



## New Bus Service Proposals for East Cambridgeshire

### Introduction

East Cambridgeshire District Council is seeking funding from the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority to trial new bus services across East Cambridgeshire to allow them to become established and viable.

Accessible and affordable public transport is essential for many rural residents, yet bus use is declining, a trend which has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Low population density and longer distances to travel make practical and commercially sustainable public transport difficult in rural areas. Funding for bus services continues to be reduced and this has led to services in East Cambridgeshire being withdrawn or reduced so that the areas, days and times of operation do not meet the needs of residents.

In East Cambridgeshire, by necessity, only 13% (4510 out of 34,614) of households do not have a car or van (Census 2011). Data from the 2011 Census also shows high levels of car reliance across the district for both work and other journeys. 72.8% of East Cambridgeshire residents travel to work by car (the England average is 61%). Given that 40% of households (13,990) have only 1 car or van, many more people are left with no vehicle when another person from the household goes to work and are therefore dependent on public transport. Despite the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Council understands the importance of continuing to provide a regular, comprehensive bus service for its residents.

The East Cambridgeshire District Council Corporate Plan 2020-2023 includes a promise to 'support better bus services: more frequent, more rural routes'. To inform this work, which the Council considers to be vitally important, it carried out a consultation exercise to identify key bus services for local residents. The aim of the consultation was to identify bus routes that are viable, or can become self-financing or close to self-financing, over a period of time, and to seek funding for a trial period to allow routes to become established in terms of passenger numbers and move towards financial viability.

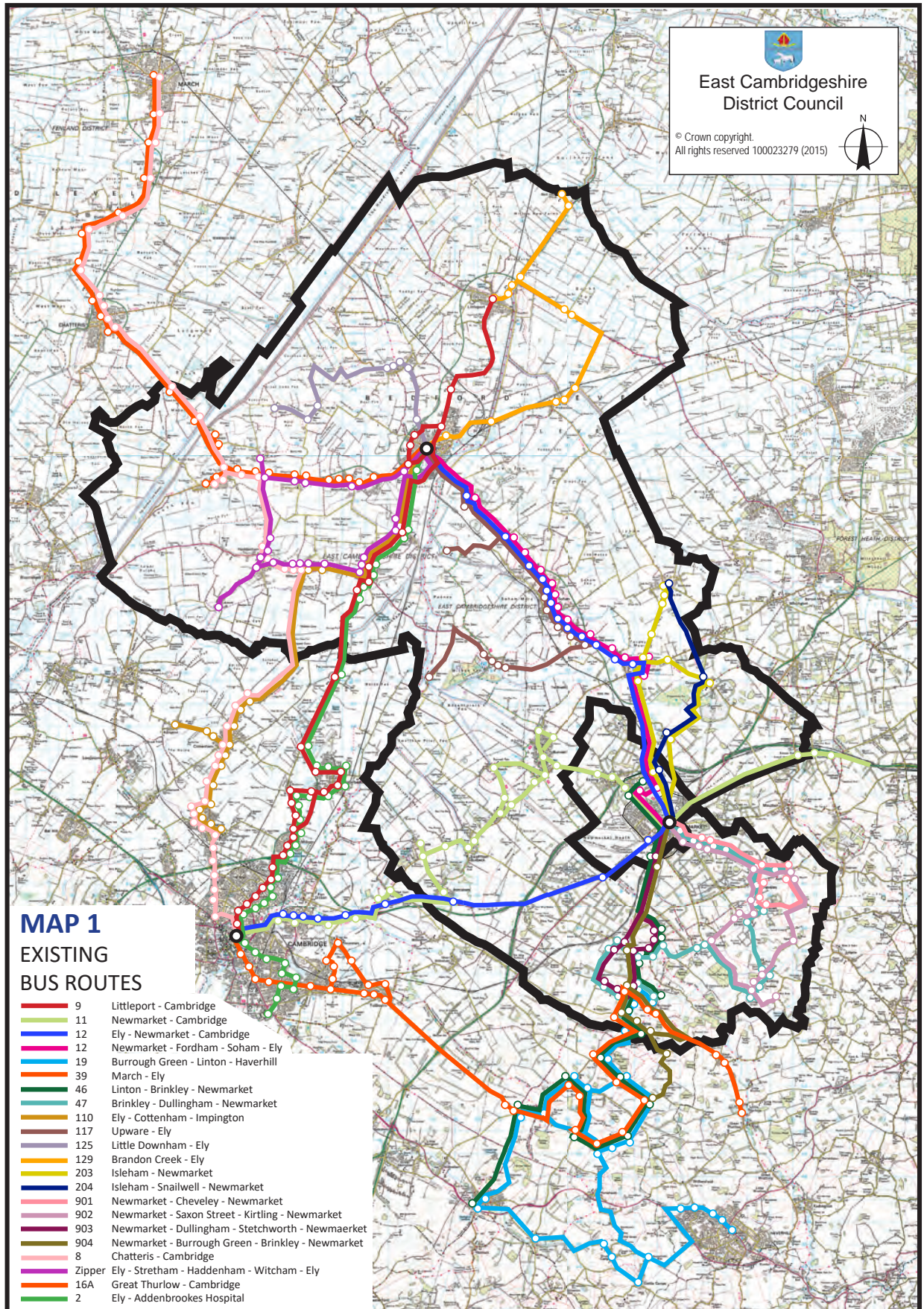
In developing this report, the Council has not sought to determine how bus services should be delivered (ie, CPCA commissioned, partial subsidy, franchise, bus partnership), but is promoting what a good bus service network should look like for the residents of East Cambridgeshire.

The Council wishes to work with the Combined Authority as it progresses its own Bus Reform work, to deliver a package of bus service improvements to meet the needs of East Cambridgeshire residents.



# Existing Services

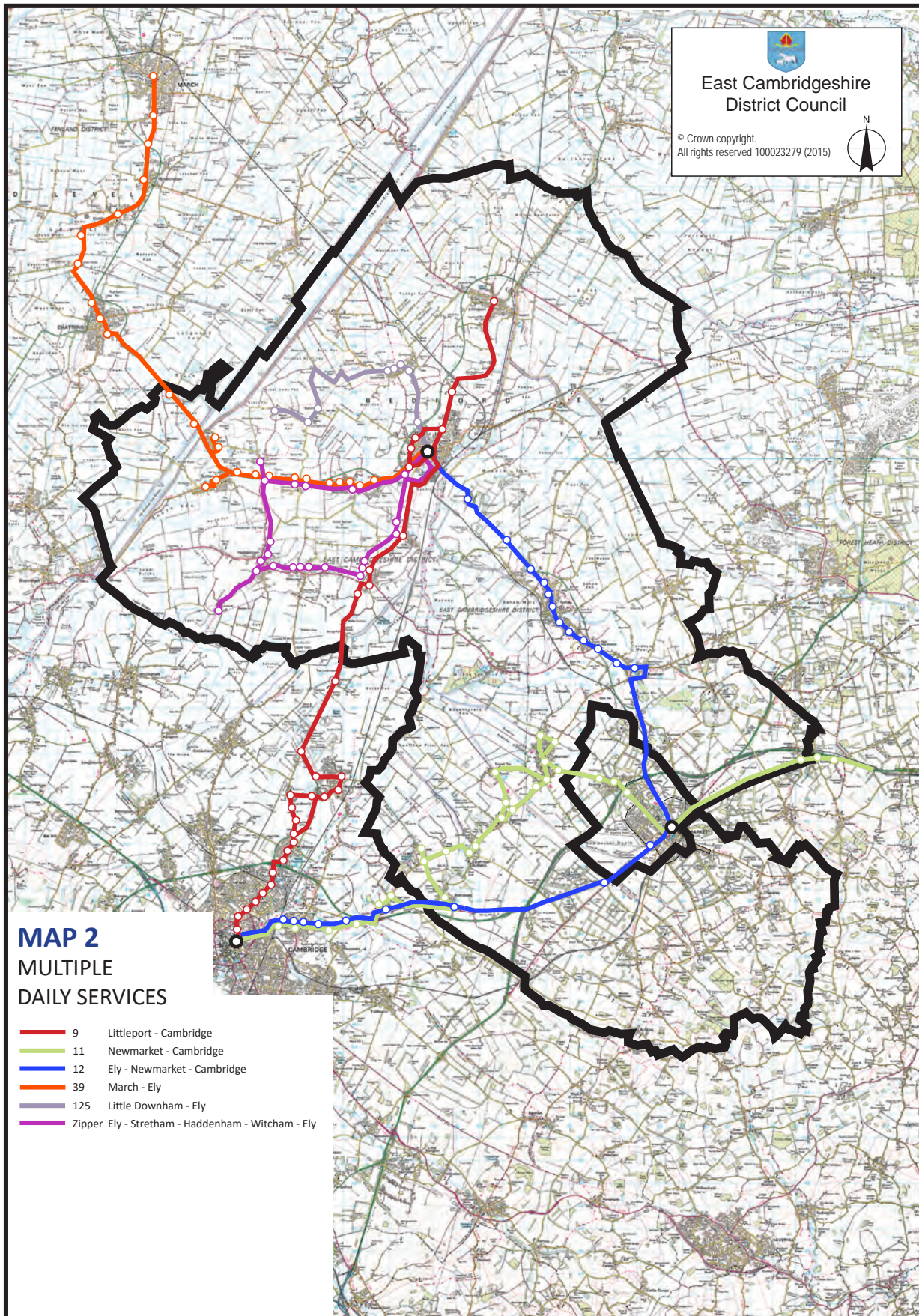
The following series of maps shows the existing bus services currently operating across East Cambridgeshire.





**Map 1** shows all of the services currently operating across East Cambridgeshire, the circles indicate bus stops. It highlights the many areas of the district which have no bus service. Very few of these services run into the evening and no buses run on a Sunday.

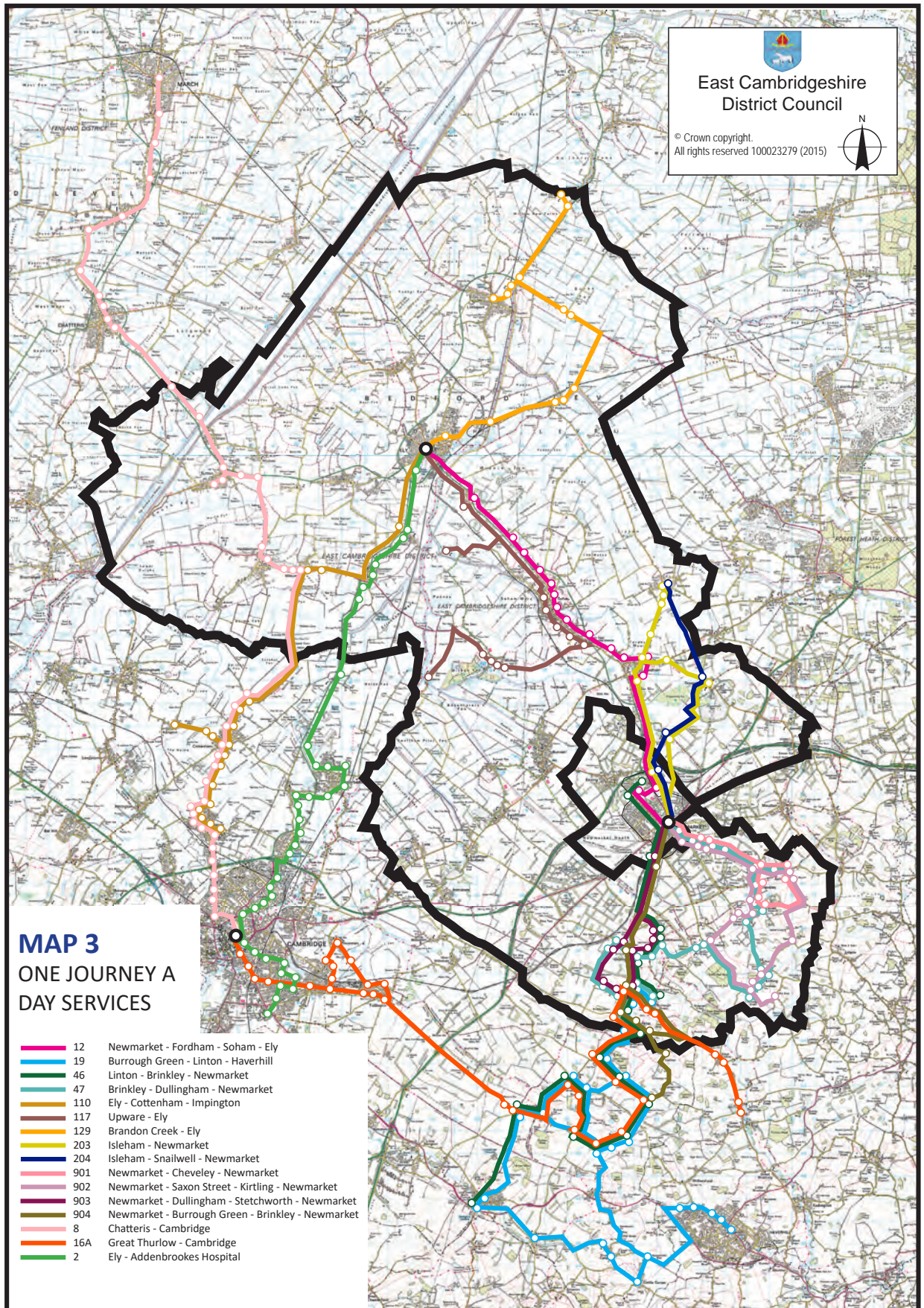
**Map 2** shows the routes that provide multiple, but not regular, services during the day.





**Map 3** shows those that operate a one journey a day service, some of which (46, 110, 117, 129) also only operate one day a week.

Together, the maps show that many parts of the district are very poorly served and that even where bus services already exist, they often offer a poor service.





## Consultation Feedback

In recognition of the importance of frequent bus services, with regular clock face timetables, for residents, the Council conducted a consultation exercise to identify new bus routes and services. The consultation commenced on 9th March and ended on 31st May. The deadline was extended by 6 weeks, due to the COVID-19 lockdown restrictions resulting in the closure of many of the drop-box locations.

The questionnaire was available online via the District Council website and a copy was delivered by Royal Mail to every home in the district. Drop-boxes to enable people to return their questionnaire locally were provided in shops, pubs and community facilities. District Councillors also arranged sessions to meet with local residents and capture their proposals for new routes. However, the majority of these were cancelled as a result of the COVID-19 lockdown restrictions.

1,458 questionnaire responses relating to bus services were received, 44 emails containing comments were received and a number of bus related comments were received by the Council via the Climate Change Ideas Forum.

Of the 1,458 questionnaire responses received, 578 of these are from those who never use a bus because either the current service is too infrequent, there is no service or travel by car is more convenient or quicker.

However, 404 of these said they would travel by bus if a suitable service was provided for shopping, 378 people to access other public transport, 370 to access sports and entertainment facilities and 292 to access doctors/healthcare services.

The most requested changes to existing services by those who do travel by bus were for a more frequent service, later services and reinstatement of Sunday services.

383 new routes/services were suggested. The three most requested were:

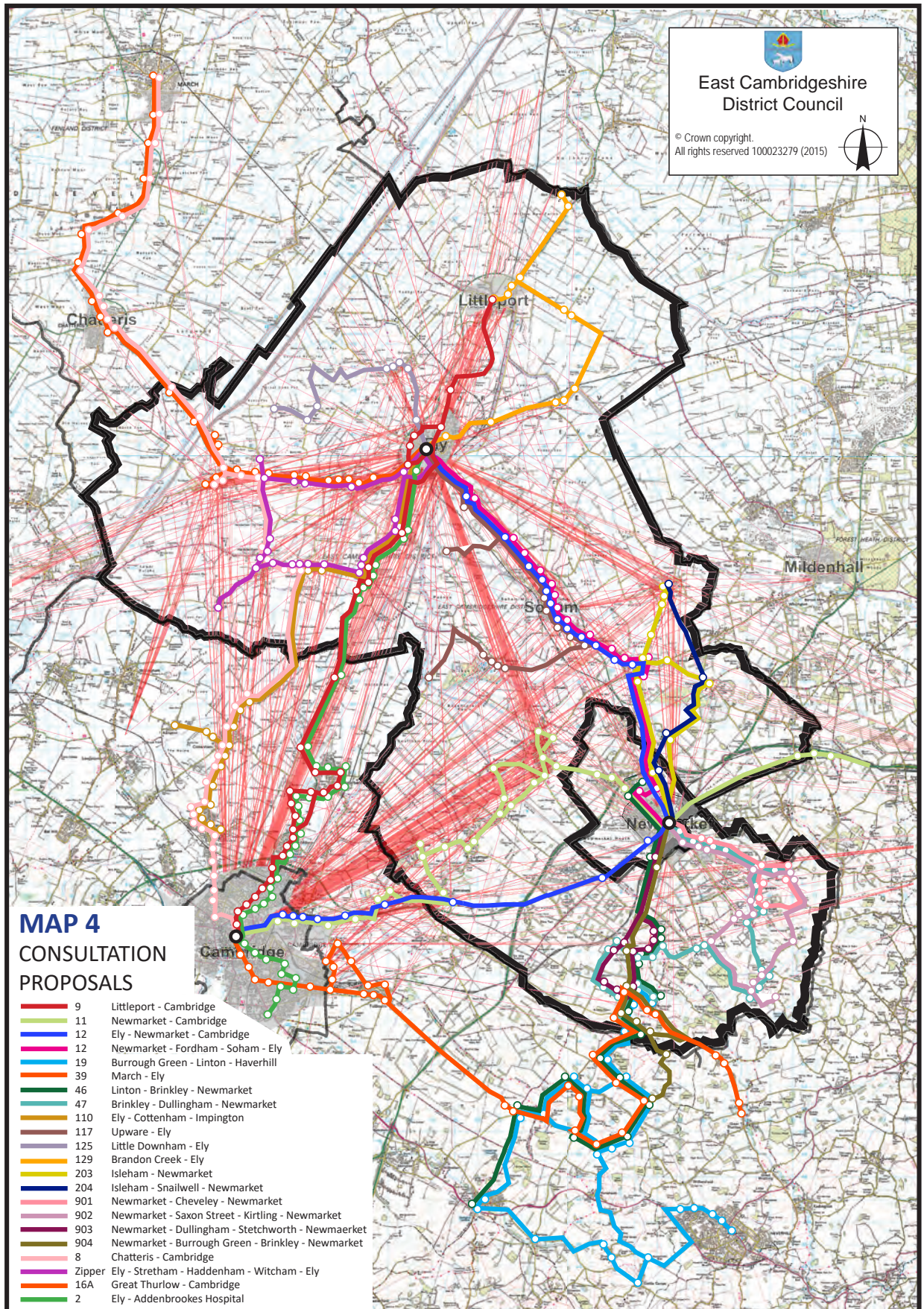
- **Burwell to Cambridge**
- **Ely to Cambridge**
- **Burwell to Ely**

Many of the suggested routes/services were a section of a longer route corridor:

- **A10 corridor Ely / Cambridge / Littleport**
- **Isleham / Newmarket / Ely**
- **Burwell / Cambridge / Ely**
- **Bottisham / Cambridge**
- **Sutton / Ely / Cambridge**

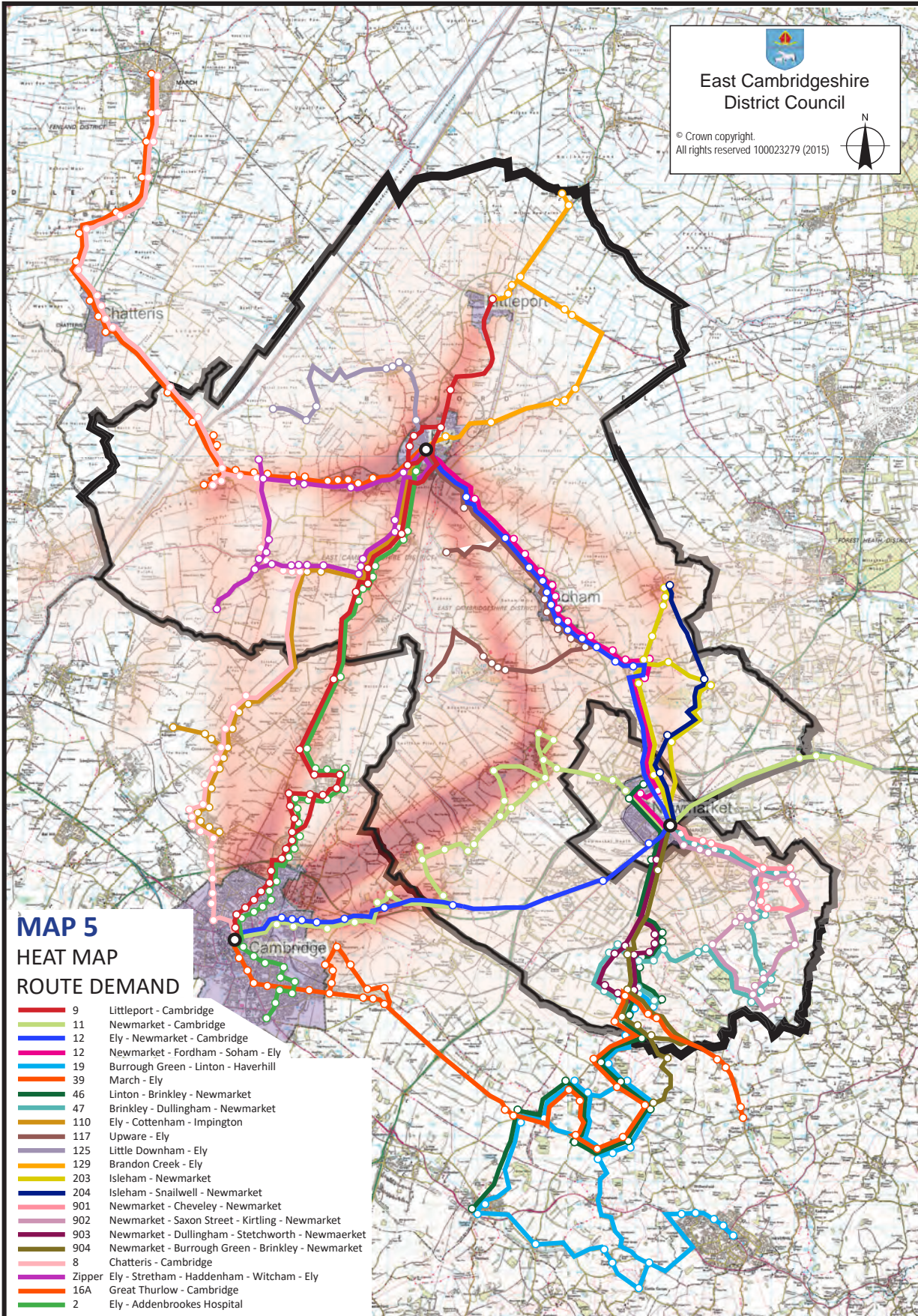


Map 4 shows the consultation proposals overlaid over the map of existing services.





Map 5 is a heatmap, showing the demand for the proposal routes. Both maps also show where there are current gaps in provision.



The most requested new bus services within East Cambridgeshire which are not currently provided are:

- **Burwell to Ely**
- **Isleham to Ely**
- **Isleham to Newmarket**
- **Haddenham to Cambridge**
- **Isleham to Cambridge**

Also requested (to a lesser degree) which could link in with these routes:

- **Isleham to Soham**
- **Prickwillow to Ely**

Comments regarding changes to existing services relate to later buses running until 11pm (especially Friday and Saturday evenings), direct buses to Addenbrookes, Cambridge railway stations and sixth form colleges, a more direct service to Cambridge to reduce travel time, and provision of Sunday services.

## Our Proposals

Our proposed bus service improvements are a combination of newly scheduled services, improvements to existing services and demand responsive transport services (DRT), to be supported by a comprehensive and ongoing marketing campaign.

These will deliver improved connectivity to transport interchanges and corridors e.g. railway stations and the Busway, improve links to employment areas, local shops and services and support better connected communities.

The benefits of this will be a reduction in car use and congestion, which will improve air quality, reduce carbon emissions and deliver wider social and economic benefits to the areas they serve. An efficient public transport service is an important element of the Market Town strategies for Ely, Littleport and Soham and will aid the post COVID-19 recovery of the economy of East Cambridgeshire.

East Cambridgeshire District Council and the City of Ely Council are prepared to make an initial financial commitment towards trialling new routes and services.

## Potential new routes

Proposed new services will be based on the Ely Zipper model i.e.

- Make fewer stops
- Have shorter journey times
- Provide an hourly service
- Travel in one direction in the morning, which is reversed in the afternoon.

As well as being frequent, services also need to operate to regular clock face timetables to encourage use.



### **Burwell – Soham - Isleham – Prickwillow - Ely**

**Bottisham – Cambridge North – Science Park – Cambridge Regional College.** This service would enable students to catch the train to Cambridge Station to access Hills Road and Long Road Sixth Form Colleges.

**Ely – Witchford – Wentworth – Haddenham – Sutton - Mepal – Longstanton guided bus station** (or other guided bus station) to link East Cambridgeshire with guided bus services.

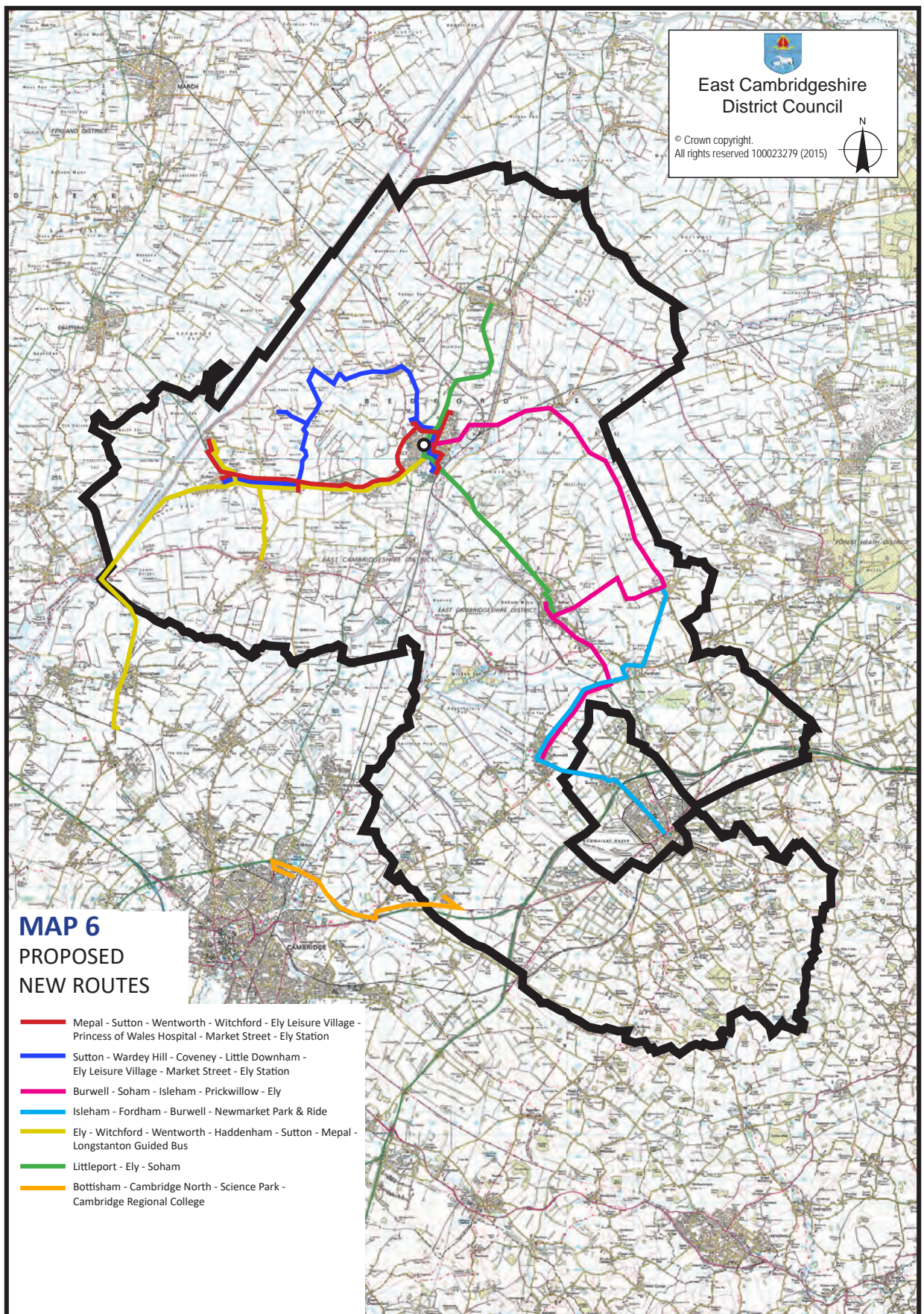
### **Isleham – Fordham – Burwell – Newmarket Park and Ride**

Comments were also received regarding the lack of an hourly service from Sutton to Ely and a service from Sutton to Ely Station (the Stagecoach number 39 service doesn't stop at the station).

Another potential new route could link Sutton and the larger settlements and outlying villages en route to Ely Leisure Village, Princess of Wales Hospital, Market Street, and Ely railway station.

If this service went via Coveney and Little Downham, the 125 service bus could then be used to provide a circular route around Ely. The City of Ely Council strongly support the provision of better bus services around the city and have allocated CIL funding towards a pilot of this service. Alternatively, the frequency of the Stagecoach number 9 service should be increased to provide an hourly service around Ely.





**Map 6** shows proposed new bus routes.



## Changes to existing services

Many of the consultation responses related to existing services already in operation e.g. Stagecoach services 11 Newmarket to Cambridge and 12 Ely to Cambridge, the number 9 Littleport to Ely (and Ely to Cambridge) service and the Stagecoach 39 service, which travels from Sutton to Ely.

The comments regarding existing services were requests for later buses running until 11pm (especially on Friday and Saturday evenings), direct buses to Addenbrookes Hospital, Cambridge railway stations or sixth form colleges, more direct services to Cambridge to reduce travel time, and provision of Sunday services. Sunday services are important to allow those who work on a Sunday to be able to travel to work, to support tourism, and to boost the local economy.

ECDC would like to work with the CPCA to trial earlier and later buses and Sunday services, particularly to/from Cambridge and to increase the frequency of services that do not currently provide an hourly service for example the Stagecoach 39 service and to provide additional services for villages that do not have a daily bus service.

## Demand Responsive Transport (DRT)

The Council requests that the Combined Authority considers trialling demand responsive transport (DRT) solutions in providing bus services in East Cambridgeshire.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on bus usage and the rural nature of the district mean this would be a more viable option for delivering new routes and is also a method of trialling new services and collecting data on which routes people are requesting and the time/days they are travelling. This trial would complement the one to be conducted in Huntingdonshire by providing additional information, specifically related to rural settlements, to aid decision making around the establishment of DRT in the Combined Authority area.

The DRT solutions would fill a gap in provision, where there is no current local transport offer and complement existing timetabled bus services, for example by acting as a feed-in service. They could also provide access to rail, Busway, and Park and Ride services for some journeys, providing first mile/last mile solutions.

This would enhance opportunities for local residents, particularly those without access to a regular timetabled bus service to access services (for example, school, local hospitals, and shops), employment and enabling greater social inclusion.

It would also improve the experience of, and offering to, passengers through improving bus journey times, reliability, providing weekend or evening services and giving access to more destinations.

New DRT services should complement the existing dial-a-ride services. It is the Council's intention to engage with Ely and Soham Association of Community Transport (ESACT) and The Voluntary Network to ensure this.



Areas where DRT could be trialled include:

- In the south of the district to provide a better alternative to the existing one journey a day services.
- In the Isleham area as an alternative to scheduled services to Soham, Newmarket and Ely.
- In the Littleport area to enable those living in the outlying hamlets of Black Horse Drove, Brandon Creek, Little Ouse and Redmere to access the shops and services in Littleport and to connect to public transport services.

## Supporting schemes

In order for these new services to be successful and move towards financial viability, people need to know they exist and accurate, real time information about the vehicle location and arrival time needs to be provided.

A targeted marketing and information campaign will be required. This should include formal and informal and traditional and online methods of communication, which are consistent, clearly branded and be ongoing. This will create trust in the services and encourage people to use them and become committed to supporting them.

Other things to be considered for the future are the development of smart and/ or multi-operator ticketing schemes and the enhancement of bus infrastructure, stops and stations. Provision should also be made to accommodate bikes on buses.

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