

Date: 29 June 2023

Reference: PT49

Dear Resident

PT49 Maltings Road, Great Baddow

Thank you for your communication regarding the proposed Maltings Road highways improvements, which have recently been consulted on.

I appreciate you taking the time to contact us, and the various observations made. It is my intention through this letter to present/clarify not only the issues that you have raised, but those of other respondents, in order that you are provided with a more holistically complete response. This will I hope will aid your understanding of the range of issues raised and our considered response to them and perhaps more importantly why the final package of interventions has been proposed.

Firstly, to set the scene, it has been highlighted that large vehicles, including buses, refuse trucks, emergency services, delivery lorries and others providing a service to local residents, regularly face difficulties in passing through the Maltings Road area, due to the way in which vehicles are often parked in the area in relation to the central island and the way in which this impacts their swept paths. So, to be clear, whilst the issue was brought to our attention by the bus operator, they are only one of the parties which are affected by the current conditions in the area. It is also worth noting that the inconsiderate parking also has negative impacts on a number of pedestrian movements, especially affecting elderly, disabled and other less mobile members of the community.

It is also important for us to keep in mind that the legal purpose of the public highway is to enable vehicles to 'pass and repass' – there is no intrinsic requirement to allow parking on the public highway, although this is indeed accepted as common practice in areas where this does not cause detriment to other road users.

As you may be aware, it is the stated policy of both Central & Local Government that we should actively encourage more people to make more journeys by sustainable means – walking, cycling and public transport and less by private transportation. This brings with it a number of benefits including commencing a virtuous cycle of reducing congestion – whereby more people travelling sustainably enables users of buses and cycles to be able to do so more quickly, safely, and easily – encouraging still more people to undertake modal shift, further reducing (or at least containing) congestion and so on. The move to sustainable modes of transportation also brings with it environmental benefits in terms of better air quality as well as laying the foundations for safer neighbourhoods for our residents to live and work in.

In 2021 Central Government released its National Bus Strategy 'Bus Back Better' https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/980227/DfT-Bus-Back-Better-national-bus-strategy-for-England.pdf which placed greater legal onus upon Local

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Authorities to actively facilitate bus travel. In response to this, ECC made a commitment to Government in October 2021 within its submitted Bus Service Improvement Plan [ecc bsip 2021 to 2026.pdf \(essexhighways.org\)](#) to progress an array of workstreams to support the national bus strategy locally. This includes things such as making public transport easier to understand and use, reviewing the network itself and considering how individual routes could be altered to better serve the communities and travel needs of today's residents as well as facilitating bus access and to make journey times more reliable and quicker. A number of these elements require us to commit to formal 'Enhanced Partnership' arrangements, which are legally binding commitments on both the Local Transport Authority and local bus operators. We currently have in place a county wide partnership, which provides for a number of high-level commitments, and we are now in the process of developing area-based partnership agreements for each of the 12 Essex 2nd tier authority areas.

This provides a backdrop to understanding why we have over recent months (countywide) been stepping up our actions to address several known highway issues which have over time been identified as encumbering the movement of buses and therefore hindering our progress towards achieving our commitment to government and actively facilitating modal shift. Some of the interventions are major such as developing a new Chelmsford City Centre multi modal interchange to more appropriately benefit the reasonable expectations of Essex's main City and the incorporation of bus priority measures associated within the new Army & Navy roundabout major scheme – through to minor schemes such as this one in a more local setting. Large or small, these interventions all work towards a single set of goals – facilitating bus movements, encouraging increased ridership, and improving the customer experience.

The issue of access here was brought to our attention 2019, however partially due to Covid and partially due to the delays incurred in securing budget and developing designs, it has taken until now for Essex County Council to be able to act – in which time the bus operator has felt it necessary to further reduce the level of service provided, as access conditions have continued to worsen.

In regard to the current bus service operating through the Maltings Estate, it has been correctly observed that at present the service operates unidirectionally only – further that this currently only operates during the limited interpeak period. Some respondents also quite correctly state that the service operates much less frequently than it has done previously and there are a number of reasons for this – one of the prime ones being the difficulty that the buses have increasingly faced over recent years in passing through a number of the residential areas of the City and its suburbs, which were not designed with the intention of accommodating so much on-street parking as is present now. It is the level of car ownership that has changed and as has been observed particularly the number of multi car households that has increased – whereas the roads that buses use have remained reasonably constant for 40 or more years.

As intimated above, we have in our role as Transport Authority undertaken an extensive exercise for each of the district/borough/city areas and identified a number of elements that should be taken into consideration in reorganising and facilitating the respective local bus networks [Getting Around in Essex Bus Strategy | Essex County Council \(essexhighways.org\)](#).

We have identified a number of highway interventions that could be progressed as and when opportunity and/or funding arises as well as considerations of how the network of services can metamorphose into a more appropriate network for the future. This will undoubtedly involve new linkages, revised frequencies, and provision of direct or indirect bus facilitating highway infrastructure.

Regarding the C6 bus service, this scheme is one of 5 minor schemes that are being investigated for progression that could aid operation of the service in differing ways – this is in addition to 3 major schemes within the city that would also benefit this service (as well as benefitting several other services).



Thus, the level of service and unidirectional flow in place at present may not be reflective of the way the area is served by the network of the future. As an aside I would also take the opportunity to reiterate that whilst the intervention is being put forward for progression as a means to facilitate bus access, it is not solely the bus operators (and of course their passengers) that would benefit – it will assist providers of a range of services throughout the estate requiring access by larger vehicles. This brings us back to highway law in that the ability of legitimate road users to be able to pass and repass is a requirement, whereas the provision of on street parking is not.

Comments on the size of the vehicles currently used on the route have been received – observing that the ‘long buses on occasion have difficulty negotiating the “straight across” route “around” the roundabout in the middle of the road due to parked cars.’ This is indeed precisely why this issue was brought to us, i.e., because buses have difficulty negotiating their way through. I am sure you will be well aware it states in the highway code that you cannot park at a junction nor within 10 metres of one, or on a roundabout – however, some of the residents themselves, in their correspondence to us openly identify that they know they should not park on corners, but do so, as it is not enforced – and in doing so impact on local pedestrian movements as well as the activities of various service providers.

As shown in the picture below, large vehicles including buses would be easily able to manoeuvre along this road if there were no vehicles to obstruct them. Unfortunately, in reality this is not the case, parking contrary to the highway code does impede larger vehicles getting through, and the purpose of this scheme is to ensure that is no longer the case here.



On the question of bus size, the bus companies allocate buses to services based on the largest likely number of passengers that the bus is going to need in its working day, at present the service here is interpeak, as such it is likely that the bus used for this service operates additional peak trips and/or school trips either side of operating through the Maltings Estate, where it needs to be able to carry additional passengers.

There simply are not an infinite number of buses present in a depot to suit all purposes, they all cost money to purchase, insure, tax and maintain – vehicles therefore get used for an array of purposes – we cannot for example have a bus with 70 seat capacity that is needed for school journeys and convert it to a minibus for interpeak or evening journeys where passenger requirement may currently be less. Multi use vehicles help keep costs down, whilst ensuring that vulnerable, elderly, less mobile and disabled passengers in particular are still served.

It is likely that if the operator was not managing their fleet in this way, that this service would simply not operate at all, which would be to the detriment of a notable sector of the community who rely on the service.

If the service were to be withdrawn statistically it is more likely to have a severe impact on elderly, disabled, mobility impaired and lower income residents who are the main groups who are disproportionately disadvantaged by the loss of or unreliability of a bus service, as many have no access to other means of transportation. These groups are important members of our society, whose interests must be protected, as covered by Everyone's Essex objectives. It is also increasingly apparent that younger residents are becoming more dependent on bus services as a means of travelling independently – they are generally less interested or able to drive and own a car than was the case previously.

It is also worth pointing out that the elderly and disabled residents have free travel on bus services, as such use of bus services is of financial benefit to them as it means that accessibility to their daily life needs are undertaken at nil cost to them as the user. Thus, the loss of a service – perhaps requiring use of taxis instead can lead to their financial hardship.

It has been mentioned that the street design was not originally intended to accommodate vehicles of the current size, however we would advise that, Leyland National buses which were used extensively to serve the development in the 1970's and 80's were 11.3 metres in length – very similar to those buses used today. The main difference between then and now is the increased number of cars, multi car households and propensity of car owners to park irresponsibly – this is something that the urban designers of the past may not have been anticipating, when planning road widths and parking facilities.

The service of the future may well operate throughout the day, in which case buses would be used which more precisely suit the needs of the service at that time – however it would be our aspiration that the service of the future would be more attractive and therefore better used than currently, as such it may well still be larger vehicles operating the service – with perhaps medium sized vehicles at an intermediate stage of network development.

It has been relayed to us that the residents have limited options for parking in the area, however on closer viewing, the residents of the Maltings have much more parking than has been implied by some. Many of the households have driveways capable of (and actually) accommodating anything up to 6 vehicles – it is also true that some do not currently have this facility, however they could apply to Essex Highways for permission to instal dropped kerbs to enable parking on their frontages – to be clear, this would not however be something that the Local Authority would be able to fund the provision of. However, if there were enough residents who obtained consent for a vehicular access a contractor may be able to look at costs more favourably, as they would be buying materials in bulk and may be able to undertake multiple installations within a single visit.

In addition to private parking, there are a number of areas of communal parking present along Maltings Road, in the form of formal parking bays and indeed a bank of garages. Many of the objectors to the scheme actually have their own off-street parking. The majority of other residents will continue to have parking outside their residence and also be within 80m of formal designated parking bays. The images below show some examples of the additional communal parking areas available for use.







It has been observed by some residents that some houses have dropped kerb off road parking, which they feel has reduced the available on street parking. This is not strictly correct however, as the reality is that in many instances the driveways appear to have been original design features of the respective properties, whilst for others the dropped kerbs have potentially reduced one on-street car parking space and replaced it with accommodation for 2 or more vehicles off street – plus these residents are in most cases able to still park across their own frontage if desired. So, the negative impact of such actions is not quite what some perceive it to be.

We would agree with the residents that observed “the number of vehicles owned by residents is rising with a smattering of “work” related vehicles and an increasing number of multi car households” however, as pointed out above there is more parking for residents than implied and as we have said, often parking is not taken away by virtue of the introduction of a dropped kerb. Either way, it is however not the fault of either Essex County Council or the bus operators that the number of multi car households has risen in the area. It is in reality these additional vehicles that are the cause of the problem and not as some suggest the provision of the bus service - which has been operating through here since at least the early 1980’s.

A further concern that was raised, was the need for some individuals to be able to stop outside their homes in order to alight from a vehicle or unload a delivery. In this regard, I would advise that on double yellow lines you can drop off and pick up (5-minute wait), therefore this does not exclude the affected residences from being able to continue this practice.

An additional observation was that a small number of properties have visiting care workers. These providers can still use the designated provided parking areas within the estate or indeed the majority extent of roadside parking that will remain parking along the straight sections of all 4 arms off the roundabout remains.

It has been mentioned that there is an ‘unwritten rule’ whereby most residents only park on the South side of the East-West Road allowing busses and other vehicles to pass. Whilst this may be true, it must be remembered that they are parking on a roundabout and around the corners of junctions which is not permissible and although buses may not currently use this side of the carriageway other large vehicles do. The scheme is emphasising to road users/residents that they should not (according to the Highway Code) be parking on roundabouts or within 10m of junctions (Essex County Council normally install 15 metres of junction protection), these are safety issues affecting all road users, including children, mobility impaired, visually impaired and the disabled and as Highway Authority, we should not condone such activities.

Observation has been made in regard to the proposed scheme, stating that the 'proposed parking restrictions are symmetrical and not in proportion to the solution of the problem. (Bus traffic is in one direction only)' – it is true that the bus routing is currently unidirectional however it has been operational in both directions in the past and as indicated above, it is quite possible that along with other highway measures being progressed along the route, that the network of services in the area could alter. The scheme is symmetrical as the interventions apply equally to all borders of the 'circular roundabout style structure'.

It has also been observed that 'the parking restrictions extend to the North and South of the Junction – this appears to be unnecessary - buses do not go here.' – as previously stated, no driver should be parking on any of the junction corners, nor the roundabout – vehicles parking on the approaches to the roundabout cause particular issues for larger vehicles and our proposals are only upholding the highway code. All arms off of the roundabout, on both sides of the carriageway have dropped kerbs for pedestrian use, these should not be blocked at any time, but they are being by the illegal parking. The proposed restrictions will make sure that these important pedestrian crossing points will remain clear at all times.

Another resident observes that parking restrictions remove the number of available resident parking spaces – these are scarce, to which we would respond, it is the unreasonable numbers of cars per property that are causing the issue for other road users. Communication with some residents have suggested that the available garages are not being used fully, nor are the provided visitors/residents' bays. It is human nature that residents who do not have their own parking facilities prefer the easy option of parking directly outside their own property, wherever possible, however again I would make the point that Highway Law states 'the carriageway is there to pass and repass', it is not an automatic right that residents can park on the public highway.

We have also been questioned on the 'proposed restrictions being 24/7 when the problem is to deal with a small transitory issue.' Whilst it is true that the main party bringing the issue to our attention currently operates only for a restricted period, this issue remains for large vehicles/emergency services 24/7. Additionally, as relayed earlier, we aspire to the bus service through the area, being improved over time as the package of interventions along the route to aid accessibility are implemented. The illegal parking on the roundabout and at junctions is not timed that is 24/7 and the Highway Code should be always adhered to.

It has been suggested that ECC should negate the need for the scheme and/or reduce the perceived impact on local residents. It is firstly worth noting that it is the inconsiderate actions of some residents that has generated the need for the scheme and that considerable time has been invested in debating the best way to deal with the issue effectively, whilst minimising the impact and potential for inconvenience to local residents.

There are two other nearby roads in Great Baddow that have recently had parking restrictions/Permit Parking installed and they are Foxholes Road and Snelling Grove. Foxholes Road has a similar issue to Maltings Road, where it was difficult for buses and other large vehicles to pass through the area, and these schemes were also consulted on and installed.

Some of the suggestions made by residents have already been investigated and include.

Removing the roundabout altogether to facilitate a straight road - All options were considered, but the junctions would still need junction protection markings, the scheme cost would dramatically increase, as would the speed of through traffic. Inadvertently the roundabout also assists with traffic calming. Such an action would not provide any traffic calming but would likely increase the safety risk particularly for younger and elder residents. It would be irresponsible and unjustifiable to use public funds for such an inflated scheme, when a substantially more cost-effective and pragmatic solution is available. This proposal would not address all the current issues that exist and would continually exist without a No Waiting Scheme being



implemented. In addition, the street lighting would need to be looked at and a design carried out which is likely to add noticeably to the overall scheme cost.

Slimming the Roundabout to allow straight travel of busses through the junction - As above, although not such an impact on the speed of traffic.

Replacing the roundabout high kerb with a lower ramped edge to allow a bus/vehicle to pass over - As above.

Working with the bus company to determine if smaller busses can be utilised (perhaps more frequently) – (This service feeds the industrial unit [BAe] and a hospital and currently has no services allowing commuting to work in either direction at either end of the day). As explained earlier in this letter, other regular sized vehicles including smaller buses would perhaps be in the region of 10 metres rather than 12 metres but the issues that they are currently facing would still largely remain. The issue is as much about the width of the vehicles as the length. In the main the width doesn't alter which is approximately 2.55 metres. However, if minibus sized vehicles are being referred to by the resident, then I would respond that even if they were permanently full to capacity, they would be unlikely to generate sufficient revenue income to enable the service to operate with commercial viability.

Essex County Council want to work towards serving the greater community and their needs, however the bus service needs to be able to run reliably and unimpeded before we can expect the frequency of the service to be increased.

Working with other community bus services to provide alternative routes/services that are not limited by the current road layout - The current bus service is provided commercially, that is to say at no cost to the tax payer, community bus operations are in the main wholly paid for by Essex County Council, thus to provide a replacement provision for the full extent of the service and we are not just talking about Maltings Road, would be much more expensive and would overall represent a loss to the elderly and disabled residents in particular, who would have to pre book a journey and in all likelihood would also have to pay for the service, as most community transport schemes do not permit the use of concessionary free travel passes. Added to which Essex County Council does not have spare budget to fund such a scheme, which is a core reason as to why it is in Essex County Council's and its residents' best interests to maintain and seek to encourage enhancement of this service provided by the commercial sector.

Remove or restrict the proposed parking restrictions to the absolute minimum necessity to achieve the aim of the scheme - This is what has been designed already.

The majority of all the residents' concerns have been about parking and very little else, unfortunately the highway code appears to be overlooked in this area, as such this scheme only reinforces this and nothing more. Unfortunately, if residents had been more considerate with their parking this scheme would not have been brought to our attention and deemed necessary.

All points raised by the residents have been taken on board and answered, whilst it is appreciated that some will not be happy with the replies that have been received, we have proposed a scheme which represents value for money, where we reinforce compliance with the highway code, we facilitate access by buses and other larger vehicles and provide additional protection for pedestrian movements - the restrictions imposed would be the minimum necessary to achieve this – this is a core consideration with any such scheme as it is not our intention to cause unnecessary hardship. As Essex County Council officers, we cannot support objections where illegal parking has been and continues to be carried out causing issues for pedestrians and other legitimate users of the highway.



Thus, Essex County Council are not responsible for providing parking, however they are responsible for ensuring that the Highway code is upheld. No resident should assume that parking on the public highway is a given. It must be recognised that circumstances change, carriageways are altered, schemes are installed all of which change the public highway uses, the dynamics of what the public highway is used for, and ultimately keep traffic moving.

Moving forward it is our intention to present a report named - Cabinet Members Action Form (CMA) which provides the background to the scheme as explained in this letter, along with sharing all the objections received and officers' recommendation to proceed.

Part of the process will also include the Equality Impact that looks at how this scheme will help aid residents such as elderly, disabled etc which is where keeping the dropped kerbs clear will become essential.

The report is presented to different areas of the organisation to be signed off, before a decision is made by the Council Cabinet as to whether the scheme will be accepted and implemented, and you will be informed of that decision, in due course.

Yours faithfully

Network Assurance Team

Essex Highways

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