

Bus Service

Policy R1 of the Joint Core Strategy (WNJCS) indicates how the housing growth directed towards the rural areas (outside of the NRDA, Daventry, Brackley and Towcester) would be delivered. The policy outlines that the rural requirement for both Daventry and South Northamptonshire are both 2,360 dwellings and that the distribution of the rural housing requirement according to the local need of each village and their role within a rural settlement hierarchy is to be determined and set out in the Part 2 Local Plan.

The policy indicates however, that once the rural requirement has been met that residential development would be restricted, save for a small number of criterion where residential development may still be permissible, including where it can be demonstrated that it:

- vi) *Is required to support the retention of or improvement to essential local services that may be under threat (in particular the local primary school or primary health services); and***
- vii) *has been informed by an effective community involvement exercise prior to the submission of a planning application;***

Greens Norton is served by the No.87 bus service between Northampton and Towcester, however the service has reduced over the years due to a lack of County Council funding.

There is no budget within Northamptonshire County Council for subsidising the bus service any longer than the current financial year, ending March 2021. This has resulted in the Parish Council already making financial contributions (some £4,500 in 2019/2020 and £3,500 in 2020/2021) to ensure its retention through the village.

The village bus service is highly valued by the local community and petitions have been made by villagers regarding its impending loss. Many residents feel they are becoming cut off from the surrounding villages and larger towns of Towcester and Northampton and are extremely concerned that funds for the vital transport link will be ceased in their entirety.

Preliminary discussions have been held with Northamptonshire Highways regarding a financial contribution towards public transport; at this stage, it has been agreed with the local authority that a contribution of £1,000 per dwelling towards enhancements to the existing No.87 service will be made (via Section 106 agreement). The contribution will be pooled with other development contributions along the route of the No.87 service and used to deliver enhancements to the daytime service, Monday to Saturday, between Northampton and Towcester.

The significant contributions to be made as part of the development proposals will help to support the retention of, and improve, the existing bus service for many years. Without sufficient contributions arising through developments such as this scheme, this community service will cease to operate. In making this important local service provision, it is considered that the development proposals fully comply with criterion ii) of WNJCS Policy R1 and that development should be permitted in principle.

It should also be noted that whilst the development proposals can assist by making such contributions, the provision of a bus service no longer features in the settlement hierarchy assessment, although did take 'other considerations' into account, including the distance of a settlement from urban areas, rural service, GP surgeries and railway stations. In the Report on the LPP2 the Inspector fully agreed with this approach, stating it accords with the NPPF insofar as it seeks to promote sustainable development in rural areas.

Of increasing importance however, is the reliance on broadband connectivity. Services such as superfast broadband are now a key element of ensuring a settlement's sustainability, and have therefore been elevated to classify as 'Very Important' within the settlement hierarchy scoring. Greens Norton benefits from superfast broadband, with speeds of up to 80 Mbps, providing the fast and reliable connections required to facilitate effective home working in a rural location. Furthermore, with changing working practices and greater remote working taking place, particularly since the COVID-19 pandemic, aligned with increased use of online shopping, this has reduced the need for communities

and businesses to travel as frequently. Such home working is only likely to increase in a post COVID-19 world. Greens Norton is more than adequately provided for these changes.