

Report to Stronger Place Select Committee

Date of meeting: 7 March 2023



Portfolio: Place (Councillor N Bedford)

Subject: Sustainable Transport Update

Officer contact for further information: Stephen Lloyd Jones

Democratic Services Officer: Laura Kirman

Recommendations/Decisions Required:

1. To note and comment on the updates on Sustainable Transport initiatives and
2. To consider the potential to extend the DaRT87 trial to allow the app problems to be resolved and increase usage, ahead of possible major reductions in the commercial and subsidised bus network.

Report:

Update on Buses

The Bus market continues to struggle to return to pre-pandemic levels of usage, with resultant threats to service levels nationally. As a result, DfT has extended its funding of a £2 flat fare for all single bus journeys outside London to the end of June 2023. EFDC had already created such a fare for the Flexiroute app's launch for the EFDC-funded **DaRT87** in December 2022. In addition, we have created a platform poster which TfL have agreed to host free of charge at Epping station promoting all Essex buses serving it with the special fare. A press release in December, backed up by social media, local poster sites and an item in Housing News all featured the £2 flat fare and the new passenger app for DaRT87.

The app has been a key requirement to help increase and widen usage of DaRT87 and whilst 123 downloads to end in January is positive, the app was launched almost three months late and has suffered teething problems. Around 400 individual passenger trips were made between April and December 2022 on DaRT services and fare revenue returned to EFDC has rarely exceeded £300 per month, so in pure financial terms this service has not been successful.

In social value terms however, it has been important, running throughout the pandemic and beyond, helping key workers and others without easy access to cars make important trips enhancing health, wellbeing and access to education and employment. ECC is beginning to see encouraging signs in 2023 across its portfolio of rural and inter-town DRT services, including the large scale Digigo EV minibus pilot in Braintree and areas of Uttlesford, funded by DfT's Rural Mobility Fund. It is hoped they can give DaRT87 some marketing and even financial support to help extend the trial and integrate the service under the emerging Travel Essex branding.

Electric Vehicles

The Electric Vehicle (EV) market continues to evolve at pace with EV sales outnumbering petrol cars in December 2022 for the first time and battery-only (BEV) outselling plug-in hybrid

(PHEV) by a growing margin. Across Essex and EFDC, however, the levels of public EV charging may be a cause of doubt among prospective adopters. Expressed as chargers per 100k population, we are at half the all-England level of around 50 per 100k which includes comparable county council areas with significantly higher numbers/rates. Nevertheless, EFDC has the highest number of BEVs on the roads of any Essex council area and the Instavolt rapid chargers in our car parks are set to grow from two to six by the end of March 2023 (new chargers at Banson’s Lane, Ongar is imminent).

Usage of the Oakwood Hill East car park Instavolt chargers has exceeded all expectations and is proving a ‘win-win’ in meeting urgent demand from residents and businesses, increasing car park revenues and potentially extra rental income and a profit share element later this year. The EV users at Ongar Business Centre (at least 15) are also eagerly anticipating the Ongar chargers.

EFDC is also facilitating and logging all planning requests that involve public or semi-public chargers. Waitrose Supermarket in Buckhurst Hill for example, is on land in our ownership and multiple chargers, including for non-customers, have been approved for an area with zero public chargers. Qualis are committed to public chargers in the new multi-storey car park at Bakers Lane site in Epping and an optimal ‘day one’ mix has been discussed. By the end of 2023, it therefore looks reasonable to predict that EFDC area will match the all-England ratio of EV chargers per 100k population and this assumes zero on-street chargers that Essex CC are still debating provision.

Another market issue has been rising prices on public charger networks but despite some misinformation, running costs of EVs remain significantly lower than conventional cars for most users. However, we must continue to explore and deliver lower cost/lower speed local chargers and are working on communal charger solutions for council-owned areas as well as for car parks close to suitable residential or small business areas. Instavolt’s tariffs are not under our control but their rates relative to other ‘ultra-rapid’ networks are close to average and market forecasts are for price stabilisation or even reductions in this ‘premium’ market segment.

Latest Ultra Low Emission Vehicle (ULEV) statistics from DfT shown below. These indicate that EFDC has the largest number of BEV in Essex (including the unusual number of London EV black cabs in the ‘*REX’ category due to their small range extender engine). EFDC is also moving strongly away from PHEV versus other Districts. Total ULEV as a % of all cars is now at just under 3% all cars, versus a target of 10% by 2025 as per EFDC’s Interim Air Pollution Mitigation Strategy.

District (Q3/22)	BEV+REX*	PHEV	Total ULEV
Basildon	835	1,562	2,397
Epping Forest	1,082	790	1,872
Chelmsford	799	743	1,542
Colchester	672	600	1,272
Uttlesford	736	529	1,265
Braintree	573	501	1,074
Brentwood	444	407	851
Tendring	392	337	729
Rochford	371	316	687
Maldon	297	269	566
Harlow	241	223	464
Castle Point	232	211	443

Cycling

The Census 2021 data paints EFDC area as one with very low utility/commuting cycling rates compared to Harlow, Broxbourne and adjoining London Boroughs. ECC’s refreshed cycling

strategy (draft) contains little for the EFDC area. Only those Districts with a completed Local Cycling & Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) are in the frame for infrastructure improvements by 2030 and even then, that is not guaranteed. A LCWIP was completed for Harlow/HGGT in 21/22, but our LCWIP for Waltham Abbey funded by the UK Shared Prosperity Fund allocation will not be conducted until well into 23/24. Otherwise the strategy is strong on behaviour change campaigns and targets which look very unlikely to be met in an area like ours, at least for everyday/utility cycling.

The Local Plan adoption would at least open up new funding opportunities for active travel and as an example, the Connecting North Weald project is already exploring potential safe(r) connections between proposed North Weald's masterplan areas, the existing settlement and Epping using a combination of byways/bridleways and quieter roads as well as new routes within the developments themselves.

Reason for decision: Update and good governance

Options considered and rejected: n/a

Consultation undertaken: None

Resource implications: None

Legal and Governance Implications: None

Safer, Cleaner, Greener Implications: ECC is severely constrained in its ability to subsidise bus services and if/when commercial operators withdraw local services due to market conditions, the District could be left with a reduced service that does not fully meet the needs of any resident or business group. The area's low availability of public EV chargers is threatening to stall EV adoption, especially among key groups such as those with no off street parking, minicab/taxi drivers, small van-based businesses with cross border trade in London etc. Whilst EFDC area remains a major draw for confident/experienced (primarily male) leisure road and mountain bike cyclists, utility cycling, especially among women and teens/young people remains almost negligible whilst safe infrastructure is rare. The Local Plan adoption would unlock funding and some major improvements, but the preceding period ahead of major sites starting to come on stream needs to include funded activity and campaigns to protect and grow what already exists.

Background Papers: None

Impact Assessments: N/A

Risk Management: N/A