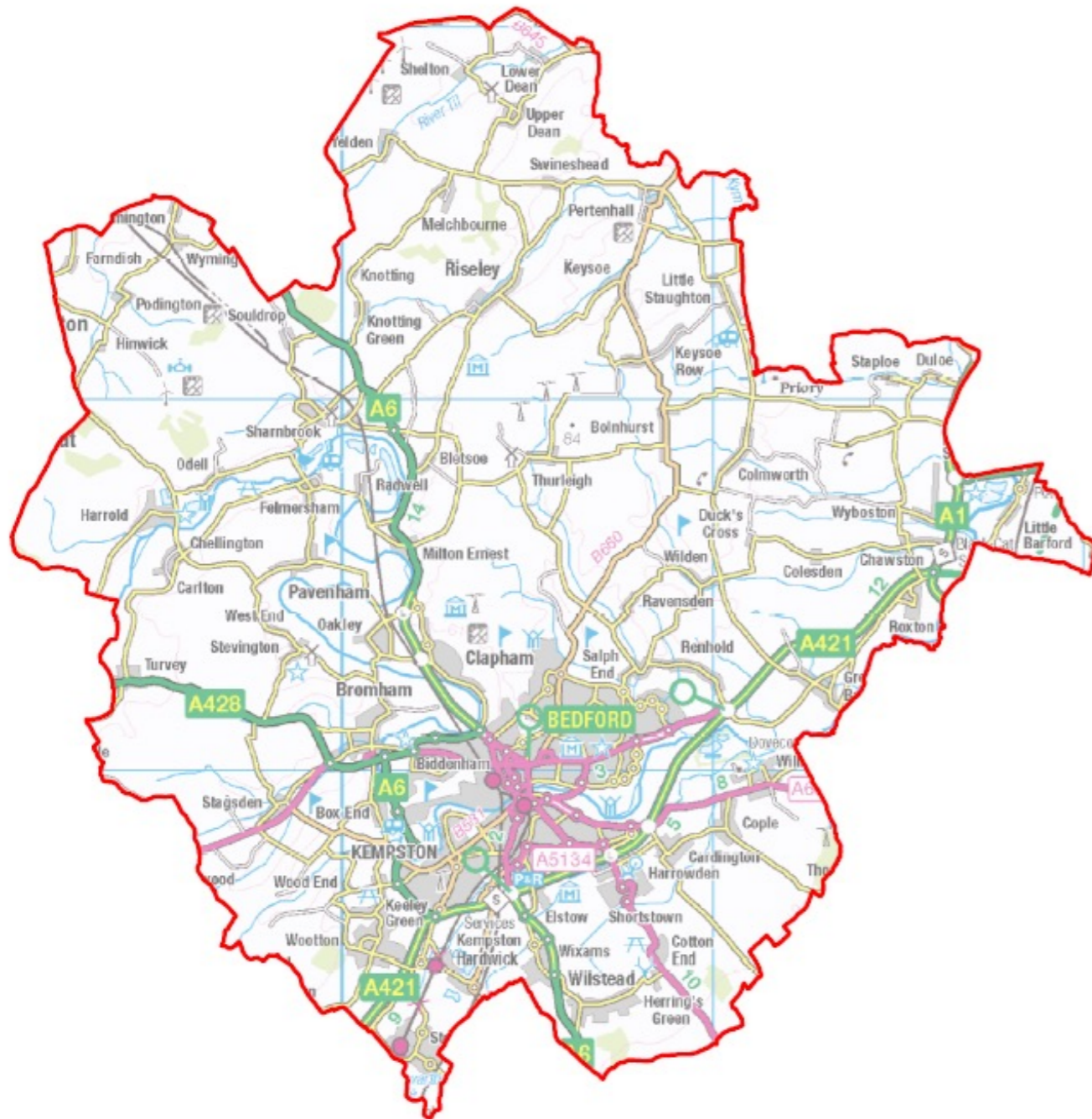
Bedford and Kempston have grown in recent years by circa 1.25% - 1.50% per annum and the villages of Biddenham and Elstow now largely sit within an urban context, though each retains its own distinctive character and sense of identity. Beyond the town some of the larger villages, such as Clapham, Bromham, Wootton, Wixams and Shortstown are very close to the urban edge. Others including Great Barford, Wilstead and Sharnbrook lie further from it. The Borough also offers a patchwork of smaller villages and hamlets (or 'Ends' as they are known locally).

These areas are served by public transport and services, however, more could be done. As stated within BBC's Local Plan 2030, one of Bedford Borough Council's aims is to:

“Improve the borough’s transport infrastructure in order to support growth in the local economy and to make the borough more attractive as a place to live and do business. Reduce congestion in the borough, particularly into and around the town centre and by making journeys by public transport, walking and cycling more attractive to encourage an increase in more sustainable and healthy modes of transport.”

Bedford Borough is part of the 'England's Economic Heartland' Sub-national Transport Body. This encompasses the entirety of the Oxford-Cambridge Arc. There is currently a study of regional, long distance bus services that we are part of.

This Enhanced Partnership covers the whole of Bedford Borough Council area as shown in the map below.



Bedford's Challenges

Bedford Borough Council is aware that there are traffic congestion hotspots within the Borough. Work has been and continues to be undertaken to reduce this congestion, through our Transporting Bedford scheme. This is a £24million project, funded through Bedford Borough Council, the DfT National Productivity Fund and £15.5m from the South East Midlands Local Enterprise Partnership, through the Local Growth Fund and represents the largest ever investment in Bedford's roads.

The draft Local Plan 2040 sets out four possible strategies for allocating growth sites in the Borough; but all of them are based on a combination of three areas:

- In and around Bedford town;
- At and around railway stations:
 - Kempston Hardwick / Stewartby;
 - Wixams;
 - Bedford St Johns;
 - Bedford Midland;
 - St Neots / Tempsford (where EWR crosses the East Coast Main Line).
- Along the A421 corridor.

Significant new developments are under consideration at:

- Wyboston (Denybrook);
- Little Barford;
- In the Wixams / Stewartby / Kempston Hardwick area.

Bedford as a borough continues to deliver significant infrastructure projects to maintain and improve its transport networks. Recent and proposed work includes:

- Transporting Bedford – a £23m congestion relief package including works on:
 - Amphill Road;
 - Britannia Road;
 - Clapham Road and Manton Lane;
 - High Street;
 - The introduction of a new Urban Traffic Management and Control system.
- Town Deal – a £22.5m package of improvements including works on:
 - Midland Road;
 - St Paul's Square;
 - Bedford Midland Station;
 - Greyfriars;
 - The John Bunyan Statue junction;
 - The introduction of a comprehensive network of cycle routes.

- An accelerated package of pre-Town Deal and Active Travel works including:
 - Silver Street Square;
 - Cycle route signing and shelters;
 - Goldington Road segregated cycle route.
- Future works include:
 - Prebend Street Relief Road to relieve congestion at the Midland Road mini roundabout;
 - Signalisation of the A421 / A6 junction to introduce a sustainable travel corridor to / from the Wixams;
 - Construction of the Wixams railway station;
 - Remodelling of Bedford Midland railway station;
 - Relocation of Bedford St John's railway station.

The Build Back Better High Streets MHCLG strategic document is ambitious for Town Centres. High Streets are evolving. Bedford's objective is to create a distinctive, attractive and multi-functional town centre for the future with a particularly strong focus on leisure and visitor economy activities. In turn, less congestion on the High Street through the Transporting Bedford work will develop the High Street further as a place to enjoy, a place where niche retailers predominate and people choose to socialise. Projects to regenerate key urban sites are also bringing a new renaissance to the town.

- Improvements to the Borough's transport infrastructure will support growth in the local economy and to make the Borough more attractive as a place to live and do business. Reducing congestion in the Borough, particularly into and around the town centre and by making journeys by public transport, walking and cycling more attractive will encourage an increase in more sustainable and healthy modes of transport.
- There is significant capacity for new residential development in the urban area. Not only will this deliver the regeneration of key underused urban sites it will also provide for the renaissance of sustainable urban living.
- Rural service centre allocations and development growth with infrastructure will improve connectivity.
- Our aspiration is to make Bedford Town Centre a destination of choice celebrating its thriving independent sector with events, markets, retail as well as residential and office space. With a diversification of the town centre it needs to be not only interesting but accessible to all, all year round at times which suits its entire community. Addressing the changes in the context of consumer behaviours and habits requires ambitious, collaborative measures which need to be integrated including public transport running into evenings and weekends.

Bedford Borough's current network will need support to recover from the Covid-19 pandemic, or failing this whole sale changes will need to be made to ensure that services are commercially viable.

A survey was undertaken by Bedford Borough Council in May and June 2021. The respondents were asked how satisfied they were with different aspects of current services:

Satisfaction	Very Satisfied	Fairly Satisfied	Neither	Fairly Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied	Don't Know
The bus routes available	129 (18%)	307 (43%)	71 (10%)	118 (17%)	82 (12%)	6 (1%)
The cost of bus travel	141 (20%)	136 (20%)	123 (18%)	117 (17%)	129 (19%)	47 (1%)
The frequency of buses	91 (13%)	260 (37%)	67 (10%)	155 (22%)	127 (18%)	4 (1%)
The times the buses run	91 (13%)	237 (34%)	97 (14%)	150 (21%)	120 (17%)	6 (1%)
The bus services overall	88 (13%)	279 (40%)	114 (16%)	133 (19%)	76 (11%)	7 (1%)

Modal shift from car to sustainable forms of travel is important. The Sustainable Transport team are included in the Enhanced Partnership Scheme as the experts of modal shift. By educating the public about sustainable forms of transport including the bus and prioritising sustainable transport methods the council hopes to achieve modal shift.

Bedford Borough Council has undertaken large scale improvements on the road network in recent years and therefore congestion data is skewed because of these works. A review of congestion and bus journey speeds will be undertaken during 2022/2023.

Purpose

The overall aims of the EP plan were agreed during the Bus Service Improvement Plan workshops. These were to improve:

- Standards and Infrastructure;
- Fares, Ticketing and Network;
- Town Centre, Congestion, Parking and Planning.

We will deliver our goals by having three different workstreams that will deliver the objectives of:

- Promote the achieved reduction in CO2 per passenger mile;
- Deliver rising customer satisfaction with infrastructure year on year;
- Correct timetable available and accessible for every stop to a consistent standard;
- Increase the number of town centre bus passenger boardings;
- Reduce bus journey time (variation and absolute);
- Effective consultation between transport groups during planning process;
- Improve value of bus vs car;
- Promote the improved value of bus vs car;
- Successful delivery of affordability improvement programme.

Even though there are Public Transport policies in place, there are no policies in relation to local bus services that will be pursued in the EP plan. However, supplementary policies will be pursued in support of EP objectives are planning consultation, parking policy.

Governance Arrangements

This EP Plan will be live until April 2024 and will be reviewed annually in line with the BSIP. Any proposed variations to the Plan will follow the formal variation procedures set out in s.138L of the Transport Act 2000.

The development of this Plan and associated Scheme has been overseen by the Bedford Enhanced Partnership Board that consists of senior leaders from the following organisations:

- Bedford Borough Council;
- Grant Palmer Ltd;
- Stagecoach East;
- Uno Bus;
- Bedford Area Bus Users' Society (BABUS);
- Central Bedfordshire Council;
- Luton Borough Council;
- Bedford BID;
- SEMLEP;
- Bedford: An Inclusive Town.

The Board will operate in accordance with agreed terms of reference.

The EP Plan and Scheme will apply to all Qualifying Bus Services. These are defined as registered local bus services with one or more stopping place within the geographical area of the Enhanced Partnership, with the exception of:

- Any schools or works registered local bus service not eligible for Bus Service Operators Grant;
- Any cross-boundary registered local bus service with less than 10% of its registered mileage within the Enhanced Partnership area;
- Any services operated under section 22 of the 1985 Act;
- Any registered local bus service which is an excursion or tour;
- Any other registered local bus service that the Operators and Council decide should be excluded from all or specific requirements of the Enhanced Partnership Scheme.

For the avoidance of doubt, a list of Qualifying Bus Services will be published at the start of each Council financial year.

Reviewing the EP Plan

Once the EP Plan is made, it will be reviewed by the Enhanced Partnership Board annually, following the review of the BSIP. Bedford Borough Council will initiate each review and it will take no longer than 3 months to complete.

The review will include consideration of:

- The arrangements for consulting passenger representatives on the effectiveness of the EP;
- The objectives set for improving the quality and effectiveness of bus services;
- Set out how such consultation will be carried out;
- Monitoring reports for the BSIP will be produced every 6 months to demonstrate progress towards the objectives and targets set.

Bus user representation are included in BABUS and Bedford: An Inclusive Town to ensure the Board are getting feedback from the travelling public.

Neighbouring Authorities

Bedford Borough Council will consult with neighbouring authorities if an EP scheme is likely to impact them. Both Luton Borough and Central Bedfordshire Councils are represented on the Board and will help direct the plan and scheme.

Evaluation

Bedford Borough Council will use an objectives tracker which will be reviewed at each board meeting to ensure that the EP plan / Scheme and BSIP are at the stage where they should be.

Bedford Borough Council also, subject to BSIP funding, will conduct evaluation of the EP scheme, which will include consultation with neighbouring LAs, bus users, operators, BABUS, Bedford: An Inclusive Town and Bedford BID. Bus user representation are included in BABUS and Bedford: An Inclusive Town to ensure the Board are getting feedback from the travelling public.

Small and Medium Sized Operators

Given the variety of bus operators involved (in terms of market share, fleet size, company turnover and structure), it is important to ensure that the effects of the Enhanced Partnership do not unduly negatively impact smaller operators' ability to engage or to comply with requirements.

As such, the needs of small and medium-sized operators (SMOs) have been considered in the development of the Enhanced Partnership, with opportunities for all bus operators to participate throughout, either through individual discussions or through attendance at the Partnership meetings. The Plan seeks to support improvements in all aspects of bus provision, regardless of the size of operators providing services. Within the Enhanced Partnership Schemes, smaller operators may be given extended periods to comply with certain standards.

Competition

Bedford Borough Council has undertaken an assessment of the impacts of the EP Plan and Scheme [made on [date]] on competition and believes it will not or is unlikely to have a significantly adverse effect on competition, for the purposes of Part 1 of Schedule 10 of the Transport Act 2000.

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Varying the EP Plan

If one of the Board members considers that there is a need for a variation to the EP Plan, they should set this out and notify the Board Administrator. The EP Board will be convened in order for the proposed variation to be considered. If this is agreed, the proposed variation will be put to the operator objection and statutory consultation process. The Council will then make the variation to the Plan, subject to the approval of the Council.

Revocation of the EP Plan

If, for some reason, it becomes necessary for the EP Plan to be revoked, the EP Board will be reconvened and follow the same process as outlined in the section 'Variations to the Plan' (noting that the agreement will be for revocation and not variation).

If at any point in the future the EP Plan area is included in a Bus Franchising Area, the relevant requirements set out in this EP Plan document will cease to apply from the commencement date of the Franchising Scheme.

Finding out more

If you would like further information about us and our services, please telephone, email or write to us at our address below.

Për Informacion

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Za Informacje

Per Informazione

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