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Happy ending as GoStart finally secures a £100k funding boost

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Around £100,000 set aside by developers a decade ago for public transport improvements in the Sudbury area has finally been allocated to a project – just ahead of the agreed cut-off point.

The money, initially secured by Babergh District Council in 2006 as part of a planning agreement with Barratt Homes when the Bakers Mill development was built in Great Cornard, will be used to launch an evening bus service in the area.

Concerns were raised that the cash, which was originally due to be spent on a rail halt on the Sudbury to Marks Tey line, would revert back to the developer this year if agreement could not be reached on how it should be spent.

The original agreement stated that if the rail halt did not materialise by 2014 then the council would have two years to come up with another public transport project to benefit Cornard residents.

However, despite a number of suggestions being put forward by local groups, nothing was found that satisfied criteria set down by Suffolk County Council and the developer. This caused frustration among councillors and transport groups.

Sudbury-based community transport group GoStart filed several applications for a share of the money, but the bus services they were proposing were turned down because they would be in “direct competition”

“...seeing £100,000 left unspent would have been hard for my constituents to swallow.”

South Suffolk MP James Cartledge



■ Sudbury's GoStart community transport scheme has secured £100,000 of funding. From left, councillors Tony Bavington, Jan and Adrian Osborn, and South Suffolk MP James Cartledge. Photograph: GREGG BROWN

with a commercial service in the area.

South Suffolk MP James Cartledge then used his connections to see if the developers could be more flexible on the terms and conditions.

And following dozens of local meetings led by Babergh councillors Tony Bavington and Tom Burrows, an idea emerged to run an evening bus service from Bakers Mill. It has now been confirmed that GoStart has received the money, just before the developer's deadline.

Current commercial services to and from Bakers Mill stop at 5pm. The new service – which is expected to be up and running by December – will enable residents to get a bus from the train station, to the local theatre

or to cafés in the evenings. The idea is that by using volunteer drivers, fares from the service can be set aside to purchase a replacement bus in the future, making the service sustainable.

Last night Mr Cartledge paid tribute to Babergh councillors and officers for reaching a successful conclusion.

“When it was first revealed to me that there was a possibility that the Sudbury and Cornard area might see this large amount of money returned to the developer rather than spent for the benefit of local people, I was aghast.

“In what have been unavoidably stringent financial times, particularly in local government, seeing

£100,000 left unspent would have been hard for my constituents to swallow.”

Jan Osborne, Babergh's portfolio-holder for community engagement said the new service was “greatly needed” as many Cornard residents were left with no viable transport options in the evenings.

“We are all beyond delighted that, due to lots of hard work behind the scenes, this really valuable service will be up and running soon,” she said.

Meanwhile councillor Tony Bavington, who is also chairman of the Bakers Mill Project Group, added: “This service will provide a vital link for Great Cornard in the evenings and outside of normal hours.”

Military bases on alert following attempted abduction incident

■ From: Page 1

Despite the situation, yesterday's RAF Marham friends and families day went ahead as planned, with US airmen from Suffolk also joining the crowds.

All three west Suffolk bases said they would not comment on operational security matters, but said they keep aware of threats and incidents and change their security measures accordingly.

Master Sergeant Eric Burks, at RAF Lakenheath, said: “Due to operations security, we can't discuss specific changes to force protection levels. However, commanders at all levels continually assess threats alongside host nation counterparts and take

appropriate measures. We are dedicated to making every possible effort to ensure the safety and security of service members, civilians, their families, and our facilities.”

A similar statement was released by the USAF at RAF Mildenhall, while an RAF Honington spokeswoman said: “We do not comment on matters of operational security but the safety of our personnel is our paramount consideration, therefore our security posture is kept under constant review.”

It is not known if advice about remaining out of uniform off base has been circulated to west Suffolk personnel.

Police are urging the public to

call 0800 056 0154 if they saw a “dark-coloured” people carrier in the King's Lynn area on Tuesday or have seen people matching the suspects' descriptions.

The first man is described as 20 to 30 years old, about 6ft tall, of athletic but stocky build, with dark hair which was long on top and had a well-groomed beard.

The second is described as between 20 to 30 years old but younger than the first suspect and of a slimmer build.

He was about 5ft 10ins tall, clean shaven with short dark hair. Both are described as “of Middle Eastern origin”.

The police are looking into a range of motives, including terrorism and attempted robbery.



■ RAF Marham is still on high alert after Wednesday night's attack on a serviceman close to the Norfolk base. Photograph: IAN BURT