

PS19a North West of Stonehouse: Public Transport Strategy Commentary

Stagecoach confirms that in addition to the material submitted by the promoters as part of the evidence base to the Local Plan Review, we have had separate discussions with the promoter and their client team, to help identify and shape proposals for the development, such that they maximise the opportunity for the use of sustainable transport of all kinds, not only existing or potential future bus services.

Stagecoach is concerned that the share taken for sustainable modes is maximised, not least to ensure that added pressure on transport networks from development-related car-borne traffic does not seriously aggravate current and foreseeable congestion on the highway network across a broad area, further eroding our ability to provide reliable attractive journey options within an acceptable journey time. As we make plain elsewhere in our previous and current representations the nature of the District, which exhibits low levels of self-containment and where settlements are relatively modest in size and separated by substantial distances, the focus on maximising the use of sustainable modes, and public transport in particular, needs to be at least as great as in a more urban context.

The initial comments made in the Sustainable Transport Strategy site briefing template by AECOM for proposed allocation PS19a North West Stonehouse concern the existing pattern of bus services. Stagecoach West would re-iterate that these are subject to a major commitment with Robert Hitchins Ltd. to divert and augment bus services as part of the now-consented West of Stonehouse development (known today as “Great Oldbury”), which lies to the immediate south, and to which the proposed allocation in essence forms a seamless extension. As part of these commitments we anticipate, in the quite foreseeable future, diverting service 64 through Great Oldbury and thence to Quedgeley via the A38 and Whitminster. This is picked up by AECOM subsequently in their Bus Strategy Diagram for the site.

There is a strong argument that the agreed strategy for Great Oldbury should be properly read as representing the baseline provision for the site, as this might well have been implemented by the time that the Local Plan Review reaches Examination in Public. Stagecoach understands that the developer is on the point of letting the contract to build the missing link in the Spine Road. Thus, the nearest bus stops serving the site will be within the Great Oldbury site. Stops are already built opposite tranche R21 and are planned at the Local Centre, at the point the spine road is completed. It is important that the AECOM work is not mis-interpreted to substantially under-represent the baseline for accessibility by bus from the proposed allocation.

The AECOM work recognises the clear synergies between the proposals and the consented strategic development, with regards to services and other amenities. We strongly agree with this analysis. The consolidated hinterland of demand for these services would certainly apply to the bus service provision.

1. Development scope

The allocation is for 500 dwellings and 5 Ha of employment, that represent an extension of the consented Great Oldbury development. As detailed design of the adjacent parcels (H15-H20 inclusive as referred to on the Indicative Master Plan) and the northern loop of the spine road have

yet to be finalised, there is very good reason to believe that the promoter will be in a position to optimise the disposition of land uses, infrastructure and urban design to maximise the achievable synergies across the boundary and treat the extension seamlessly in urban design terms. We would strongly recommend that these opportunities are taken.

The consented Great Oldbury development includes up to 1350 homes, a local centre and primary school. The latter is now under construction. It is important to note that the development is delivering a policy-compliant affordable housing quantum. The proposed allocation will be able to take direct advantage of these facilities, as well as existing and proposed new employment. We strongly concur that the immediate proximity of the Stroudwater Business Park as well as the further employment to be provided on the Great Oldbury site, and significant further existing and proposed employment along the A419 well within 4km (and thus cycling distance) strongly support the sustainability of this location.

The promoters consider the site has scope to appropriately accommodate a significantly larger quantum of about **600 dwellings**; a figure that accords with the capacity assumed by the Council in the previous “Emerging Strategy” consultation, and the Sustainable Transport Strategy document prepared by AECOM. Given the inherent sustainability credentials of the site, which is particularly well located with respect to the largest employment and service centres within the District, within reach of a station with mainline rail service without recourse to a car, and is already served by bus services on its southern margin, we would urge that the practical capacity of the site is made fullest use of. These credentials are well signposted by the site-specific template in the AECOM Sustainable Transport Strategy.

As discussed above, trip internalisation should be assessed in the round with the existing consent of Great Oldbury, to which this represents a logical extension. A 2-form entry Primary School is under construction to the south west. Extension of Great Oldbury on to the proposed allocation would serve to underpin the exclusive hinterland of the proposed local centre substantially, further reinforcing a range of retail and other services that would obviate the need to leave the site’s immediate vicinity to meet day-to-day needs – a point clearly raised by AECOM in their site briefing template within the Sustainable Transport Strategy.

There has been significant initial exploratory work done to understand the opportunities and the constraints on the site and accordingly, the indicative master plan has yet to evolve to something that is reasonably definitive.

2. Stonehouse (Bristol Road) Railway Station

This station is a one of several long-held aspirations to open new stops on the Bristol to Birmingham Main Line within Gloucestershire. The County Council has recently commissioned a Rail investment Strategy Study that examines this as well as a substantial number of other possible rail-based interventions in the County. While stations at Stonehouse and Hunts Grove have featured as initiatives protected within planning policy for some years, there is no sponsorship of either apparent from the rail industry or Network Rail at this time, of which we are aware.

In some ways this is incongruous given the size of Stonehouse and Stroud as settlements, and the fact such a station, if suitably sited South of Stonehouse near the A419, could effectively perform a “Parkway” function for a substantially bigger catchment south of Gloucester.

However, we would urge that the focus remains on what is demonstrably deliverable by the Plan, with active participants in the plan-making process. For this reason, we consider that maximising the potential for inter-urban bus and coach links, supported by targeted investment in inter-modal hubs, is much the most appropriate manner for the plan to progress, alongside exploratory work to substantiate the technical deliverability and business case for a station.

3. Transport Strategy

The key to maximise the bus mode share from the site would be to build on the committed service provision at Great Oldbury, to enhance service frequency to at least every 20 minutes between the site and Stonehouse/Stroud and equally towards Quedgeley/Gloucester. Should further development come forward for housing and employment use west of the M5 near Whitminster on any strategic scale, there is a further potential - subject to urban design maximising the efficiency of a seamless bus advantage corridor - to considering if a further frequency enhancement to every 15 minutes might be achievable in the longer term.,

The attractiveness of a new express service towards Bristol via the A38, depends on its speed. Many motorists seeking destinations to the south from Cam and Dursley actually use junction 13, which while a significantly greater distance, is in fact generally somewhat quicker. It is possible that a service design to link Dursley and Cam with Bristol might serve j 13.

We have been in discussions with development promoters on both sides of j 13 with respect to facilitating access to longer-distance coach services, both by car and other modes. Regular coach services already use the M5 and if a facility is readily accessible to and from the motorway without significant journey time penalty, the size of the hinterland might well justify

A separate service to Dursley would also be likely to run at a similar frequency and scheduling overlay of common sections of service should aim as far as possible to create a core frequency of every 15 minutes between Cam, Draycott, Wilsloe and Stonehouse as the plan period runs on.

4. Urban Design

Stagecoach notes that the AECOM Sustainable Transport Strategy site template for the proposed allocation PS19a includes a principle that *“The emerging road layout would provide for public transport permeability by ensuring the ‘loop road’ through the site is designed to accommodate a bus route should this be required.”* Parts of the site are likely to extend further than 400m to the north of the spine road intended to act as a bus possible route within parcels H15-20 inclusive of Great Oldbury. However, these would represent a small minority of plots. The extra circuitry involved in further extending the Great Oldbury loop directly onto the site between two quite closely spaced access points is in our view unlikely to be warranted, given that the vast majority of residents are likely to be well within a 400m walk of stops that could be provided within Great Oldbury. Creating a short bus route diversion to the north of the committed link through Great Oldbury would actually be achievable without abandoning any of the stops that are to be provided on the main spine road.

We nevertheless support the routing flexibility that this loop would offer. We would urge that all stakeholders carefully consider the design principles set out in our formal guidance document “*Bus Services and New Residential Developments*”.

The effective integration of the extension into the existing consented development to the south is highly relevant to maximising the use of sustainable modes and minimising the need to travel to take advantage of key local services and facilities, especially those provided within the consented development. The recent application (S.19/2165/DISCON) to discharge a condition on the outline consent for an Area Master Plan for parcels H16-20 inclusive, adjoining the proposed allocation, is thus highly pertinent. This demonstrates that the applicant and promoter has already taken intentional steps to optimise connectivity and circulation across the boundary between the consented and proposed development. Within the supporting Master Plan Statement, the following paragraphs are especially pertinent:

*“4.7 The Main Street east-west identified on the approved plan overleaf forms part of the Main Street ‘loop’ serving the surrounding residential parcels and Local Centre, **providing the key bus route** and primary vehicular access to the development. This is also the main access from Oldends Farm in the East.*

*4.8 As part of the evolution of LC1, LC2 and PS1 what was formerly the secondary link (East of LC1, PS1 and H17) has been improved (by the Area Master Plan proposals) to a ‘Primary Street’ providing cycle and bus routes to the Primary School and Local Centre. **The upgrade has therefore continued north through Parcels H16-18 and up to the northern boundary assisting with the prospective development of the adjoining PS19a by continuing the ‘Main Street’ road hierarchy.**” (our emphasis)*

Stagecoach is happy to endorse the approach taken, which provides a relatively effective and efficient link into the site. It also allows any route extension or diversion through H15-20, or further into the proposed site itself, to effectively serve the Great Oldbury Local Centre and the key stops that will allow a walk through to the adjacent employment parcels which will be important to passengers originating off-site, looking to access the employment area. As an aside, it is worth pointing out the mixed use nature of this and the wider area, generating simultaneous in-bound and out-bound trips, substantially assists with the overall economic viability of any bus services in this area.

Stagecoach is expecting to work closely with the promoters’ client team to refine and optimise the urban design approach taken and secure the wider benefits this site is likely to offer to provide effective bus advantage in the wider A38-A419 corridor between Quedgeley, Whitminster and Stonehouse, and then beyond towards Stroud and/or Cam/Dursley.

5. Delivery and Deliverability

It is evident that this development could be brought forward propitiously, taking advantage of existing infrastructure. We see this potential is recognised by the Council in its housing trajectory at section 7.0 of the plan at table 6. This indicates that 100 homes would be occupied by 2025, suggesting commencements in 2024 over at least two outlets, and implying a swift start following consent shortly after the Plan is adopted. Thereafter an annualised rate of delivery of up to about 75

homes/annum is anticipated. Thus the development would be substantially complete by about 2036. Based on what is being achieved at West of Stonehouse and looking at recent performance on local outlets, this appears to be eminently achievable and, indeed, sedate to the point of being inappropriate. Maintaining a strong rate of development is important to allowing demand to evolve at a sufficiently fast rate to help sustain the commercial viability of the new and enhanced bus services that we expect to be able to provide to this locality.

However, evolution of travel demand in the immediate area needs to be considered in conjunction not only with the existing commitments at West of Stonehouse (Great Oldbury) but potential development west of the M5, which has been advanced as a suitable location for development by the same promoter. Land South of Grove Lane could include as many as 800 units, while a larger area to the north, lying east of the A38, could accommodate a substantial further quantum, of at least another 1300 units. Land south of Grove Lane is also being promoted to provide about 15 Ha of employment land, which might in any event be required of the proposed new stadium for Forest Green Rovers FC is permitted in due course on land currently being considered for employment east of the M5. There is an exceptionally strong potential relationship between development either side of the M5 which would “load up” a very high quality public transport corridor, that could, with thoughtful design, approximate to a “bus rapid transit” offer between Stonehouse and Gloucester. We urge the Councils to consider this very carefully, not least as a manifestly more sustainable option to accommodate the quantum currently being directed to the exceptionally remote location at Sharpness/Newtown.

Proportionate contributions to pump-prime further bus service improvements will nevertheless be required. There would be a number of possible strategies and supporting mechanisms to effect this and we need to discuss the optimum solution to effect the best possible outcomes in line with the mobilisation of development at a suitably early stage, while also avoiding excessive costs being incurred prematurely. However, we can point to the success of the direct procurement approach by the developer at Great Oldbury.

In particular, assessment of the appropriate scalable and phased delivery of new and improved services, which are likely to involve improved links towards the north first, needs to be agreed. Improved frequency to Stonehouse and Stroud, and to Gloucester are clearly required in the first phase.