

Report to the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport
Report submitted by: Executive Director of Environment
Date: 7 January 2011

Part I - Item No. 3

Electoral Division affected:
All Preston Divisions

Bluebell Way Park and Ride and the Preston Orbit Bus Service

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Executive Summary

The report considers the implications of giving Preston Bus Limited twelve weeks notice for the termination of contract 06/004. This contract presently allows the extension of the Preston Orbit bus service via Bluebell Way and the Preston East Business Park at a cost of £299,599 per annum.

The report also considers options for the future of the Bluebell Way Park and Ride Site.

This is a Key Decision and is included on the Forward Plan.

Recommendation

That,

- i Preston Bus Limited is given twelve weeks notice for the termination of contract 06/004, and
- ii authority is given for the Bluebell Way Park and Ride to close from early January 2011.

Background and Advice

Preston Orbit Service

The Preston Orbit service was introduced in October 2006 following a successful joint bid for funding to the then Government's 'Kickstart' competition by the County Council and Preston Bus Limited. 'Kickstart' was a funding stream aimed at 'pump-priming' new or enhanced bus services which had a sustainable business case in the longer term.

The main philosophy behind the Preston Orbit scheme was the provision of direct public transport services between areas where people live, particularly areas of high

deprivation, with employment, healthcare, educational and recreational opportunities. Preston's bus network, although extensive, is historically radial, centred on the bus station, and at the time had not adapted to the changing spatial location of many of the important opportunities listed above, leading to difficult or time consuming journeys, often requiring more than one bus, particularly for those with no access to a car.

The contract with Preston Bus for the Bluebell Way extension to the Orbit service expires in October 2011. However, development on the Preston East Business Park has proved to be slower than anticipated and the County Council has closed its 'Hub' facility. In addition, the Bluebell Way Park and Ride, which is served by the Orbit route has proved unsuccessful. These events appear to have largely negated the need for a regular bus service along Bluebell Way for the foreseeable future.

A series of discussions have taken place with Preston Bus to ascertain:

- 1 How the company would react to the early termination of the contract to operate the Orbit service via Bluebell way.
- 2 Explore in detail the alternatives should the company not be in a position to operate the existing route on a commercial basis.

The conclusions of the discussions are:

- 1 The continued operation of the Orbit service via Bluebell Way will not be commercially viable should contract 06/004 be terminated. This is due to the relatively low number of passengers boarding and alighting on the section of route between Brookfield and Longsands and the relatively high level of resource required to operate it. Operation via Fulwood Row as originally proposed may negate some of the additional costs. However in view of local concerns this is not considered to be an acceptable option from a County Council perspective.
- 2 There does not appear to be any other commercially viable option for routing the Orbit service in East Preston due to the loss of key passenger flows.
- 3 Preston Bus may retain commercially the part of the route from the Royal Preston Hospital to the West of the City and City Centre.

Whilst this will ultimately be a decision for the new owners of Preston Bus, it is possible that Orbit will be deregistered and that the service pattern will revert back to being radial. It should be noted that Preston Bus does not regard it as commercially viable to serve Longsands under this scenario.

An analysis of some of the key passenger flows on the Preston Orbit service has been undertaken using ticket machine data supplied to the County Council by Preston Bus. The data used is for Wednesday 20 October 2010 and Friday 22 October 2010.

The table below shows passengers boarding the Orbit service at Bluebell Way and Red Scar.

Passenger flow	Average passengers per day
Service 88a (northbound)	33
Service 88c (southbound)	93
total	126

The table below illustrates the number of daily passengers using the Orbit service for a number of key flows. None of these key flows will presently be catered for (other than by circuitous routes involving a change of bus) should Orbit cease. This is not exhaustive due to the limitation of the ticket machine data available.

Passenger flow	Average passenger journeys per day
Brookfield to Longsands and beyond	225
Longsands to Brookfield and beyond	122
Asda to Longsands and beyond	148
Royal Preston Hospital to Longsands and beyond	80
Total	575

It should be noted that there are other flows on the eastern part of the Orbit service for which it has not been possible to extract data or for a proportion of passengers, alternative services may be available without penalty. An example of such a flow is Sainsburys to Brookfield and beyond. The average daily flow on the northbound service is 135 passengers. A number of these passengers are likely to have alternative services available.

Should Preston Bus make the decision to withdraw the eastern side of the Orbit, the main implications for the County Council to consider are as follows:

- 1 The withdrawal of bus service provision from Longsands Lane. Firstly the County Council would seek whether alternative commercial service providers would be interested in running a service to Longsands. If this was not possible, we would use detailed analysis of passenger journeys to determine a level of replacement service which would be financially sustainable to provide and examine alternative routing options with operators.
- 2 The direct link from Brookfield to Royal Preston Hospital, Asda and employment centres around Pitman Way would be broken. Whilst this would be an unfortunate consequence, connection facilities, between other bus routes, will continue to be available at locations within the city.

Conclusion

The level of financial support given by the County Council into operating the Orbit service via Bluebell Way is clearly unsustainable in the current financial climate, given the number of people directly accessing the area on this service.

Preston Bus have indicated that the eastern half of the Orbit service would not be commercially viable and that they will revert to a radial route pattern but not serving Longsands.

Bluebell Way Park and Ride

It appears unlikely, given its location, that the Bluebell Way Park and Ride will attract users in sufficient numbers to make it a viable option for bus based park and ride. The site is presently costing in the order of £40,000 per annum to run including business rates, winter maintenance etc.

As a result consideration has been given to the future of the Bluebell Way site. It appears that the best option, given the present financial circumstances, would be to dispose of the site. The County Council's Property Services are presently updating their valuation of the site as a precursor to any discussions taking place with interested parties.

Consultations

In addition to discussions with Preston Bus Limited the County Councillors for all Preston Wards, Penwortham North, Penwortham South, Bamber Bridge and Walton le Dale, South Ribble Rural East, Fylde East, Longridge with Bowland, Ribble Valley South West, Wyreside and Garstang have been consulted regarding the potential withdrawal of funding. The following comments were received:

- 1 County Councillor Blow commented that there will be a need for a bus service once James Hall (Spar) move to the site close to Bluebell Way.
- 2 County Councillor Welsh commented that there would be considerable local opposition if the Orbit service was to be rerouted via Fulwood Row. However, he welcomed the proposed decision on Bluebell Way Park and Ride site but suggested that any future planning applications for the area need to ensure that they are adequately supported and do not exacerbate existing problems of traffic congestion, on street parking and hazards to pedestrians.

Implications:

This item has the following implications, as indicated:

Financial

The potential savings of £299,599 per annum through the termination of contract 06/004 may be partially lost if a replacement service to Longsands needs to be provided and through additional concessionary re-imbursements (non-quantifiable) should displaced concessionary orbit users choose to use more than one bus to replace a direct journey.

Risk management

There is a significant risk of an adverse public and press reaction should the eastern half of the Preston Orbit service be withdrawn.

Any representations made to the Cabinet Member prior to the issue being considered in accordance with the Public Notice of Forward Plans

Name: Organisation: Comments:

N/A.

Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 List of Background Papers

Paper	Date	Contact/Directorate/Tel
Urban Bus Challenge (Kickstart) Competition Bid	Awarded January 2004	Chris Anslow/ Environment/ 01772 534673
Report to the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transportation - Preston Orbit Quality Bus Route Fulwood Row, Automatic (Rising) Bollard	4 May 2005	Sharon Montgomerie/ Office of the Chief Executive/01772 530544
Report to the Cabinet Member for Sustainable Development - Preston Orbital Bus Route	4 April 2006	
Report to the Cabinet Member for Environment and Transportation - Park and Ride Site, Bluebell Way, Preston	20 February 2008	

Reason for inclusion in Part II, if appropriate

N/A