

## **School Bus Arrangements – Homewood School / Adelaide Drive**

To: Swale Joint Transportation Board: 13<sup>th</sup> January 2020

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Classification: Unrestricted

Ward: Homewood

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**Summary:** This report provides an update on the revised school bus arrangements for Westlands School, Sittingbourne. The new arrangements were introduced from the week commencing 28<sup>th</sup> October 2019 following notification from the school that the existing on site pick up / drop off facility would no longer be available. Members are asked to note the report and to endorse the installation of bus stop clearway markings to support the revised arrangements.

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### **1.0 Introduction and Background**

- 1.1 Revised bus stopping arrangements for Westlands School, Sittingbourne were introduced from w/c 28<sup>th</sup> October 2019, following notification from the school that the on site bus pick up / drop off area would no longer be available.
- 1.2 Whilst KCC, with the exception of one service, does not contract school buses to the site, it undertook the role of “broker” in order to discuss alternative options with commercial bus operators.
- 1.3 Given the lack of an alternative “bus hub” type arrangement for the site, it was identified that the only way to progress was to split services between existing marked bus stops on Adelaide Drive and the A2. All stops used are existing and long-standing bus stop locations and no new bus stops were established as part of this work.
- 1.4 Services were split evenly in order to limit the number of pupils at any one point. A map of how services are split and the stops concerned can be found in Appendix A.
- 1.5 In order to support the new arrangements, the JTB is asked to endorse the installation of bus stop clearway markings at the four utilised marked bus stops on Adelaide Drive in order to ensure that buses can fully access the kerb side to

enable safe boarding / alighting. Appendix B provides greater detail on the stops concerned.

## **2.0 Review of New Arrangements**

2.1 On Friday 8<sup>th</sup> November 2019 a safety audit was conducted by Kent County Council's (KCC's) Schemes, Planning and Delivery Team with respect to the new arrangements. Alongside this audit, officers from KCC's Public Transport Team carried out a number of observations during the week commencing 11<sup>th</sup> November 2019. Both the audit and observations focused on the afternoon peak when the impacts of the changes are understood to be most acute.

2.2 Overall, it was observed that the work to split services between the four existing marked bus stops on Adelaide Drive and the existing marked stop on the A2 had been successful. Pupil numbers were spread relatively evenly between the available infrastructure which reduced the impacts on residents in any one area.

2.3 During all observations, buses were able to stop at or in near proximity to marked bus stops meaning that pupils were able to safely and accessibly board without having to step onto the carriageway (other than to cross initially for access to southbound stops). Observations from KCC Public Transport included:

*“At 1450, 5 of 6 vehicles using the Adelaide Drive stops were also already present - the last - the 344 comes through later in service. 3 of 4 stops were clear with buses stood at the stop without any obstruction”*

*“Each stop had a single bus that arrived well in advance of school kick out time and took their place at their designated bus stop.”*

2.4 However, there were occasions when buses were unable to stop exactly at the identified stopping points and it should be noted that buses were arriving early to site, in the main before general school pick up traffic. As such, without the presence of clearway markings it cannot be guaranteed that buses will be able to stop either at or near to their registered point e.g. if buses arrive late due to congestion or if the number of cars picking up pupils was to change. This in turn means that it cannot be guaranteed that buses will always be able to fully reach the kerb side, impacting on accessibility for those who may have difficulty boarding the bus.

2.5 The absence of clearways also means that consistency of stopping location cannot be guaranteed– i.e. the bus may need to stop at different parts of the road on different days. Pupils however did appear to be aware of the general area their bus would be stopping in and were looking out for the bus itself.

2.6 With respect to the clearway markings, the Traffic Schemes, Planning and Delivery Team concluded that:

*“Several parents / guardians pick up and drop off in Adelaide Drive which can impede access to the various stops on Adelaide Drive which currently do not have clearways in place to protect pull in areas for buses. Buses being unable*

*to pull up alongside the kerb poses a significant safety hazard and forces pupils to alight buses into the carriageway. Based on the fact that all dwellings along Adelaide Drive do have off street parking, and the limited demand for on street parking noted during site inspections, we would recommend that a single length of bus stop clearway markings (approx. 19 metres) be installed at each stop. This will ensure that each stop has sufficient pull in space for at least 1 bus, and not remove an excessive amount of on street parking. Due to the high number of accesses and dropped kerbs, each bus stop clearway will remove a maximum of 3 on street parking spaces”.*

### **3.0 General Safety / Impact of New Arrangements**

- 3.1 Overall, the revised arrangements were seen to work well during all observations, with little impact on traffic flows, neighbouring residents or the buses themselves.

HTW's Schemes Planning and Delivery Team noted that:

*“pupil crossing behaviour, and general behaviour, was very good. There were teachers / staff from the school monitoring the area whilst we were carrying out our observations. The school buses were distributed across the 4 different bus stops in Adelaide Drive and this seemed to disperse the school traffic and ensure that there were no notable bottle necks, or excessive congregations of pupils. The buses were on site prior to the school actually finishing, so pupils were able to wait on the buses and were not assembling in groups on the public highway. Based on the site assessment, other than the fact that the buses do not have marked locations in which to stop, no highway safety issues were noted on site.”*

- 3.2 Observations conducted by officers of KCC's Public Transport Team concurred with this view. It was noted that:

*“Buses made up only a small part of either parked vehicles or vehicle movements in the area. With the road width allowing the continued passage of passing vehicles I do not believe that the presence of buses represents a problem for other vehicles or residents”.*

*“Students started to arrive through Sydney Avenue and Brisbane Avenue at around 1500 and were accompanied by teachers who remained on site until vehicles and students had cleared. Student behaviour was appropriate, and I saw nothing anti-social.”*

- 3.3 During the safety audit and during two of the three observations conducted by KCC Public Transport, it was noted that staff from the school were present to guide / monitor the new arrangements. It was observed that this was beneficial and helped encourage pupils to approach their required stop in a controlled manner. It would be prudent for this provision to be maintained moving forwards.
- 3.4 Buses arriving slightly earlier at the bus stops helped to ensure that they were not impeded by parked cars. The introduction of clearways would limit this requirement by ensuring the stops were clear at the appropriate times.

#### **4.0 Request for Highways Safety Measures to Support New Arrangements**

- 4.1 Following requests from Westlands School, HTW's Schemes, Planning and Delivery Team also considered the requirement and viability of additional highways safety measures to support the change in arrangements. Alongside observations that there were "*no other highways safety issues noted on site*" other than the benefits that markings would bring.
- 4.2 It was concluded that: "*There is no crash pattern on Adelaide Drive to prioritise funding in this location from the limited crash remedial measures budget. It is worth noting that all of these requested highway changes, and the relocation of the collection / drop off points for the school buses, are due to a planning application to expand the school as such any highway improvements and changes required should be funded through the planning process by the applicant. It would not be possible to install traffic calming on the A2 in any event as we should not install traffic calming on main route corridors / emergency response routes.*"

The school have been notified of this position and are in direct contact with the KCC Schemes, Planning and Delivery Team.

#### **5.0 Alternative Option – Use of Cricket Club Car Park: Gore Court**

- 5.1 SBC advised that Gore Court Cricket Club have offered the use of their private carpark as an alternative to the new arrangements in place on the A2 and Adelaide Drive. This was considered during the audit conducted by HTW Schemes, Planning and Delivery on 8<sup>th</sup> November who concluded that:

*"The team would not recommend this course of action. Although there are crossing points on the A2 it is not recommended that over 300 pupils, who use school buses every day, cross the A2 London Road to access school bus services. This would substantially increase the opportunity for vehicle pedestrian / student conflict. It is also noted that the cricket ground car park area is not publicly maintainable highway which may cause issues for the various bus companies who may be required to have indemnities in place to access / park on private property."*

#### **6.0 Conclusions & Recommendations**

- 6.1 Although inevitably inferior to previous arrangements on the school site, the new practices are working well for students and operators and they continue to compare favourably with those for many other schools across the County. The coordination of services to split them between stops, the presence of school staff and the observed good behaviour of students has mitigated any acute impacts on the local neighbourhood and the continuation of practice is not considered problematic from any perspective.

6.2 Members are asked to:

**a) Note the contents of this report**

**b) Endorse the installation of bus stop clearway markings at the four stops on Adelaide Drive in order to guarantee that buses are able to access the kerbside appropriately.**

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