

Rural Mobility Fund

Call for Expressions of Interest

Application Form

Applicant Information

Bidding authority: Suffolk County Council

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Additional evidence, such as letters of support, or maps should be included in an annex.

Applications to the Fund will be assessed against the criteria set out below.

Submission of proposals:

Proposals must be received no later than 1700 on **Thursday 4th June 2020**.

An electronic copy only of the bid including any supporting material should be submitted to betterdeal4buses@dft.gov.uk with 'Rural Mobility Fund' in the subject line.

Enquiries about the Fund may be directed to betterdeal4buses@dft.gov.uk

Transparency and Privacy

Please refer to the guidance for this scheme before completing your application to understand how DfT will manage your data.

SECTION 1: Defining the area

This section seeks evidence to confirm eligibility against the definition of the rural or suburban area to be covered by the on-demand solution within the bidding authority.

Bidders should:

- **Name the area**, and include a map showing the proposed area in which the demand responsive transport service will operate.
- **Explain how the area meets the eligibility criteria against either the definition of rural or suburban area** as set out in the guidance. This should also include, where relevant, links to urban areas that the services will provide local residents access to.

1.1 Geographical area:

Please name the area within the local authority that will be covered by the demand responsive transport solution. Include information setting out the extent of the rural or suburban area covered in the proposal and a description.

West Suffolk (West)

This Rural Mobility bid focuses on providing a transport service to four rural villages that are located in the district areas of West Suffolk. The four rural villages are: Lidgate, Ousden, Hawkedon and Hundon, and are referred to in this Expression of Interest as the West Suffolk (West) cluster (see map attached in the appendices as Figure 1).

The district of West Suffolk has five key service towns, two of which, Newmarket and Bury St Edmunds, serve the West Suffolk (West) cluster and are located (on average) between 10 and 11 miles from the four rural villages. Each of the rural villages are dependent on the towns for access to education, health and grocery facilities. There are also transport dependencies between the rural villages, for example employment at the HMP Highpoint, located in Hundon. Employment is mostly contained in the market towns of Bury St Edmunds and Newmarket. No commercial public transport services exist between Hundon and Hawkedon to Bury St Edmunds and Newmarket. A limited morning and afternoon sponsored bus service operates between Lidgate and Ousden to Newmarket and Bury St Edmunds.

Bury St Edmunds is the primary centre for Post-16 education, being home to West Suffolk College and the new 6th Form Centre, which will provide education to students from across the whole of the West Suffolk district. Bury St Edmunds, Haverhill and Newmarket are also the main centres for employment and leisure, with Newmarket providing employment in its horse racing and bloodstock industry, and Bury St Edmunds offering a more diverse economy with employment in food manufacturing, retail, IT and financial services.

Data captured by the Department for Transport shows that journey time from the four villages to employment is on average 30 minutes by car.

Two of the closest railway stations are located in Bury St Edmunds and Newmarket which provide an hourly service to Ipswich, Stowmarket and Cambridge.

1.2 Rural or suburban area eligibility:

Explain how the area meets the eligibility criteria against either the definition of rural areas or of suburban areas set out above. This should also include, where relevant, links to any urban areas that the services will provide local residents access to.

We will not accept bids that do not meet the definition of rural or suburban area as explained in the eligibility criteria.

This Expression of Interest proposes to deliver a new transport service in four rural settlements: Lidgate, Ousden, Hawkedon and Hundon (all of which are categorised by DEFRA's Rural/Urban 2011 classification as rural villages) and connect them with the market towns of Bury St Edmunds and Newmarket.

The district of West Suffolk is a mix of rural and urban areas, with local services dispersed and employment mostly contained in the market towns of Bury St Edmunds, Newmarket and Haverhill.

The district of West Suffolk is categorised by the Government's Rural Urban Classification as 'largely rural', with 43% of its Medium Super Output Areas defined as 'rural'. The district is comprised of 122 villages. 59 villages are classed as 'rural', and the remaining 63 villages are classed as either 'urban', 'mid urban', 'outer urban' or 'urban/rural' (Healthy Suffolk, 2016).

In 2016, West Suffolk had a population of 177,385 residents. Over 40% (71,750 residents) of the population live in areas outside of the urban towns. Of that 40% population, 10% of the population is between the ages of 10 and 19, with 49% of the population being of working age, and 27% of the population is over the age of 60-years-old. (Source – Office for National Statistics, 2016 – latest available small area data).

The combined population of the West Suffolk (West) cluster is 2,372. Approximately 8% of the population is between the ages of 10 and 19 years old; 65% of the population is between the ages of 20 and 60 years old; and 27% of the population is over the age of 60 years old.

Bus service provision to rural communities within West Suffolk varies, with some villages having infrequent passenger transport services, to other areas having none at all. The 2011 Travel to Work Census data shows that the average distance to employment in West Suffolk is over 10-miles and that journeys to work by car is significantly above national average.

SECTION 2: Setting out the challenges

This section seeks a description of challenges faced by local residents in accessing services within the operating area. Local authorities should:

- **Explain the challenges faced by local residents in accessing services within the operating area**, and who those local residents are. This could include data on population-density and demographics of the population in the area.
- **Clearly describe the local transport offer**. This could include the number of operators (both commercial and non-commercial operators), size of the bus fleet in the area, existing routes offered (commercial, tendered or community transport services), and areas which are not served by those routes as well as lack of transport provision.

Data and maps from the Department for Transport Public Service Vehicle Survey will be used to assess changes in mileage in the operating area.

Evidence must be provided that the current transport offer in the area in which the demand responsive transport service will operate are not sufficient to meet the needs of local residents.

- **Explain the challenges faced by local authorities or bus operators in maintaining or providing transport services to meet the needs of local residents**, and why Government funding is needed.

2.1: Challenges faced by local residents

We recognise that each area will see different challenges. Supporting evidence on the challenges facing local residents could cover the following:

- *Population without access to regular timetabled bus service*
- *Accessibility requirements*
- *Missed GP and NHS appointments through lack of access to bus services*
- *Evidence of residents unable to access other local services within the operating area*
- *Population 16+ unable to access school or college via public transport*
- *Population not in work due to lack of public transport options*
- *Population demographics and population-density*
- *Any other relevant information*

The combined population of the four rural villages is 2,372 residents and all have either limited access or no access to local services. The villages of Ousden, Lidgate and Hundon have an infrequent public transport service. One sponsored bus service operates from the villages to Bury St Edmunds and Newmarket in the morning and one bus service in the afternoon. Access to the nearest railway station is also over 9 miles from the four rural villages. Key services such as grocery stores, employment and education, are located between 7 and 9 miles away from the four settlements.

Access to Post-16 education is particularly difficult for young people living in Hawkedon who have no bus service operating in their village, as well as for young people living in Lidgate and Ousden, where the bus service is limited. A high proportion of people leaving education in West Suffolk with GCSEs is below the national average (with only 23% attaining qualifications above a GCSE level) and take up of further education is also below the national average. Access to education is one of the key factors influencing young people's decisions about whether to remain in education. In the West Suffolk (West) cluster the number of people without any qualifications is higher than the national average.

The Local Plans for St Edmundsbury and Forest Heath both identify 'poor access to jobs' from rural settings and 'the quality of the transport system' as key economic issues that

need to be addressed in the district. People of working age living in the four rural villages have limited or no access to public transport services. They are therefore dependent upon the car to access centres of employment in Bury St Edmunds and Newmarket, where railway stations are also located. The villages that form the West Suffolk (West) cluster all have the high levels of fuel poverty when compared to other areas across the county, with Ousden, Lidgate and Hawkedon having some of the highest levels of fuel poverty in the county.

Average income levels in West Suffolk are also poor and are an indication of the number of people in low-wage jobs. The village of Hundon has one of the highest number of children in the county living in low-income two parent families and has one of the largest number of people in the county who are in long-term unemployment.

The district of West Suffolk has a higher proportion of older people living in the rural areas than in the towns. This is also prevalent in the four rural villages where people over the age of 60-years-old make up a bigger percentage of the population than the younger groups. The transport needs of the older population is served by community transport – but this is not a transport service that young people and people of a working age feel is reliable for their transport needs, as community transport requires a door-to-door service to assist older people who may have mobility issues, meaning that journey times and vehicle availability can be unpredictable and unreliable.

2.2: Current local transport offer

Please provide details on your current local transport offer. This could include the number of operators both commercial and non-commercial, size of bus fleet in the area, existing routes offered (e.g. commercial, tendered services or community transport operators) and areas not served by those routes as well as lack of transport provision)

Bids will not be accepted if sufficient evidence is not provided that the current transport offer is not able to meet the needs of local residents.

In the West Suffolk (West) cluster, commercial bus services are provided to key towns and urban areas (see bus route maps attached, as Figure 1) where the population size is bigger than the surrounding rural villages or where passenger demand is prevalent.

One bus operator, Mulleys, operates a sponsored service that provides one bus service from Lidgate, Ousden and Hundon to Bury St Edmunds in the morning and one bus service to Lidgate, Ousden and Hundon in the evening. No bus service operates in the rural villages of Hawkedon.

Where a commercial or subsidised bus service is not operational in rural villages in the West Suffolk (West) cluster, community transport operators provide a transport service. Suffolk County Council has a contract with a transport operator called TVN, which serves the district. The transport operator has a fleet of five minibuses on Section 19 and 22 Permits and one wheelchair accessible vehicle operating on a Section 19 Permit. The TVN service is also supported by volunteer community car services.

The community transport services are a pre-booked transport service, using a telephone contact centre or an online form. Concessionary bus passes are not accepted on the service. Passengers can opt to exchange concessionary bus passes for the Suffolk Travel Voucher Scheme for use on the Connecting Communities services. The value of these vouchers is £100 per annum.

In West Suffolk during 2019 – 2020, 14,640 journeys were undertaken by community transport. Over the same period, 262 instances were recorded where community transport could not meet requested transport needs in the district due to vehicle availability at the time of the request. This is an increase of 33 instances on the previous year, which is an indication that demand in West Suffolk is increasing and goes beyond the capability of the community transport service. This has a knock-on effect on the reliability of the service and the confidence of young people to use it.

The limited operating hours of the taxi-bus service (which operates between the hours of 7am and 7pm) also means that young people are unable to access leisure activities. The taxi-bus service we are proposing will operate 7 days a week (7am – 11pm Monday to Saturday, and 10am to 6pm on a Sunday) allowing people to access leisure activities and helping the evening economy.

Rail services from Bury St Edmunds and Newmarket stations provide an hourly rail service to Ipswich and Cambridge, as well as the urban area of Stowmarket.

2.3: Challenges faced by local authorities and bus operators in providing transport services.

Please provide details of the challenges faced by local authorities in subsidising socially necessary services or bus operators in maintaining or providing services, and why government funding is needed. Supporting evidence could include:

- Total passenger numbers
- Number of ENCTS passengers compared to fare paying passengers
- Revenue information
- Passengers using other concessions such as jobseekers or youth
- Types of fares paid and tickets used
- Revenue information
- Increase in social care provision or other statutory duty requirements.
- Any other relevant information

Suffolk community transport operators complete an average of 140,000 countywide journeys in a year, and during 2019/20 served 139,143 passengers. In the West Suffolk district in 2019/20, 14,640 passengers were recorded as using the service.

The Suffolk County Council revenue funding for community transport services in 2019-20 was £849k with contract subsidies ranging from £3 to £13 per journey. In the West Suffolk district, the contract rate for 2019/20 was £99,256. The collection of fares in West Suffolk in 2019/20 was £37,995.

During the year of 2019/2020, there was 262 incidents recorded in the West Suffolk district where the community transport could not meet travel requests. This was due to limited vehicle resource being available, which is an indication that the current community transport service is stretched and cannot provide a reliable transport service. This also means that not all areas have a consistent transport offer.

Why Government funding is needed?

The bus services in the cluster area are either limited or do not exist. Community transport services do operate in the area, but the service user demographics is predominantly for older people, who require a door-to-door service. Feedback from younger people and those needing access to transport for education, employment and healthcare suggests that community transport is unreliable and viewed as a provision for older people, therefore not designed to meet the needs of a younger and working-age population. In that respect community transport serves a valuable role but is unable to meet the transport needs of the younger and working population.

Through our engagement with taxi-bus transport operators, we have identified they have the capability to pilot the community taxi-bus scheme. The taxi-bus service will provide a reliable and flexible service between villages in the cluster area, connecting them to market towns. Journey times to market towns, where they can access education, employment, shops, healthcare and transport services offering long distance travel, will also be much reduced. This will be achieved by not offering a door-to-door service, passengers can board the taxi-bus service from collection points in their village. The taxi-bus service will complement the community transport services by removing the strain on the service for those passengers who do not require a door-to door service.

The community taxi-bus service will not only connect currently cut-off rural villages, but also improve social inclusion in rural villages (making communities more sustainable), as well as build capacity for commercial public transport services.

SECTION 3: Explaining the ambition and proposed solution

This section seeks evidence of the level of ambition from the local authority, support from stakeholders and evidence that the local authority is well-placed to use the Rural Mobility Fund to tackle these challenges. Local authorities should:

- **Set out the high-level ambition for the local transport offer through demand responsive transport services.** This should explain how the services would enhance the opportunity of local residents in accessing education, employment, healthcare, and other services as well as enabling greater social inclusion, or improve the experience of or offering to passengers through improving bus journey times, destinations, reliability, providing weekend or evening services, etc. It should show how this option would compare with and be better than a traditional bus service.

This could include estimates of how the services could help reduce the overall cost of the local transport offer, for example, through delivering efficiencies, or improve living standards, access to employment or progression through income of local residents. Estimates of cost efficiencies beyond the local transport offer, for example to the NHS through reducing loneliness and isolation would also be helpful, where relevant.

This section should also explain how the service will attract a diverse range of passengers.

- **Clearly describe the proposed solution.** We are not seeking to specify a solution ourselves, as those need to be tailored to the specific needs of local residents and the geographical circumstances of the rural and suburban areas that the services will operate in. We have provided an indication of identified need for support in the section on "Eligibility".

This should also include an estimate of the potential demand for the services, and thus the size of the fleet and the type of vehicles to meet that demand.

Evidence should also be provided as to how the service (or its benefits) might be maintained, and become sustainable in the long-term.

- **Explain the maturity of the solution.** This should include a summary of previous work which has been completed, and identified barriers that might need to be removed before the project can begin.
- **Provide the amount of funding needed,** and indicate how it will be used (i.e. buying solutions or resources needed.) This should include an estimate, if relevant, of other funding provided by the local authority, other bodies such as NHS Clinical Commissioning Groups, and from private investment.

We will not accept bids that do not provide sufficient evidence of support from local partners.

3.1 High level ambition.

Set out the high-level ambition for improving the local transport offer to local residents through demand responsive transport services, and how this links with the challenges outlined in section 2. Information provided could include:

- Improved access to education, employment, healthcare and other services.*
- Improvement of journey times*
- Greater social inclusion*
- Increased reliability*
- Cost efficiencies e.g. reduced cost to NHS through reducing loneliness*
- Improvement of living standards such as increased access to employment opportunities.*
- Diversity of passengers and how they will be attracted*
- Any other relevant information*

The community taxi-bus service will provide accessible transport for young people needing to access Post-16 education, training and leisure facilities, and for the working age population to access employment. It will also provide access to shops and healthcare.

The transport service will operate 7 days a week (7am – 11pm Monday to Saturday, and 10am to 6pm on a Sunday) as a demand responsive service, which passengers will be able to book using an online booking application or through a telephone contact centre. The taxi-bus will connect the rural villages with market towns where services such as education, employment, leisure activities and supermarkets can be accessed. It will also provide a more reliable transport service, reducing travel time between rural villages and services, which is essential to addressing inequality and enabling social inclusion.

Two 8-seater wheelchair accessible vehicles will serve the cluster. This means that the transport offer will be more flexible than a traditional bus service, providing transport to people when they need it. The community taxi-bus will also provide a direct express service to the market towns of Bury St Edmunds and Newmarket.

Traditional bus services are unable to satisfy demand in rural villages as the impact of the distance the bus would be required to travel makes the service commercially and operationally unviable. Feedback from younger people and those needing access to transport for education, work and health suggests that their experience of the current community transport offer (called Connecting Communities) is one where the service is unreliable and doesn't meet their needs. The Connecting Communities service is stretched, so cannot meet the travel time needs of all passengers, as operators are required to provide door-to-door assistance to elderly or some disabled groups, meaning that journey times can be unpredictable and the transport service unreliable. The taxi-bus service differs from the Connecting Communities transport service, as it will operate from a central connection point and not offer a door-to-door service, which will still be provided by the current Connecting Communities transport.

Although, the transport service is aimed at younger people and those of working age, the community taxi-bus will be available for use by all, which will help connect people with market towns, therefore reducing isolation. The ability of the vehicles to carry wheelchairs means that the taxi-bus vehicles can connect people with mobility needs to key services and employment, which will reduce isolation and enable them to live more independent lives.

Research shows that lowering transport costs and improving transport accessibility has positive effects on income and the employment prospects of young people (Transport and Inequality, 2019). Improvement to public transport provision has the potential to help 6.8% of younger people classed as 'Not in Employment, Education or Training' in the West Suffolk (West) cluster back into education or employment. Improving transport provision

also provides access to wider employment opportunities, which could enable the 5.7% of the cluster's population that are unemployed back into work.

From an environmental perspective, our demand modelling shows there is potential for the service to move 304 two-way daily trips to public transport, which has associated carbon savings.

3.2: Proposed solution

Please provide details of your proposed solution and evidence on how it, or its benefits, might be maintained, and become sustainable in the long-term. You should refer to the section on "Type and size of projects" in the guidance for an indication of identified need for support when completing this section. Please also include estimate of demand, including size of fleet and type of vehicles that will be used.

We will not accept bids that do not meet the eligibility criteria.

To address this need, we are proposing to pilot, over a two-year period, a community taxi-bus service. The taxi-bus service will consist of two 8-seater wheelchair accessible vehicles, which will operate in the four rural villages in the West Suffolk (West) cluster. The transport service will connect residents with services in the rural villages and in the two market towns (Bury St Edmunds and Newmarket), as well as to railway stations and bus interchange routes. The community taxi-bus will operate 7-days a week (7am – 11pm Monday to Saturday, and 10am to 6pm on a Sunday) as a demand responsive service.

The service will be part-subsidised with a flat-fare charged for single and return journeys. Adult journeys will be priced at £7.00 for return journeys and £4.00 for single journeys. Child fares will be priced at £3.00 for return journeys and £1.50 for single journeys. The cost of the subsidy decreases with a higher number of passengers using the service. All ticket prices are in-line with current bus fares.

Although the intention is to provide transportation for 8 passengers, we appreciate that under COVID19 scenario this will not be possible and so we will also provide a cost scenario (attached in the appendices) on the basis of carrying 2 passengers.

Trip demand modelling in the West Suffolk (West) cluster, which is based on mobile phone data, shows daily two-way trip rates of 1,438 trips within the cluster area only. A percentage of 2.87% (which is the average bus trip rate recorded from the National Travel Survey for the Eastern region) has been applied to the trip rate output to provide an indication of the likely daily two-way trips that could be converted to taxi-bus journeys. Our calculations show this daily rate for trips in both directions is 304 daily trips.

To enable flexibility, passengers will be able to book the community taxi-bus service using an online booking application months/weeks or days in advance of travel (with an hour before travel being the maximum deadline that the service can be booked). A telephone contact centre will also be available between 7am – 11pm Monday to Saturday, and 10am to 6pm on a Sunday. The online booking application will enable passengers to see the availability of the community taxi-bus, its location, time of pickup and arrival at the destination. The technology platform will also show the real-time timetables of connecting bus and rail services – giving passenger confidence that the transport service can connect with rail and bus services. We have met with technology providers and are confident that this type of technology platform exists and can be used in rural areas.

To ensure that the project has longevity beyond the pilot, the transport scheme will be supported by a unique marketing plan. The scheme will also be supported by S106

funding from new development proposed to be developed over the next five years. In addition to this, if the transport scheme proves successful, Suffolk County Council will review its public transport expenditure to work with operators to deliver more taxi-bus schemes and provide them in other areas.

3.3 Maturity of solution

This should include a summary of previous work which has been completed and identified barriers that might need to be removed before the project can begin.

The bid for this transport project has been developed in conjunction with key partners, such as West Suffolk Council, and transport operators, such as CabSmart and 24/7. Both the district council and transport operators are supportive of the taxi-bus scheme, with the transport operators demonstrating a willingness to run the service. We have also engaged with the County Council's Education Team to understand how the taxi-bus can better serve the transport needs of young people needing to access education.

We have worked with technology providers and transport operators to identify how an online application could provide an effective platform for passengers to book and pay for transport services, as well as enable operators to manage the running of transport. In addition to this we have worked with transport providers and the County Council's Children and Young People and Education teams to understand the types of information the online platform can record, such as passenger trip demands for education and trip trends.

Discussions have also taken place with vehicle manufacturers to understand timescales for the delivery of the mini-buses, which is predicted to be 24-weeks.

We have worked with our communications team to set out a unique marketing and branding plan for the service to attract young people and a working age population.

Barriers

We have identified that one of the key barriers to implementing the project could include delays in the delivery of the new taxi-bus vehicles. We will address this potential barrier by ensuring transport operators have access to high quality vehicles that can be used and branded in the event that there is a delay in the delivery of the two mini-buses. This will also be necessary in the event that passenger demand for the service outstrips seating capacity.

Demand for the taxi-bus service could be restricted due to confidence in using shared transport services as a result of the COVID19 pandemic. We have selected the Renault mini-bus vehicle models based on the space provided within the vehicle, which will allow 2 passengers to be transported at the recommended social distance. We will also ensure that all mini-bus vehicles have a rigorous cleaning regime and are fitted with plastic screens between seating rows to protect passengers and drivers.

Poor functionality of the booking application due to limited Wi-Fi connectivity could also pose a problem for the successful delivery of the project. We will ensure that the online booking application is robustly tested in the rural areas before the project commences – this will enable us to understand further the likely demand on the telephone contact centre.

To enable greater uptake of the taxi-bus service, we plan to raise awareness of the service by promoting it in Post-16 education settings, through businesses and through parish councils. We anticipate that this project, if successful, will commence post COVID19.

3.4 Funding required.

Please provide an estimate of the amount of funding required. Funding for each project will be between £0.5 million to £1.5 million, though we will also consider support for other amounts depending on the identified need. Please also provide details of any other funding for your solution from local government, other bodies such as NHS Clinical Commissioning Groups, or from private investment.

This Expression of Interest is seeking £317,239 to support a 2-year pilot of a community taxi-bus service in the West Suffolk (West) cluster. The funding will be used to develop the project, as well as cover the cost of subsidising the service. The total costs are itemised over a 2-year period below. A separate costing COVID19 scenario is attached in the appendix.

Suffolk County Council		
WEST Suffolk Taxibus Pilot		
	Year 1	Year 2
FIXED COSTS		
Vehicle Depreciation Yr1	£45,714	£45,714
Vehicle Insurance	£2,000	£2,000
Vehicle RFL	£640	£530
ViaVan vehicle fees	£40,320	£40,320
Marketing	£3,600	£3,600
Overheads inc. taxi licence fees	£1,500	£1,500
TOTAL FIXED COSTS	£93,774	£93,664
FARES		
Bus fare income to be retained by taxi operator	£159,357	£159,357
Taxi Fares Subsidy	£4,889	£4,889
Paypal fees on fares transactions (@ 20p per transaction)	£5,678	£5,678
TOTAL SUBSIDY	£10,567	£10,567
RUNNING COSTS		
V1 Fuel - to be paid directly by taxi operator	£0	£0
V1 Maintenance & tyres	£3,000	£3,000
V2 Fuel - to be paid directly by taxi operator	£0	£0
V2 Maintenance & tyres	£3,000	£3,000

TOTAL RUNNING COSTS	£6,000	£6,000
CAPITAL COSTS		
V1 - Renault Eco blue diesel - 8 seats / Wheelchair accessible (Est.)	£40,000	
V2 - Renault Eco blue diesel - 8 seats / Wheelchair accessible (Est.)	£40,000	
ViaVan installation	£16,667	
TOTAL CAPITAL COSTS	£96,667	£0
Total REVENUE funding requirement for Taxibus Pilot	£110,341	£110,231
Total CAPITAL funding requirement for Taxibus Pilot	£96,667	
Total funding requirement for Taxibus Pilot	£207,008	£110,231

Grand
Total £317,239

Section 4: Deliverability

This section seeks evidence of how the demand responsive transport service will be delivered, and demonstrate that plans are credible and deliverable.

- **Demonstrate that your plans are credible and deliverable in the time proposed, and that any risks are understood and mitigated.** This should also show how the scheme will be marketed to attract passengers. A detailed project plan is not required at this stage.
- **Set out timescale for implementation.** This should include key milestones such as recruiting staff, when vehicles will be on the road, marketing of the services, and initial take-up of new or expanded services.
- **Provide a list of partners involved in the projects,** and briefly explain how they will contribute to the success of the project. For example, through specific expertise, reduced duplication of services, enhancing opportunities for operators of any size to trial the demand responsive transport solution and make efficiencies by pooling resources (e.g. back-office/administration of demand responsive transport services, marketing, fleet, etc.)
- **Describe how monitoring and evaluation will be used** to ensure learning about the project to inform future schemes. A detailed monitoring and evaluation plan is not required at this stage but we expect applications to include information on how the evaluation could identify learnings about the implementation of the services, including the approach to communicating with service users, which can be used to improve the design of services in future. Bidders should explain how the approach to delivering the services will ensure that future learning is maximised.
- **Confirm you have received advice on EU State Aid rules,** and provide a summary of that advice to confirm how your transport offer will fit in with state aid rules.

4.1 Deliverability plan

Please demonstrate that your plans are credible and deliverable in the time proposed, and that any risks have been mitigated.

We have worked with key partners to develop this bid to the Rural Mobility fund. Discussions with operators have demonstrated a willingness by them to provide the community taxi-bus service. Through our conversations with vehicle manufacturers, we are confident that we can achieve delivery of the 8-seater wheelchair accessible vehicles before the pilot project commences. In the event that there is a delay in the delivery of the mini-bus vehicles, we have worked with transport operators that can demonstrate they have access to wheelchair accessible vehicles that can be used – this will also be essential to ensure a reliable service if vehicles require repair or if there is passenger demand for more seats. We will ensure that the lines of communication are kept open between the vehicle manufacturers and transport operators to ensure that any vehicle faults or issues can be dealt with quickly.

Equally, through discussions with transport operators and technology providers we are clear about the type of booking application that is required and how it will assist transport operators and passengers. We understand the fundamental role the booking application will have in providing a more flexible transport service. To learn the lessons from other transport operators, we have investigated how booking applications have been used in other areas (such as Go Buses in Kent). We will maintain a close-working relationship between the technology provider and the transport operators to ensure that any technical issues are dealt with quickly.

The success of the service is dependent on an effective communications and marketing strategy. To encourage young people and the working population to use the new transport service, we will work with Post-16 education providers and businesses (through the County Council's 'Local Links' smarter choices project) to ensure that the service is widely promoted. We will also work with other transport providers, such as Greater Anglia Trains, to promote the service as a transport link to rail services.

The launch of the taxi-bus service will include promotional offers and incentives, which includes a 'refer a friend' promotion. We will also use this method throughout the two-year project to stoke demand. We will also work with the County Council's Children and Young People, Education and Passenger Transport teams to assist in the promotion of the service to young people. We will work with parish councils to ensure that the taxi-bus service can support transport to key community events

The service will be launched in June 2021, this will allow for young people to try the service before the end of the school term and allow for new travel patterns to be established before the new academic term commences in September. During the summer holidays we anticipate that the service will be used for travel to access employment, but also for tourism.

We appreciate that COVID19 may impact on people's willingness to share vehicles, however, we will ensure that plastic screens are fitted between the rows of seats and that the number of passengers being transported is reduced. Details of costs, based on a COVID19 scenario, is included in the appendix.

4.2 Timescale for implementation

Please set out your indicative timetable for implementation in the table below. You should include key milestones on:

- Staff recruitment
- When vehicles will be on the road.
- Marketing
- Expected initial take up and progression
- Any other relevant milestones

The indicative timetable for the passenger transport implementation is set out below. The delivery of the project will be jointly managed by Suffolk County Council's Transport Strategy Team and Passenger Transport Team.

Milestone	Expected completion date
Funding awarded	Autumn 2020
Agree transport operation contract with transport operators	Autumn 2020
Place order for mini-bus vehicles for April/May delivery	Autumn 2020
Procure and test technology application	January 2021
Procure EV charging points and identify locations	January 2021
Establish telephone contact centre	January 2021
Develop communications and marketing plan	January 2021
Hold focus group meetings with Post-16 Students	February 2021
Commence promotion of transport service	May 2021
Launch service	1 st June 2021
Review progress of service with operators	August 2021 November 2021 February 2022 May 2022 August 2022 November 2022
Conduct passenger surveys	August 2021 November 2021 February 2022 May 2022 August 2022 November 2022

4.3 Partnerships

Please provide details of partners involved in the project, and explain how they will contribute to the success of the project. Examples can include expertise, reduced duplication of services, enhancement of opportunities for operators to trial DRT services and efficiencies.

Suffolk County Council's passenger transport team will oversee the implementation of the community taxi-bus service and will work with a number of partners to deliver the project.

The County Council has worked with two transport providers, CabSmart and 24/7, to develop the bid proposal. Both transport operators have expressed a willingness to operate the service. Their engagement will be integral to operating the transport service in the West Suffolk (West) cluster. Throughout the delivery of the project, continued engagement with the operators will be critical to monitor demand for the taxi-bus service and to respond to changes where they occur. We plan to hold quarterly meetings to discuss service demand and any changes that may be required.

Discussions have taken place with technology platform providers, such as ViaVan, to provide a technology solution that can support the needs of passengers and drivers, and to capture the data requirements of the project.

Ongoing engagement with the County Council's Children and Young People's and Education teams has been crucial to understanding young people's transport needs to reach education. We will continue to work with them to ensure the transport scheme supports the needs of children and young people, as well as work with businesses through our 'Local Links' smarter choices programme to understand the transport needs of workers.

The County Council will work closely with West Suffolk District Council to inform them about the operation of the taxi-bus. The district local authority will have a role in the future success of the project through securing s106 funding from new development which will enable services to expand or new local services to be created. West Suffolk District Council has also indicated that they could provide some financial assistance to support the taxi-bus project if it is required.

Marketing and communications will be integral to encouraging people to use the transport service. Suffolk County Council's communications team will manage the promotion of the service and will work with the transport operator and technology provider to ensure an attractive marketing campaign.

The County Council chairs an established transport operating group, which consists of representatives from the County Council, district local authorities and transport operators, and we will use this group to ensure that the taxi-bus is able to support bus and rail operations and provide a seamless link to public transport services.

4.4 Monitoring

Please provide indicative details of how monitoring and evaluation will be used to ensure learning about the project and inform future schemes. A detailed monitoring and evaluation plan is not required at this stage but should explain how the approach to delivering services will ensure that future learning is maximised.

The project will be continuously monitored throughout its delivery. We feel this will be necessary to help understand which elements of the project are successful/unsuccessful and why. Data on passenger demand and footfall, types of trips, trip distances, use of the booking application, and views and opinions about the transport service will be reviewed every three months.

The data will be collected through the technology platform (such as the one provided by ViaVan), which can provide data on passenger demand and footfall (in particular to focus on passenger trends at different times of the year), number of single/return trips, and origins and destinations. We will compare the use of the booking application against the use of telephone contact centre to ensure that we understand access to the booking systems.

The technology platform will also capture information on the performance of the vehicles, as well as plan the most efficient routes for the transport service to respond to booking requests.

We will also conduct surveys every three months to assess passenger's opinions about the service, such as whether it meets their transport needs in accessing services and has enabled them to be less reliant on the car. Surveys will also be undertaken every three months to establish how the booking application and telephone contact centre is being received by passengers and if there are recurring issues that need to be addressed. A complaints procedure will also be put in place to manage and review complaints.

We will work with the County Council's Education Team to measure whether the introduction of the transport service has achieved an increase in the numbers of young people participating in Post-16 education.

The impact of promotional work will be monitored to identify changes in passenger demand, as well as identify the method of communication that has created the biggest impact in encouraging use of the taxi-bus service.

4.5 State Aid

Please confirm you have received advice on EU State Aid rules, and provide a summary of that advice to confirm how your transport offer will fit in with state aid rules.

This project will commence in April 2021, at a time when the UK would have already left the European Union. We have sought advice from the County Council's procurement team and the State Aid Team and, based on that advice, we have measured the project against the current regulations. We are confident that the proposed project adheres to EU State Aid rules.

The project will use funds administered by state resources, which will be used to pump-prime an undertaking to operate a public transport service that can support residents living

in rural villages. The aid could be considered to distort the market and give the undertaking an advantage against its competitors, however we have been careful to select rural areas where limited or no public transport services operate, therefore remedying market failure. We have also sought interest from a number of different transport operators to ensure that all have received the same opportunity to be part of the project.

Although the project is a State Aid project, it falls within the General Block Exemption Regulation (GBER) for the following reasons:

1, The funding will aid research, development and innovation

A large part of the project is based on researching the impact the transport service will have on improving the prospects of people living in rural locations, as well as developing an understanding of why public transport operations are successful/unsuccessful.

2, Social aid for transport for residents for remote regions.

This project is a transport scheme that will enable people living in remote rural villages to access key services such as employment, education, healthcare, groceries and leisure facilities.

The state aid we are seeking is below the €150m threshold, and will be administered in blocks of funding over the two-year pilot of the project. We will use SANI to record the spending of state aid, ensuring that we contact the State Aid Team six months prior to the commencement of the scheme to notify them of our intention to use state funding for the project, as well as to gain access to SANI. We will also seek approval from the State Aid Team to verify our record keeping approach, which is required to evidence how state aid has been used.

As this bid for funding is one of three Expression of Interests we are submitting for Suffolk, we will ensure that if more than one bid is successful there will be no overlap of spending on items, such as the cost of implementing the technology platform.

At the time of writing this bid, we cannot anticipate how the regulations on the use of state aid will change, we do know that it could consist of one of the following arrangements:

1, that the EU transition period is extended, which means that the current regulation applies

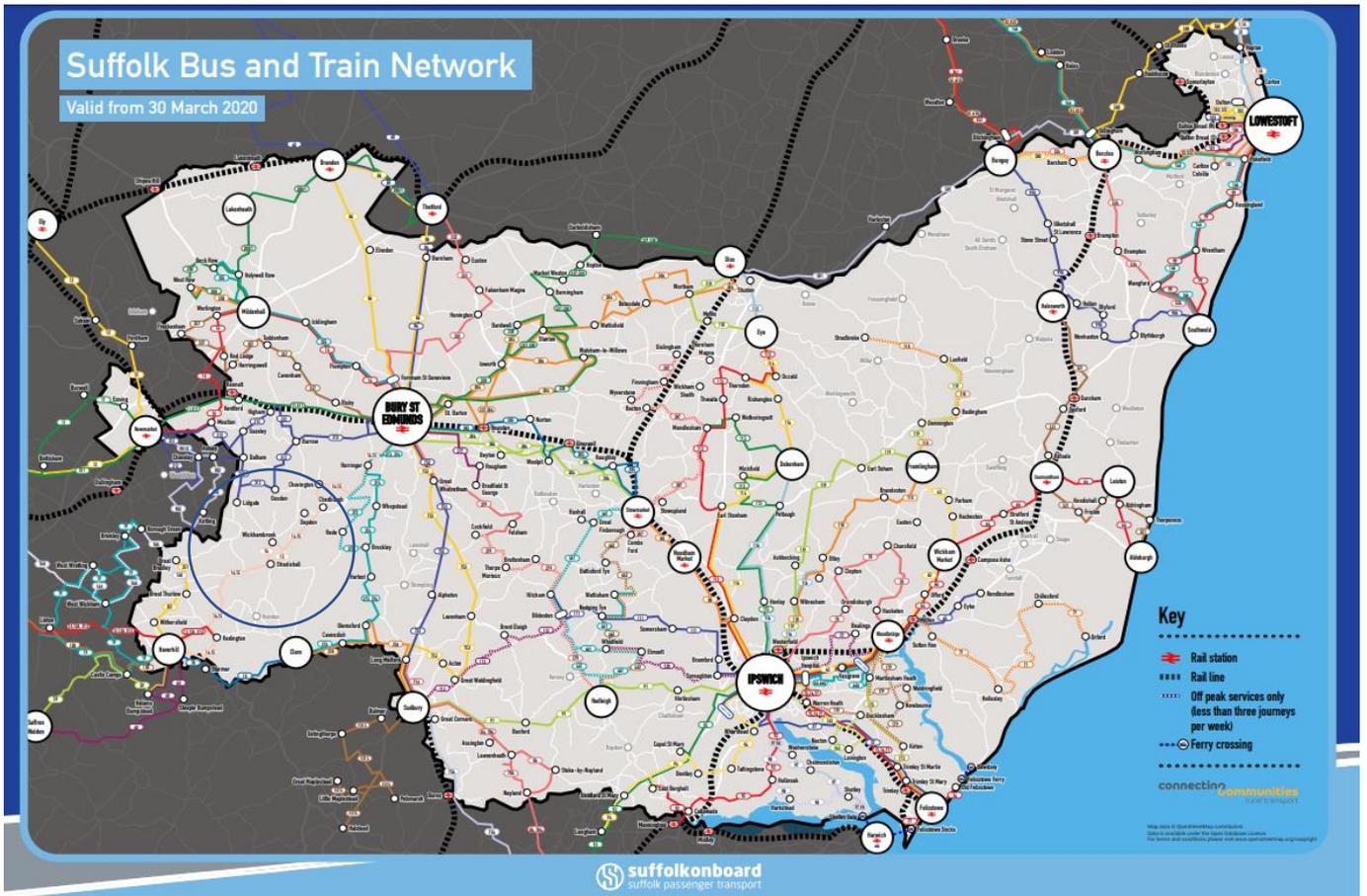
2, that a new state aid regulation is agreed as part of the new deal with the EU

3, that the UK Government develops its own Domestic Subsidy Control regime.

We will continue to work with the State Aid Team to ensure that our project conforms to any new regulation that is taken forward.

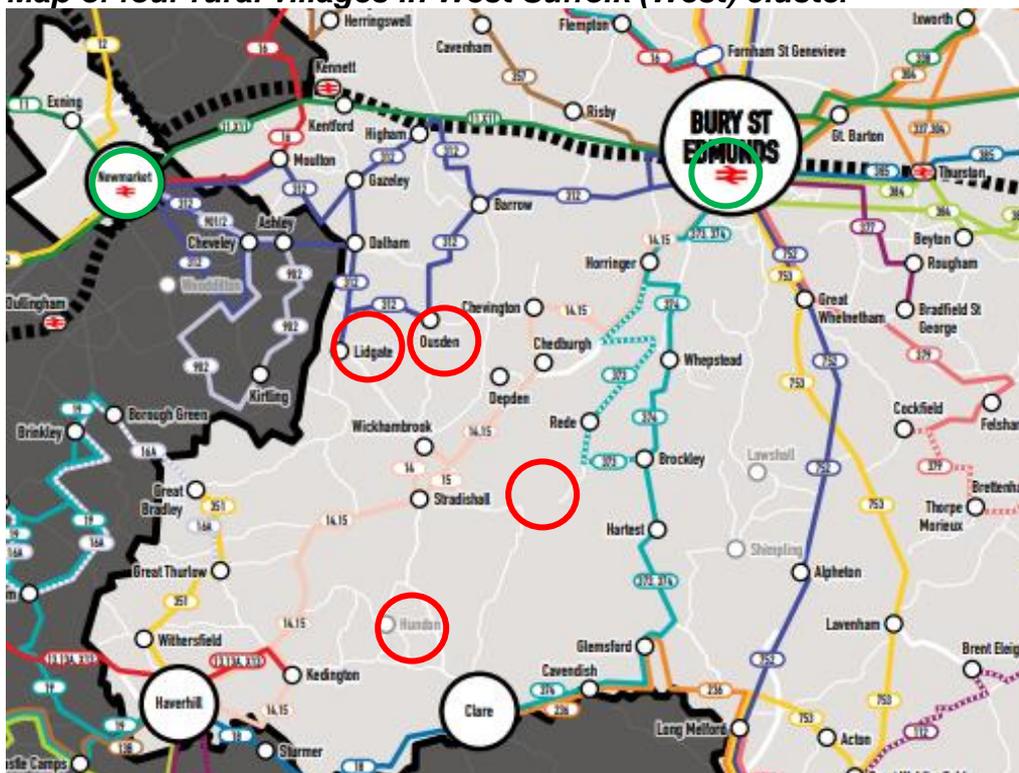
Appendices

Suffolk Bus and Rail Network Map (Figure 1)



West Suffolk (West) cluster (Figure 2)

Map of four rural villages in West Suffolk (West) cluster



Rural villages indicted by red circles; service centres indicated by green circles

COVID 19 SCENARIO COSTS

Suffolk County Council		
WEST Suffolk Taxibus Pilot (Covid Scenario)		
	Year 1	Year 2
FIXED COSTS		
Vehicle Depreciation Yr1	£45,714	£45,714
Vehicle Insurance	£2,000	£2,000
Vehicle RFL	£640	£530
ViaVan vehicle fees	£40,320	£40,320
Marketing	£3,600	£3,600
Overheads inc. taxi licence fees	£1,500	£1,500
TOTAL FIXED COSTS	£93,774	£93,664
FARES		
Bus fare income to be retained by taxi operator	£159,357	£159,357

Taxi Fares Subsidy	£51,610	£4,889
Paypal fees on fares transactions (@ 20p per transaction)	£5,678	£5,678
TOTAL SUBSIDY	£57,288	£10,567
RUNNING COSTS		
V1 Fuel - to be paid directly by taxi operator	£0	£0
V1 Maintenance & tyres	£3,000	£3,000
V2 Fuel - to be paid directly by taxi operator	£0	£0
V2 Maintenance & tyres	£3,000	£3,000
TOTAL RUNNING COSTS	£6,000	£6,000
CAPITAL COSTS		
V1 - Renault Eco blue diesel - 8 seats / Wheelchair accessible (Est.)	£40,000	
V2 - Renault Eco blue diesel - 8 seats / Wheelchair accessible (Est.)	£40,000	
ViaVan installation	£16,667	
TOTAL CAPITAL COSTS	£96,667	£0
Total REVENUE funding requirement for Taxibus Pilot	£157,062	£110,231
Total CAPITAL funding requirement for Taxibus Pilot	£96,667	
Total funding requirement for Taxibus Pilot	£253,729	£110,231

Grand
Total £363,960

Letters of support



Thursday, 4 June 2020

Susan Davey CMILT
Rural Transport Manager
Growth, Highways & Infrastructure
Suffolk County Council
Constantine House
Ipswich
IP1 2DH

Susan.Davey@Suffolk.gov.uk

Dear Susan

DFT Rural Mobility Funding Bid – Taxi bus Pilots

24x7Ltd is happy to support your bid for the Taxi Bus Service pilot scheme.

If successful in the bid, we would agree to provide the following:

- Dedicate a minimum of two wheelchair accessible taxis to the pilot or have an interest in operating assessable vehicles provided by the Council – subject to T&C's to be negotiated.
- Operate the taxi bus services linked to a dedicated booking App provided by the Council, including some provision for telephone bookings.
- Operate under a bus fare scale with Council subsidies in line with taxi fares.
- Support a dedicated branding for marketing of the taxi bus services and carrying this branding through to vehicle livery (costs supported by the Council).

All the above is subject to seeing if this is viable, once we have received further detailed information on the proposed schemes.

We wish you luck for a successful bid and look forward to working with you soon.

Andrew T Mahoney
Managing Director

L. Taylor
PP.

L. Taylor.

Little Easton Manor

Park Road
Little Easton
Essex
CM6 2JN

T: (Office) 01279 661661

www.24x7ltd.co.uk

Rural Mobility Fund
Department for Transport

By email: betterdeal4buses@dft.gov.uk

1 June 2020

Dear Sir or Madam,

Re: RURAL MOBILITY FUND – EXPRESSION OF INTEREST WEST SUFFOLK

I am writing to offer my support for a funding bid to deliver a taxi-bus service to communities in the rural villages of: Lidgate, Ousden, Hawkedon and Hundon.

The funding bid, which is being submitted by Suffolk County Council to the Government's £20m Rural Mobility Fund, will connect the rural villages (listed above) with key services within the market towns of Newmarket and Bury St Edmunds.

The taxi-bus service will provide a key transport link for young people and people of a working age, which will enable them to gain opportunities that come with accessing education and employment, as well as providing greater independence.

I hope that the Department for Transport will approve the Expression of Interest for West Suffolk for taking forward to the next stage, which is the development of a full business case.

Yours sincerely,



Matthew Hancock
Secretary of State for Health and Social Care
Member of Parliament for West Suffolk

Contact: David Collinson
David.collinson@westsuffolk.gov.uk
01284 757306

4 June 2020

Dear Sir/Madam

Rural Mobility Fund – Expression of interest – West Suffolk

As the former chair of West Suffolk Council's Rural Task Force which made specific recommendations to improve rural transport, am writing to offer my support for a funding bid to deliver a taxi-bus service to communities in the rural villages of: Lidgate, Ousden, Hawkedon and Hundon.

The funding bid, which is being submitted by Suffolk County Council to the Government's £20m Rural Mobility Fund, will connect the rural villages (listed above) with key services within the market towns of Newmarket and Bury St Edmunds.

The taxi-bus service will provide a key transport link for young people and people of a working age, which will enable them to gain opportunities that come with accessing education and employment, as well as providing greater independence.

I hope that the Department for Transport will approve the Expression of Interest for West Suffolk for taking forward to the next stage, which is the development of a full business case.

Yours sincerely

Mike Chester

Councillor Mike Chester
Councillor for Chedburgh & Chevington Ward
West Suffolk Council

Lidgate Parish Council

Clerk: Ms J Kirk

Tel: 07880 686069

E-mail: lidgateparishcouncil@yahoo.co.uk

15 Klondyke
Bury St Edmunds
Suffolk
IP32 6DB

4th June 2020

Dear Sir or Madam,

Re: RURAL MOBILITY FUND – EXPRESSION OF INTEREST WEST SUFFOLK

I am writing on behalf of Lidgate Parish Council to offer our support in principle for a funding bid to deliver a taxi-bus service to communities in the rural villages of: Lidgate, Ousden, Hawkedon and Hundon.

The funding bid, which is being submitted by Suffolk County Council to the Government's £20m Rural Mobility Fund, will connect the rural villages (listed above) with key services within the market towns of Newmarket and Bury St Edmunds.

The taxi-bus service will provide a key transport link for young people and people of a working age, which will enable them to gain opportunities that come with accessing education and employment, as well as providing greater independence. Lidgate currently has a very limited bus service making it impossible for people to access work, training or other opportunities unless they have a car.

I hope that the Department for Transport will approve the Expression of Interest for West Suffolk for taking forward to the next stage, which is the development of a full business case.

Yours sincerely



Joanne Kirk

Ousden Parish Council

Clerk: Ms J Kirk

Tel: 07880 686069

E-mail: ousdenparishcouncil@yahoo.co.uk

**15 Klondyke
Bury St Edmunds
Suffolk
IP32 6DB**

4th June 2020

Dear Sir or Madam,

Re: RURAL MOBILITY FUND – EXPRESSION OF INTEREST WEST SUFFOLK

I am writing on behalf of Ousden Parish Council to offer our support in principle for a funding bid to deliver a taxi-bus service to communities in the rural villages of: Ousden, Lidgate, Hawkedon and Hundon.

The funding bid, which is being submitted by Suffolk County Council to the Government's £20m Rural Mobility Fund, will connect the rural villages (listed above) with key services within the market towns of Newmarket and Bury St Edmunds.

The taxi-bus service will provide a key transport link for young people and people of a working age, which will enable them to gain opportunities that come with accessing education and employment, as well as providing greater independence. Because of its rural location, people living in the village are currently reliant on cars if they wish to work or study outside the village, making such opportunities inaccessible to anyone who does not have a car.

I hope that the Department for Transport will approve the Expression of Interest for West Suffolk for taking forward to the next stage, which is the development of a full business case.

Yours sincerely



Joanne Kirk



C/O Post Office, North Street, Hundon, Sudbury, Suffolk, CO10 8EE
Clerk.hundonpc@outlook.com

HUNDON PARISH COUNCIL

Dear Sir or Madam,

Re: RURAL MOBILITY FUND – EXPRESSION OF INTEREST WEST SUFFOLK

I am writing on behalf of Hundon Parish Council to offer our support in principle for a funding bid to deliver a taxi-bus service to communities in the rural villages of: Lidgate, Ousden, Hawkedon and Hundon.

The funding bid, which is being submitted by Suffolk County Council to the Government's £20m Rural Mobility Fund, will connect the rural villages (listed above) with key services within the market towns of Newmarket and Bury St Edmunds.

The taxi-bus service will provide a key transport link for young people and people of a working age, which will enable them to gain opportunities that come with accessing education and employment, as well as providing greater independence.

I hope that the Department for Transport will approve the Expression of Interest for West Suffolk for taking forward to the next stage, which is the development of a full business case.

Yours sincerely

Vicky Phillips

Clerk

Hundon Parish Council