



North Luton - JLAF Aspiration for Non-Motorised User Access

1. Purpose

The Luton and Central Bedfordshire Joint Local Access Forum (JLAF) met in January 2016 to review the proposals to develop land to the North of Luton. Subsequently this paper was agreed by the JLAF on 2nd March 2016. The document captures the JLAF's vision of an effective network of routes for non-motorised users (NMUs) to enable good access to green space within and around the development together with support of vehicle free movement to employment, shops and schools. Our aim is that the document to be shared with planners and developers to inform their plans. Our response to any proposals presented for consultation will be based on this vision.

The development brings environmental and transport challenges:

- It will separate a densely populated area in north Luton from the open country to the north of town.
- Many of the residents of the new area will need to travel through north Luton. Roads in this area are already congested.

These challenges are recognised in the Framework Plan^(ref 1). Our aim is to add weight to these design principles and add specific recommendations. Members of the JLAF would be keen to meet with planners and/or developers to debate any of the issues identified within this document.

JLAF can act as a proxy for the population that will occupy the new development – which evidently do not exist at this time - and can provide a more balanced view of the development than existing residents.

This vision does not mean the JLAF endorse or support the development, that is not our decision. It simply expresses the views of the JLAF as to how the NMU user access should be facilitated if the development proceeds.

2. Background

2.1. The Joint Local Access Forum

The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 requires Highway Authorities to establish a Local Access Forum. Central Bedfordshire Council and Luton Borough Council choose to establish a Joint Local Access Forum (JLAF)¹.

The JLAF members are local volunteers with a balance of interests in the countryside, including recreational users, land managers and those with interests in nature conservation, heritage, business, health, transport and access for the less able. The JLAF scope includes promotion of the public access to the countryside through the public rights of way network and other initiatives such as 'safer routes to school' which predominantly impact urban areas. The JLAF has contributed to the development of the CBC Outdoor Access Improvement Plan^(ref 3) and various relevant CBC policies.^(ref 4 & 5)

This proposed development area is right on the boundary between the two authorities, which enables the JLAF to provide informed opinion on behalf of the communities in both Central Bedfordshire & Luton.

2.2. Design Principles

The JLAF is focussed on access by non-motorised users (NMU); walkers, cyclists & equestrians. There are no significant bodies of water in the development area so there is no consideration of waterborne activities, similarly there is no consideration of recreational vehicle access.

The facilities for NMU should enable access within key facilities within the new development as well as routes to access adjacent facilities and the wider countryside.

The green corridors within and around the development should be developed for shared use by walkers and cyclists, some corridors should provide access for equestrians. Green corridors should be wide enough to accommodate separate walking, equestrian and cycling paths with room for landscaping on either side. As a guideline, a width of at least 20 metres should be allowed for the core green routes.

It is important that the major roads and the railway should not be a barrier to access to the countryside or adjacent facilities:

- There should be no 'at grade' crossing with the new link road
- New safe crossings for NMU should be provided across the A6 and main spine roads.

New roads within and around the developments should incorporate the latest design principles to allow safe use by walkers and cyclists. Where shared use pavements are provided these must be wide enough to safely accommodate mixed use.

The existing rights of way network is not sacrosanct. Because of this development, there may be good reason to modify the network to improve the access for NMU. This document envisages changes to the existing rights of network. Although the corridors are probably similar there is the opportunity to modify and improve the usefulness of the routes.

¹ www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/environment/countryside/jlaf/default.aspx

3. Overview

3.1. Network Summary

There should be two NMU routes running **east-west**:

- A major route (EW1) running between Luton and the new development linking Warden Hills to the Boundway. This will include access for equestrians.
- A second route (EW2) running through the green edge on the north of the development.

There should also be several NMU **north-south** green corridors to link the existing Luton urban areas with the new development and the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) including access to:

- National Cycle Route 6
- Great Bramingham Park and Great Bramingham Woods
- the Open Access land at Sundon Quarry/the restored Sundon tip
- Sundon Wood and Sundon Hills Country Park
- Streatley and Sharpenhoe Clappers

These are in line with the proposals in the “Luton and South Bedfordshire Green Infrastructure Plan”^(ref 6) from 2009 and the “Green Infrastructure Plan for Luton”^(ref 7) from 2015.

3.2. Access enhancements adjacent to the proposed development

Some of the changes needed to support the Luton North development will be outside the development area. The development should support these because:

- Encouraging NMU will be needed to avoid traffic congestion, and
- Residents of North Luton will be isolated from open country by the development. This should be mitigated by improving NMU links.

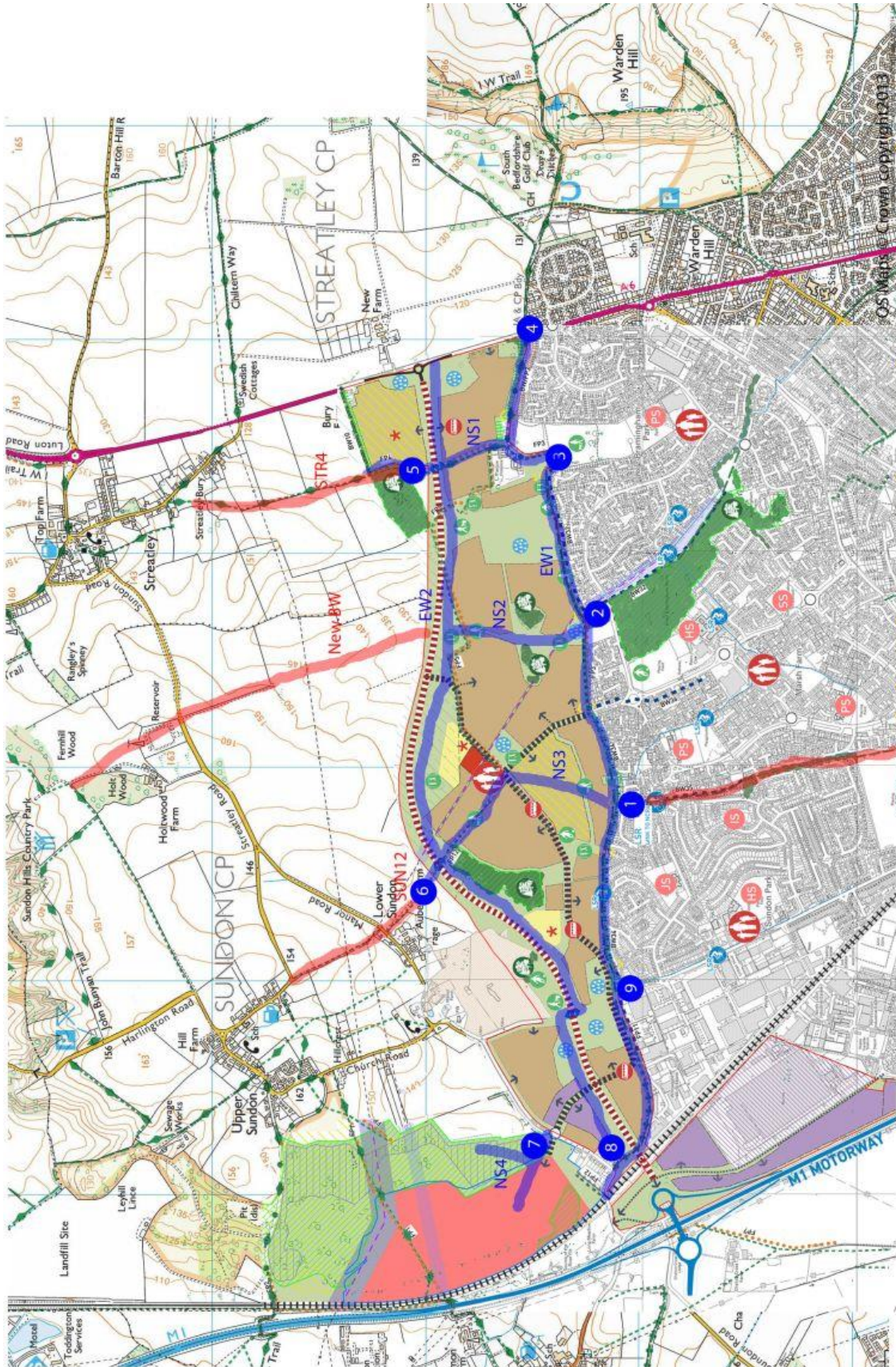
3.3. Key Linkages

Numbers refer to the accompanying plan. These links are described in further detail in the next section.

1. BW35 connection to NCR6 is an important link for NMUs
2. BW32 runs along one side of Great Bramingham wood and can be used as a cycle route to the A6 near Cowslip meadow and to access the Bramingham park shops
3. Access to the green fields of Great Bramingham park and to the shops beyond
4. There needs to be a safe A6 crossing for NMUs including horses
5. STR4 running past George Wood to Streatley and beyond that to Sharpenhoe Clappers
6. SUN12 past Sundon Wood to Upper Sundon and beyond that to Sundon Hills Country Park
7. Sundon Quarry access. This is existing Open Access land. Despite many ‘desire routes’ there is currently no official access from the south (north Luton).
8. The west end of the Theedway joins the Sundon Road to cross the railway and M1. From there you can join the Boundway south of Chalton which provides access to the open country to the west of the motorway and to Houghton Regis and Dunstable.
9. Sundon Park road provides access to Sundon Park employment area and shops/schools.

4. Route Detail

Routes within the development are shown in blue on the plan. Blue circles are the points referenced in the text.



4.1. East-west 1 (EW1)

This is the backbone of the NMU access for the development. Currently this route is a mix of byway, bridleway, footpath and public open space.

The current framework plan identifies the need to provide separation between the new development and the existing housing in Luton. The east end of this corridor is known to contain archaeological remains, which need to be protected.

The developers should take advantage of the width of this corridor to provide a high quality route with segregated access for walkers, cyclists and equestrians. Where 'at grade' road crossings are required then Pegasus crossings should be provided.

East end of EW1 (point 4) provides NMU links to Warden Hills and the countryside beyond. The west end (point 8) of EW1 provides access across the railway and M1 where there is a connection to the Boundway, a byway continuing west on the chalk ridge.

Key considerations for EW1:

- Safe crossing of the A6 (point 4). This is, and will continue to be, a heavy traffic road so a Pegasus crossing is essential.
- Safe crossing of the spine road at Northwell Drive and Sundon Park Road
- Currently in Camford Way the bridleway runs to the south of the road and so crosses the vehicle entry to several businesses. Space should be made in the green edge of the development to provide a route to the north of the road away from road traffic.
- Where the existing byway passes under the proposed new M1/A6 link road the bridge needs to have sufficient height for all NMU users
- The M1 and railway bridge crossing (point 8) need to be safe for NMUs

Key Linkage (point 4): Access to the A6 which has a good cycleway down the east side and across the road to a bridleway leading to Warden and Galley hills. There needs to be a safe A6 crossing for NMUs including horses. The CBC/Luton boundary is close, so the crossing may be in Luton Borough.

Key Linkage (point 8): The byway at the west end of the Theedway (CHL10) joins the Sundon Road to cross the railway and M1. From there you can join the Portway south of Chalton which provides access to the open country to the west of the motorway or to Houghton Regis and Dunstable. The Boundway byway (CHL9) continues west as a byway providing NMU access. The railway and M1 result in a limited number of NMU crossing points. The new M1 junction 11A facilities NMU to access the Sundon over rail bridge. This bridge is a narrow road bridge with a tight turn at the eastern end. To provide an effective NMU crossing there are several options:

- A new rail bridge for NMU – whilst ideal this is extremely expensive
- Utilise the existing road bridge with some traffic control. To enable NMU to use the road safely signalised traffic control to stop motorised traffic would enable equestrian users (and possible cyclists and walkers) to use the bridge without vehicle conflict.
- It is not clear if the road will continue to carry the same high level of traffic. If the road is closed at Lower Sundon by the access road to the RFI terminal then the motorised traffic will be minimal enabling the road bridge to safely accommodate limited vehicles and the NMU.

4.2. East-west 2 (EW2)

Should run to the south of the new M1/A6 link road for most of its length, providing access to pleasant traffic free circular walks/cycle rides when combined with NS corridors, EW1 and more northerly rights of way. Depending on the detailed design it may be preferable to cross this road at the west end of the development as shown on the current plan.

Key considerations for EW2:

- Routed through proposed green corridor
- Safe crossing of any spine roads
- No 'at grade' crossing of the new link road
- Connections into all NS routes

4.3. North-south 1 (NS1)

Links Great Bramingham Park and footpath (STR4) towards Streatley and Sharpenhoe Clappers.

Key considerations for NS1:

- Safe crossing of any spine roads
- No 'at grade' crossing of the link road – particularly if the schools are located to the north of the new M1/A6 link road – to enable safe NMU routes to access this key community facility where all children will be expected to walk or ride to school in accordance with the safer routes to school principles
- Connections into both EW routes
- The existing STR4 should be upgraded to enable use by walkers, equestrians and cyclists, at least within the development boundary to link with STR10
- The future vision would be for a bridleway to link all the way to Streatley and a safe crossing of the A6 to enable connection with STR32

Key Linkage (point 3): Access to the green fields of Great Bramingham park and to the shops beyond.

Key Linkage (point 5): FP4 running past George Wood to Streatley and beyond that to Sharpenhoe Clappers.

4.4. North-south 2 (NS2)

Will link Great Bramingham Wood (point 2) with the proposed schools and George Wood (point 5) to the north of the development.

Key considerations for NS2:

- The current proposed framework plan does not identify this as a NMU route, although a new route to the Sundon Hills country park adjacent to Holt Wood was envisaged in the Sundon and Streatley vision plan^(ref 2). This proposed bridleway is shown on the plan as "New BW"

Key Linkage (point 2): BW32 runs along one side of Great Bramingham wood and can be used as a cycle route to the A6 near Cowslip meadow and to access the Bramingham park shops.

4.5. North-south 3 (NS3)

Provides a link between the bridleway access to NCR6 and the current footpath to Sundon (SUN12). Given its importance in providing access beyond the development it should be routed close to the "Local Centre" and the central schools.

Key considerations for NS3:

- It is essential there are safe NMU routes to access the central community facility where all children will be expected to walk or ride to school as many NMU journey should be encouraged to be without motor vehicles
- The existing SUN12 should be upgraded to enable use by walkers and cyclists, at least within the development boundary, to link with Lower Sundon

- The future vision would be for a bridleway all the way to Upper Sundon and a connection with SUN3 and the wider bridleway network. The Sundon & Streatley Vision plan^(ref 2) identified a requirement to expand the bridleway network in this area.

Key Linkage (point 1): BW35 connection to NCR6 is an important link for NMUs, BW35 runs between houses initially then through a strip of woodland. One mile south you can join NCR6 and travel east to the A6 near Austin Road and into Luton or west under the motorway towards Dunstable and Houghton Regis.

Key Linkage (point 6): SUN12 past Sundon Wood to Upper Sundon and beyond that to Sundon Hills Country Park.

4.5.1. Luton BW35

This will be the key NMU link to NCR6 which provides access to Luton Town Centre and Dunstable/Houghton Regis. It should be enhanced to encourage use by cyclists. Specifics north to south:

- Initially the route is of a good width running between the garden fences with links in to streets. Surface is paving stones. The barriers across the bridleway need to be reviewed in line with latest practice so that cyclists do not have to dismount several times.
- Where the route meets Henge Way there is a short dog-leg where the user has the choice of using the road or a rough track through woods at the north of the road. The route either to the north or south should be tweaked to remove the stagger.
- The first half of the next section runs through a broad strip of woodland and is unsurfaced. It is muddy in winter which discourages use. This section needs to be surfaced.
- At the south side of Leagrave Park a link should be provided to NCR6 at the crossing before the route passes under the railway. Again this should be surfaced.

4.6. North-south 4 (NS4)

Sundon Quarry access. This is existing Open Access land which connects to Sundon Hills country park. There is currently no official access from the south of the quarry, north Luton, but there has been repeated unofficial access created demonstrating a desire from the existing population.

Key considerations for NS4:

- This could be an important green resource close to the new development, so an NMU access route (point 7) from the development should be created
- The route (point 7) may also provide a NMU access to the proposed employment area in the rail freight terminal
- The former quarry Open Access land includes a number of former access tracks that could be enhanced to provide good NMU access.

4.7. North-west of development site

The proposed rail freight terminal is at the north-west of the identified development. The following points should be considered as they were part of the vision anticipated in the CBC cycling strategy. They form an enhancement to the NMU network adjacent to the development site which should be part of the wider NMU access planning and may even provide access for employees to the new businesses.

CHL15 in Chalton parish running north is currently in the process of being upgraded from footpath to bridleway. To provide a vital link between two existing bridleways.

The rail footbridge linking CHL15 & CHL2 replaced a closed level crossing. The bridge is at the southern end of the recently built fifth (freight) rail line. It is likely that any rail freight access will

utilise this fifth line to access the freight terminal. A rail line will disturb the SUN2. Any new bridge should be bridleway standard to link the bridleway network west of the railway with the road on the east. The road to Upper Sundon, is public highway but with a Traffic Regulation Order prohibiting motorised traffic (except for access). The road is currently a good access for NMU and runs through the middle of the Open Access land.

From its junction with SUN2 the path SUN15 continues south to Chalton village on a track which could be upgraded to bridleway standard. In anticipation, when the M1 bridge parapets were replaced in 2014, Central Bedfordshire paid Highways England to make the parapets suitable for bridleway usage.

5. References

- (1) Adopted NL Framework Plan 31 March 2015_tcm6-65805²
- (2) Access and Green Space Vision Plan – Sundon & Streatley Chiltern Arc – September 2013³
- (3) CBC Outdoor Access Improvement Plan⁴
- (4) CBC Rights of Way policies⁵
- (5) CBC Cycle & Walking Strategy documents⁶
- (6) Luton and South Bedfordshire Green Infrastructure Plan – 2009⁷
- (7) A Green Infrastructure Plan for Luton - 2015⁸

² www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/planning/strategic-planning/planning-policy/framework-plan-luton-sundon.aspx

³ www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/environment/countryside/outdoor-access-projects-countryside.aspx

⁴ www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/environment/countryside/oaip.aspx

⁵ www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/environment/countryside/public-rights-of-way/default.aspx

⁶ www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/planning/strategic-planning/transport-strategy/default.aspx see under 'what it says'

⁷ www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/Images/South%20Bedfordshire%20Green%20Infrastructure%20plan_tcm6-8582.pdf

⁸ www.luton.gov.uk/Environment/Lists/LutonDocuments/PDF/Planning/Local%20Plan/A%20green%20infrastructure%20plan%20for%20Luton%20-%20March%202015.pdf

6. Existing Rights of Way Plan

Brown – byway, green – bridleway, purple – footpath. Not to scale. Path names refer to parish/path number/path link – the text uses parish & path number

