

REPORT

Rickman's Green Village Transport Assessment Annex C

Proposed Bus Service Technical Note

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1 Introduction

1.1 Background

This report builds on a feasibility study undertaken in August 2022 that looked at options for the provision of bus services for the proposed Rickman's Green Village development of 600 homes, 2-form entry primary school and community facilities at a site 1km south of Plaistow in West Sussex.

The proposed timescales for the development are:

- Rickman's Green Village Phase 1 - Full planning application for the erection of 108 dwellings (Use Class C3), and associated access and street network, footpaths, open spaces, plant, landscaping and site infrastructure (commencement on site June 2025, with full occupation by 2028).
- Rickman's Green Village Phase 2 - Outline planning application for the erection of up to 492 dwellings (Use Class C3) with education provision including primary school (Use Class F1) and associated access, footpaths, open spaces, landscaping and site infrastructure. All matters reserved other than access. (commencement on site May 2027, with full occupation by 2036. School open September 2030 with 60 pupils and reaching full capacity by September 2037).

Also of relevance is the complementary Whole Farm Plan development proposals (application 22/01735/FULEIA, including farm diversification offering a rural food and retail centre, rural enterprise centre, equestrian centre and glamping site. These activities are expected to generate employment for 140 full time equivalent staff.

1.2 Previous Recommendations in Respect of Bus Provision

The previous feasibility study explored various options for public transport services to serve the proposed development, recognising that a sufficiently attractive service would be needed to encourage usage. However, it noted that the development itself would only create modest levels of demand, which would be insufficient to warrant the provision of an extensive network of bus services. Therefore, it was recommended that an appropriate way forward would be to focus on a shuttle service between Rickman's Green Village and Billingshurst, as a dominant corridor of demand. This would offer most benefits in terms of a link to the nearest town with a range of facilities, including a rail station, and the opportunity to connect with an existing bus service for onward travel to Broadbridge Heath and Horsham.

The study also recognised that there may be opportunities to create links northwards from Rickman's Green Village. This would be best achieved by coordinating with the network of bus services that would be put in place to serve the larger development at Dunsfold Airfield.

1.3 Further Investigation

This report sets out further considerations on the provision of bus services and seeks to develop the proposals, reflecting on additional discussions, information collation and ideas. Meetings were held with officers of West Sussex County Council's (WSCC) Passenger Transport Team and local bus operator, Compass Travel. Some details of an existing shared taxi service in the area (Billilinks) emerged from the discussions. Furthermore, of relevance, is another nearby development proposal for a holiday/leisure complex at the former Foxbridge Golf Club.



This report continues by discussing the bus service proposals and updated position first, then goes on to consider some of the aspects of the proposed service and how it might be implemented in more detail.

2 Proposed Public Transport Provision

2.1 General Considerations

To meet the sustainable travel objectives of the Rickman's Green Village development, any public transport provision needs to be:

- Convenient
- Frequent
- Responsive to needs
- Direct
- Comfortable

The overall aim should be to provide a service that is suitably attractive, offering a real alternative to car travel. This will require it to offer a range of destinations and to cater for different journey purposes, including employment, shopping, personal business, education and extra-curricular activities, and leisure and recreational activities.

The site's rural location, away from significant centres of population and activity, gives several challenges for providing public transport:

- Distances to desired destinations
- Ability to serve a range of destinations
- Ability to provide comprehensive provision every day of the week and throughout each day

There is a need for public transport to be able to meet many needs, to avoid people defaulting to car use. However, this is equally difficult to gauge without knowing about the actual people who will be attracted to live at Rickman's Green Village and their precise needs. However, it will be important to have a detailed public transport plan from the outset, in order that potential residents can see what is on offer and how this will enable them to live more sustainably. Further, there are downstream benefits from providing an improved bus service, as it offers the potential to reduce impacts by diverting existing road users remote from Rickman's Green Village, from car to public transport.

The proposals for public transport provision are based on providing as attractive service as possible, relative to the size and scope of the development. Service design is based around the principles of:

- Efficient deployment of resources
- Offering a range of destinations, but with a focus on the largest potential flows and demands
- Building on and around existing public transport services

The overall ultimate plan would be to provide services that directly link Rickman's Green Village to Cranleigh, Billingshurst and Horsham, along with a number of intermediate places along the line of route, including some of the nearby villages. This would provide a suitably attractive network, both to residents and those seeking to travel to the site for employment and other activities. In being operated as registered local bus services, the routes would also be attractive to other people living along them.

Many rural areas of the country are served only by occasional or low frequency bus services, which are unattractive. It is recognised across the industry that to be attractive bus services need to be sufficiently

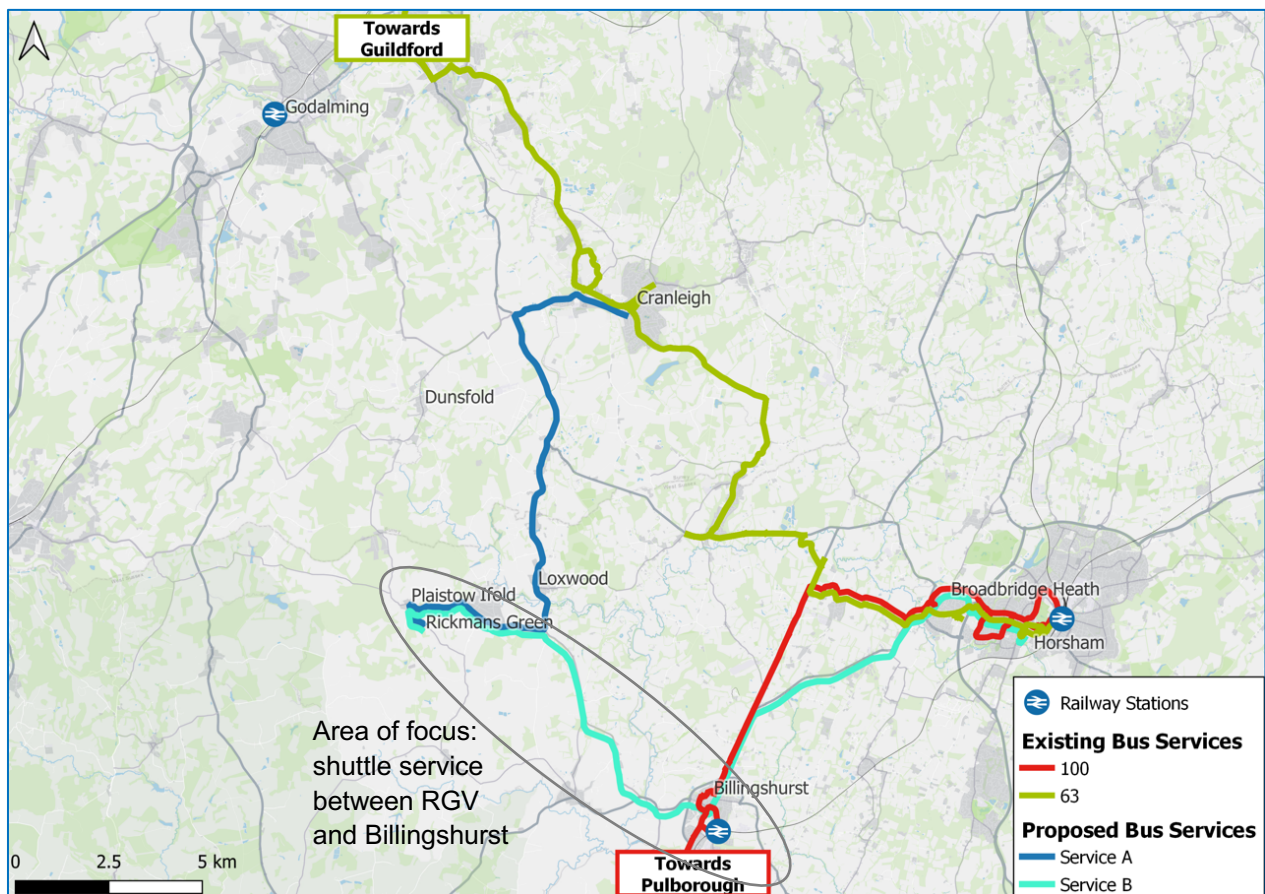
frequent, operate at regular headways (i.e. at the same time past each hour) and comprehensive (i.e. operate throughout the day and evening and at weekends).

2.2 Proposed Bus Services

Based on the travel demand data and assessments provided, key destinations for residents of the Rickman’s Green Village area include Cranleigh, Billingshurst and Horsham. These destinations offer a mix of different facilities and services, including employment, education, shopping, personal business, leisure and recreation. There would also be the ability to connect at those places with bus or rail services to other destinations further afield, such as Guildford, Chichester and London.

With the above considerations in mind, the feasibility of two potential new bus services was previously explored:

- Service A: Rickman’s Green Village – Cranleigh
- Service B: Rickman’s Green Village – Billingshurst – Horsham



The feasibility study recommended the provision of a shuttle service between Rickman’s Green Village and Billingshurst. This would be a variation on Service B (as shown in the above plan) and offer a good level of service directly to the nearest key destination, with the potential to connect with trains to various other destinations (including London) and/or bus service 100 to and from Horsham. By concentrating demand on one destination, rather than splitting the demand across a number of services,

the shuttle service might improve the chance of being viable in the longer term. Furthermore, by offering connections with service 100 to/from Horsham, the viability of that service might also be improved.

To achieve connections with existing bus service 100 to/from Horsham, it would be necessary for a half-hourly shuttle service to run, using two buses. This would provide some spare time in Billingshurst for different routing options to try and achieve:

- Convenient access to the different facilities in the town.
- Optimal interchange location with service 100.
- Access to/from the railway station for rail connections in both directions (towards London and Bognor Regis).

2.3 Discussions Regarding Proposals

2.3.1 West Sussex County Council

In a meeting with West Sussex County Council (WSCC) officers, the findings of the feasibility study and a range of relevant matters were discussed. Key points were as follows:

- Agreement that it was appropriate to focus on the link between Rickman's Green Village and Billingshurst, where connections with other bus and rail services would be possible.
- Unlikelihood that such a new service would become commercially sustainable, based on the evidence of other bus services in the area. Service 100, for example, is an important service using five buses, but is entirely supported financially by the County Council.
- An existing pre-booked shared taxi service (Billilinks) serves the area, providing links from Plaistow, Ifold, Kirdford and Loxwood to and from Billingshurst. This has been in operation for over 10 years and is supported by the County Council. Run by Jake's Cards, and underwritten by WSCC, the service offers travel opportunities about every 2 hours through the daytime and limited evening travel. Passengers are charged £2.50 (no concessions for holders of bus passes). The service seems to have minimal publicity.
- There are likely to be concerns about buses using the country lanes in the area. However, the school bus (service 500) that operates to The Weald School, Billingshurst, from the area is a double deck vehicle.
- More families moving into the area is likely to increase the number of eligible pupils requiring home to school transport. As existing school service 500 is already close to capacity, it is likely that some additional transport would be required. It was acknowledged that the proposed shuttle bus service could provide this capacity, with the costs of those particular journeys borne by the County Council, as this is likely to be more cost effective than procuring a separate bus.
- Procurement of a new service for the Rickman's Green Village development would need to be the responsibility of the developer or its agent, as the County Council would not wish to be exposed to any revenue risk. Based on current experience, there is unlikely to be much competition from operators to run the service.
- Of note, is the demand from the local area to attend college in Godalming. Post-16 students receive no support from the County Council for travel. As there is no direct transport available, some parents drive students to/from Dunsfold to use bus service 42 to/from Godalming.

2.3.2 Compass Travel

Compass Travel provides an extensive network of bus services, including a number of services in the area around Rickman's Green Village. Discussion points with the operator included:

- Current difficulties for operators, particularly finding and retaining drivers and lack of willingness to drive in evenings and at weekends.
- Limited number of operators in the area that are interested in running local bus services. Provision of a local base (outstation) for buses within the new development might help operators in some circumstances.
- Existence of the Billilinks shared taxi service.
- The importance of ensuring that people moving to live on the new development, or those working there, are strongly encouraged and signed up to using public transport and other alternatives to private car use, such as on-site car club.

2.3.3 Redevelopment of Foxbridge Golf Club

Of relevance to the Rickman's Green Village development is the proposal for the nearby Foxbridge Golf Club (on Foxbridge Lane, that joins Rickman's Lane) to be redeveloped. The proposal is for a wellbeing and leisure development with 121 holiday units and a 50-bedroom hotel, spa, health club and farm shop. When complete, it would support 75 jobs.

The proposed development's Travel Plan suggests that the proposals will create 667 two-way vehicle trips per on weekdays and 737 on weekend days.

There is a proposal to arrange subsidised taxi or minibus transport for staff, along with an on-request pre-booked minibus to pick-up and drop-off guests at various points, such as Billingshurst Rail Station. 5 years after opening, it aims to have a public transport mode share of 8%.

The Travel Plan notes that the nearest bus stops are on Rickman's Lane at a distance of about 550m (7 minutes' walk or 1 minute cycle ride).

To facilitate the development, improvements will be made to passing places along Foxbridge Lane.

3 Implementation Considerations

3.1 Demand

The final estimate of trips associated with the Rickman's Green Village proposals will be set out in Annex B of the Transport Assessment.

The Transport Scoping Report produced for the Rickman's Green Village development provides an initial estimate of potential trip rates. Using the vision-led rate, which is appropriate given the development's ambitions in respect of sustainability, it is estimated that there would be 148 public transport journeys per day, out of a total of 4,547 person journeys for the 600 dwellings, plus 79 public transport journeys for the proposed primary school, out of a total of 1920 person journeys. This suggests a mode share for public transport between 3 and 4%, which is higher than would typically be expected in rural areas. However, the bus service proposed is significantly better than that seen in most rural areas of the country.

The above estimates do not include journeys made for employment at the development, such as the rural enterprise centre. Therefore, more public transport journeys might come from people travelling to/from work, particularly if free or discounted travel is offered.

The figures above, on school days, equate to an average of about 14 passenger journeys per hour (assuming that a service operates 16 hours per day). However, given the very good level of service envisaged, along with free travel for residents, it is anticipated that more passengers would be attracted to use it. Furthermore, if the service also provides a duplicate to school service 500 to The Weald School, as has been identified as potentially viable, this will generate further additional passengers.

The service is not designed to be exclusively for Rickman's Green Village, with the intention of attracting additional use. There are various route options that would allow the inclusion of some local villages. This may also generate further use in the future, although clearly it will take time as residents will be very car dependent.

Furthermore, consideration should be given to the opportunities presented by the redevelopment of Foxbridge Golf Club. There may be scope for that development in future to contribute to the further enhancement of the Rickman's Green Village – Billingshurst shuttle bus to meet some or all of its own Travel Plan commitments, rather than lay on its own dedicated transport for staff and visitors in perpetuity. This would be subject to future discussions should both developments be consented.

Based on the forecasted trips associated with the Foxbridge Golf Club proposed development, and the target of an 8% mode share for public transport, there could be some 53 passenger journeys per weekday and 59 per weekend day to use the service.

3.2 Route

The intention is for the route to provide a direct link between Rickman's Green Village and Billingshurst. However, this could be achieved in several different ways, all of which could be achieved within the proposed timetable.

The longest route (14.2km) via Plaistow and Ifold would open the service to other potential local users, which would help increase usage and fares revenue.

Alternatively, the bus could be routed via Kirdford (13.3km), again allowing local usage for residents of that village. As part of the local engagement regarding the Rickman's Green Village proposals, interest in the bus service was expressed by a resident of Kirdford particularly with respect to its potential for school journeys to Plaistow.

Finally, the bus could run via Foxbridge Lane, to serve the Foxbridge Golf Club leisure development (12.3km). However, this road is narrow and has passing places, so not ideal as a bus route, although it would presumably be used by delivery vans and lorries serving the hotel and leisure complex and is currently used by large vehicles in any case.

Travel time via each of the routes is not significantly different.

A better option to serve the development would be for pedestrian access to be provided directly from the southwest corner of the site out onto the Rickman's Lane / Foxbridge Lane junction, where new bus stops, hardstanding and shelters could be provided. This would enable people to access the bus service without it needing to be routed via Foxbridge Lane or for them to walk along that lane. The bus stops would be served by the bus running via Kirdford.

To provide maximum coverage, it would be possible for alternate buses to run via Plaistow / Ifold or Kirdford. This would create a circular route, providing the ability for people to travel between any of the villages.

In Billingshurst, the timetable will provide sufficient flexibility to run via various points, including the railway station and town centre. This might vary through the day depending on the necessity to facilitate connections with trains and other buses, such as the 100 to/from Horsham, or to meet particular demands. Details will be finalised nearer to the time when the service needs to be procured, so account can be taken of the up-to-date timetables for buses and trains.

3.3 Timetable

As previously indicated, the recommendation is for a seven-day per week service, operating half-hourly during the daytime (Monday – Saturday) and hourly in the evenings and on Sunday. The indicative timetable below illustrates the general timetable principles, in terms of regularity and frequency. However, it is likely that a final timetable would be refined to make allowance for particular connections with trains and other buses, and to meet specific requirements, such as journeys for pupils travelling to/from school. The timetable offers some flexibility to accommodate these, given the 15 minutes that buses will have in Billingshurst. Regardless of the detailed requirements and timetabling, the half-hourly service can be achieved using two buses and the hourly service with one.

As previously indicated, the timetable has sufficient flexibility to accommodate alternative routes between Rickman's Green Village and Billingshurst. Equally, it should be resilient in terms of being able to maintain punctuality throughout the day. Using average travel times throughout the day on Google Maps, there is limited variation, with the worst case seeing journey times extended by five minutes. The nature of the route means there is limited scope for significant congestion, only some local hold-ups at times in Billingshurst itself. The timetable has some built in recovery time in Billingshurst, such that minor hold-ups will not be a problem.

Monday to Saturday										
Rickman's Green Village	0610	0640	0710	0740	Then at same times past each hour	1840	1910	2010	2110	2210
Billingshurst	0630	0700	0730	0800		1900	1930	2030	2130	2230
Billingshurst	0645	0715	0745	0815		1915	1945	2045	2145	2245
Rickman's Green Village	0705	0735	0805	0835		1935	2005	2105	2205	2305
Sunday										
Rickman's Green Village	0710	0810	Then at same times past each hour	1710	1810	1910	2010			
Billingshurst	0730	0830		1730	1830	1930	2030			
Billingshurst	0845	0945		1745	1845	1945	2045			
Rickman's Green Village	0905	1005		1805	1905	2005	2105			

3.4 Wider Integration

The planning and delivery of a bus service for Rickman's Green Village offers a number of opportunities for integration with other services, either to improve service for users and/or to achieve overall efficiencies in the deployment of vehicles and drivers. It will be important to seek a coordinated approach to avoid duplicated effort and provision, with interested parties coming together to discuss options.

Opportunities may exist with each of the following regarding the Rickman's Green – Billingshurst shuttle service:

- Coordination with the Billilinks shared taxi service, particularly at times of low demand or when more flexibility in travel arrangements might be required.
- Provision of home to school transport service to/from The Weald School (on behalf of WSCC) and potentially for those travelling to/from the new primary school at Rickman's Green Village.
- Combining provision to meet the transport requirements of both Rickman's Green Village and Foxbridge Golf Club developments.

A significant opportunity for a more coordinated approach to public transport enhancement is presented by the large development planned at Dunsfold Airfield, a few miles north of Rickman's Green Village. The planning agreement sets out a phased introduction of supported bus services, commencing with a flexible transport service and then fixed route services providing links to Cranleigh, Guildford, Godalming and Horsham. Ultimately, it is envisaged that during the main daytime period buses would run every 15 minutes to Cranleigh and every 30 minutes to Guildford, Godalming and Horsham. Therefore, if a bus service was provided between Rickman's Green Village and Dunsfold, it would be possible to link into, or coordinate with, that wider network and offer access to more destinations. Equally, those services would benefit from increased usage.

If a half-hourly service was to be operated between Dunsfold, Rickman's Green Village and Billingshurst, three buses would be required, rather than the two needed to run the Rickman's Green Village to Billingshurst shuttle. However, the integrated network may offer overall efficiencies and be jointly funded by the two developments, given the more attractive service for residents of both developments. For instance, it would create a link for students travelling to/from college in Godalming.

3.5 Vehicles

The timetable set out above requires two buses. Based on the intensity and duration of the services and industry average costs, estimated overall costs could be of the order of £200k per vehicle per year (i.e., total of £400k p.a.), less any fares revenue. Costs of bus operations are currently experiencing inflationary pressures, particularly due to driver shortages and rising costs of fuel and maintenance.

The actual cost will depend on various factors, including the precise size and types of vehicles used on the service. The suggested costs above would cover the provision of mid to full size single deck buses seating 33-43 passengers, with wheelchair/buggy space. However, on the basis of the forecast usage, the service could be operated by smaller vehicles, such as minibuses based on the Mercedes Sprinter, which would be useful on the country roads. This would reduce the costs slightly, but a significant element of the cost is the driver, which remains the same regardless of vehicle size.

The key deciding factor on vehicle size will be the peak load factor. This is likely to occur if and when the service is used to transport pupils to/from school.

Many areas are seeing the introduction of battery electric buses. These have mainly been confined to use on urban bus routes, but as battery life is extended, they will be more common on longer distance services. Electric buses have a range of 160 miles. This may not be sufficient for the operation of the Rickman's Green Village services without some opportunity charging during the day.

Electric vehicles remain significantly more costly than diesel to purchase, although many operators are choosing to use leasing agreements. Most bus operators are preferring overnight plug-in charging, rather than looking to provide infrastructure to facilitate opportunity charging throughout the day.

Whilst current cost estimates are based on the provision of diesel vehicles (with Euro VI emission standards), the use of electric vehicles should be kept under review, as designs and technology are changing quickly. Battery life may continue to improve and production costs may reduce.

3.6 Supporting Infrastructure

For the proposed bus services to be as convenient as possible, it is recommended that they run into the development itself (west of Rickman's Lane). As such, it will be necessary to provide a turning place. A turning circle will allow buses to turn without reversing manoeuvres. A bus stop and shelter (with seating and well lit) should be provided for waiting passengers. Such an arrangement has been identified in Section 6.4 of the submitted Transport Assessment

Additionally, there will be a need for bus stops on Rickman's Lane, to serve the part of the development on the east side of the lane. Again, these should have hardstanding, shelter and seating and potential locations (subject to WSCC agreement) are identified in Annex A of the Transport Assessment as part of the wider off-site works proposals.

Service users would be reassured if real time information displays were provided at the bus stops, showing the times of next departures and whether they were subject to any delay. If this was not practically possible, it could be possible to provide such information to people's smartphones via QR codes displayed at the stops.

3.7 Fares

It is recommended that the bus services are registered as local bus services, so they can be used by the public and fares charged, in order to create a revenue stream to help off-set costs. Equally, the operator will be eligible to claim Bus Service Operator Grant (BSOG), a rebate on fuel duty paid. [Note that BSOG is currently under review by the Department for Transport]. For diesel buses, this currently amounts to 34.57p per litre. There is an 8% uplift for vehicles that have operational smartcard systems and a further 2% increase for vehicles fitted with automatic vehicle location (AVL) equipment, which the majority are as part of the electronic ticket machines used (and is necessary for any real time information system).

Zero emission buses attract a BSOG rate of 22p per km.

English National Concessionary Travel Scheme (ENCTS) passes will also be valid for free travel, and reimbursement for these journeys claimable from each of the local authorities through whose areas the services pass.

In order that bus services are attractive to use, residents of Rickman's Green Village should be provided with free travel, based on showing some proof of eligibility. Equally, the same could be provided to employees at businesses at Rickman's Green Village (the Whole Farm Plan), which would aid recruitment.

In view of the coordination envisaged with existing bus service 100, it will be necessary to negotiate free travel arrangements with the operator, and some payment agreed for this, which could be based on records of actual usage.

It is recommended that fares be charged to all other passengers, to help offset some of the costs. However, reflecting the Transport Strategy for Rickman's Green Village, as well as the recognition of the need to encourage active and sustainable travel between the local villages (as part of the 15-minute community model), special 'very low' fares could be usefully considered for people travelling to or from Kirdford, Plaistow, and Ifold. As the new services will transform levels of public transport available to these (and other villages close to Rickman's Green Village), discounted fares could be offered generally to residents of these places to incentivise usage.

3.8 Procurement of the Service

The new service will need to be arranged and managed through a procurement process. This is likely to be required to be undertaken directly by the developer or its agent, which would then have direct influence over the services and their operation.

It is unlikely that the proposed bus service would be commercially viable. If the service is to be sustained in the longer term, it would be appropriate for the developer or ultimate site management organisation to take responsibility for the bus services. This would enable service changes to be negotiated and implemented more easily in response to changing requirements associated with the development. This might be particularly appropriate if the site management organisation continues to fund the services from management fees charged to all residents and businesses.

There are two types of contracting arrangements commonly used for the procurement of bus services. Cost-based contracts are where a set charge is agreed for the overall operation of the service. The contracting body takes responsibility for setting fares and taking the risk on the fares revenue, which is credited back to the organisation. Subsidy-based contracts are where the operator takes the risk on revenue and agrees a set price for the service and keeps any fares revenue collected. The latter provides some incentive for the operator to market and develop the service to encourage more usage. However, it is likely that an operator

will take a pessimistic view on likely usage and revenue (particularly if a significant proportion of users are provided with free travel), such that the cost in either approach will be similar.

Key to achieving reasonable prices from the procurement exercise will be the ability to generate interest from operators and some competition for the contract. Therefore, it will be important to carry out some market engagement beforehand, perhaps seeking views from operators about preferences for the way they would wish to deliver the service.

3.9 Service Patronage

Bus services in rural areas tend not to be well used. This is due to a combination of factors – unattractive levels of service, sparse population, dispersed demand and high levels of car ownership and use. Clearly, the intention for the service proposed between Rickman’s Green Village and Billingshurst is to challenge these norms by offering a very attractive, comprehensive bus service – not only in terms of levels of service, but also by being low cost or free to use. This should help to encourage usage. However, it will take time to establish and build use.

Completion of all 600 dwellings will create demand, but it will take some time before this is achieved. However, it is not possible to wait to introduce the service part-way through the build process. To maximise the chance of encouraging people to use the service the service needs to be in place before they move and promoted as part of the marketing of the development to prospective buyers. Therefore, the service needs to be in place at first occupation.

This will mean in the early months of the service being in place that usage will be relatively small and used more by people from the nearby villages. The service might be expected to carry 20-30 passengers per day, representing an average of possibly less than 1 passenger per bus journey.

It can take six months for a new bus service to become established and sufficiently recognised for people to try it out. It will be important for the service to be promoted well to different target audiences for different journey purposes and amongst different user groups.

Ultimately, based on the estimated trip rates from the Transport Scoping Report, the development could generate 227 passenger journeys per day (weekdays). Adding in journeys for employment at Rickman’s Green Village and wider use by existing residents of local villages, the number of passenger journeys might rise to 400 per day. This would give an average of approximately six passengers per bus journey to and from the Crouchlands Farm site, with additional passengers made up from other locations on the route.

4 Conclusion

This report confirms the feasibility of a regular bus service between Rickman's Green Village and Billingshurst. The deployment of two buses will allow an attractive half-hourly service to be offered, linking the development and the nearest place offering a range of facilities as well as connections to other public transport services.

The report highlights how the basic service pattern has the flexibility to accommodate different routing and connections options, which can be refined over time to suit emerging needs and demands. Crucially, as time goes on, it will be important to be mindful of any opportunities for wider integration with other services to achieve the benefits of economies of scale and operational efficiencies.