Executive Summary

The Council has ambitious plans for the regeneration of the town centre as set out in the adopted Corporate Plan 2015-2020. One of the key opportunities identified is for a new mixed-use development at the bottom end of North Street adjacent to the Friary Centre. This site has been included as an allocation in the emerging Local Plan and the Council is committed, with its partner M&G, to delivering a high quality development that will improve the town’s retail, leisure and housing offer and which will provide significant public realm enhancements.

On 27 September 2016, the Executive considered a report from the Managing Director on the proposal for the Council to enter into an Exclusivity Agreement with M&G. The Executive resolved:

(1) That the progress made in informal discussions with M&G be noted.

(2) That the progress made and further work necessary to resolve the bus provision in the town with the intention of closing the existing bus station, be noted.

(3) That the proposed approach, set out in the report submitted to the Executive, in respect of planning guidance to be issued to M&G to enable them to further develop their proposed scheme into a suitable scheme that meets the community’s expectations, be endorsed.

(4) That the basis of negotiations with M&G be endorsed and that the Managing Director be authorised:

   (a) to enter into an exclusivity agreement with M&G; and
   (b) to negotiate a development agreement which will facilitate a development scheme on a mutually acceptable basis in line with the key principles.

The purpose of this report is to give further detail on the shortlisted options explored, including the recommendation that bus layover with associated bus driver facilities and on-street stops could feasibly be provided in lieu of an actual station. On-street bus stops in suitable and convenient locations will continue to ensure that the heart of the town centre remains accessible for both buses and bus passengers and that a quality
bus service is maintained.

It is recommended that a short, focused stakeholder engagement exercise be undertaken early in 2017 in order to appraise a wide range of town centre and transport user groups of the emerging plans for the bus station. This will enable feedback to be incorporated into detailed designs to be developed for delivery, as part of the next stage of technical work.

**Recommendation to Executive**

That the Executive

(1) accepts the recommendations of the Stage 1 and Stage 2 Arup reports that it is feasible that the Friary Centre bus station could be replaced with an on street bus solution with suitable layover facilities provided elsewhere;
(2) supports the Council’s proposed, focused engagement exercise (with bus operators/bus user groups and other key stakeholders); and
(3) acknowledges that further detailed design and traffic modelling work should be commissioned to enable the proposed solution to be properly designed and tested before implementation.

**Reason for Recommendation:**
To ensure that the most practical and deliverable solution for the relocation of the Friary Centre bus station layover facilities is pursued in order to facilitate the redevelopment of the North Street site for the overall benefit of the regeneration of the town centre.

1. **Background and Purpose of Report**

1.1 Guildford Borough Council has very ambitious plans for the regeneration of the town centre. The Corporate Plan (2015-2020) was initially adopted by the Council on 7 October 2015 and was subsequently revised and updated on 26 July 2016. It is an essential part of the Council's strategic framework. The Action Plan within the Corporate Plan sets out a number of key priorities, including amongst others: ensuring an attractive, competitive, multi-faceted and vibrant town; enhancing our shopping and leisure offer; improving accessibility and pedestrian environment; unlocking the economic advantages of urban regeneration; and providing for a range of new housing to meet need.

1.2 On 22 March 2016, The Executive resolved that the Town Centre Masterplan (TCMP) prepared by Allies and Morrison be approved as a guide for the ongoing work of the GBC Major Projects team who will, where appropriate, present proposals in a manner that is compatible with the Local Plan and planning requirements. The Masterplan includes a number of suggestions about how key sites within the town centre, and its hinterland, could potentially be redeveloped to provide growth for the town to support its role as a retail and business centre and bring forward additional housing on previously-developed land to help meet identified needs and reduce development pressure on the borough’s green belt.

1.3 The redevelopment of the North Street site will play a key role in shaping future town centre regeneration and the land is proposed to be allocated for a comprehensive mixed-use development (retail, food & drink and housing) in the emerging Local Plan. As previously reported to the Executive, the Council is due to enter into an Exclusivity Agreement with M&G in order to negotiate a Development Agreement to deliver a high quality development that will benefit residents, businesses and visitors alike.
The Exclusivity Agreement is likely to be exchanged by the end of December 2016 and will set out a timescale for agreeing the detailed terms for entering into a Development Agreement. One of the issues to be addressed during the exclusivity period is finding a suitable solution for the relocation of the Friary Centre bus station.

1.4 The situation in relation to the bus station is complex. The station itself is in the freehold ownership of the Council and is part of the 150 year long-lease of the Friary Centre (signed in 1978). Since 2013, the long-lease has been in the ownership of M&G. There should have been a sub-lease for the bus station back to the Council or Surrey County Council; however, the sub-lease has not yet been completed. Surrey County Council has contracted the operation of the bus station to Arriva but Guildford Borough Council has been responsible for procuring the cleaning of the station. It is apparent that little maintenance has been carried out and the bus station is consequently now a tired facility in need of significant upkeep and major overhaul to make it a modern, fit for purpose facility in keeping with a regenerated town centre. Transport patterns have also changed since it was built. Given the vision of the Allies and Morrison Town Centre Masterplan, a review of bus facilities is necessary to deliver a sustainable solution for the future.

1.5 Furthermore, work undertaken to date has shown that delivery of a workable and viable mixed-use scheme for North Street is not possible if the current bus station were to remain in situ. Accordingly, the Council has been working closely with partners, including Surrey County Council, to seek alternative bus layover provision within the town.

1.6 At its meeting on 27 September 2016, the Executive noted the progress made and further work necessary to resolve the bus provision in the town, with the intention of closing the existing bus station. At that time, officers undertook to report back at a later stage the options investigated for the relocation of bus layover facilities. This report seeks to provide the update on this matter.

1.7 Options have been technically assessed on behalf of this Council and Surrey County Council by Arup and their reports are included as appendices to this report.

1.8 This report also seeks approval from the Executive to commence focused stakeholder engagement in the early part of 2017 in order to appraise a wide range of town centre user groups of the emerging plans for the bus services, and to capture their views and opinions on this matter. Feedback received will be used, where appropriate, to inform detailed designs to be developed for delivery, as part of the next stage of technical work that will be commissioned by the Council.

2. Arup Stage 1 report

2.1 Earlier this year, Arup was jointly commissioned by the Council and Surrey County Council to examine options to relocate bus operations from the existing Friary Centre bus station to facilitate the re-development of the North Street site. The commission given to Arup was divided into two Stages (1 & 2).

2.2 The ‘Technical note on existing conditions’ (Appendix 1) was the first step taken as part of the bus study. It mainly consisted of the following work:

- a summary and critical appraisal of existing background information, policy directions and priorities. This also included a review of previous studies relating to transport and movement in and around Guildford town centre, as
well as studies of the bus station itself. The material appraised was used as a starting point for an analysis of the existing bus network.

- analysis of how the bus network in Guildford currently functions, including a review of existing timetables and route maps for each existing bus route in each direction.
- analysis of currently committed changes proposed to the highway network. Assumptions and constraints to the highway network formed from this analysis will determine the selection of alternative bus routeing, stop and stand arrangements.

2.3 The second part of the Stage 1 work, the ‘Technical needs note’ (Appendix 2), then combined the review of existing conditions with stakeholder engagement in order to understand future requirements for the bus network in Guildford. Engagement was undertaken with all the bus operators using the bus station, of which Arriva and Stagecoach are the largest.

2.4 The bus operators agreed on the need for change, and that the current bus station was not fit for purpose. Operators require varying levels of layover facilities. Some operators were using the bus stops to park buses during bus driver breaks, which is not an efficient use of prime town centre space.

2.5 Other bodies engaged in the stakeholder consultation included:

- Network Rail
- North West Surrey bus users group (as no such bus user group exists for just the town of Guildford)
- M&G Real Estate transport consultants
- Guildford Vision Group
- Guildford Society

2.6 Stakeholders that responded expressed a desire for a new bus facility, with most retaining an open mind on the nature of the design of the new facilities delivered. The use of technology to communicate key messages on bus service locations, frequency, performance and routeings were regarded as critical to enabling and promoting use of the bus. Traditional bus priority measures using bus lanes were regarded as impractical, on the whole, due to the finite road space available.

3. Arup Stage 2 report

3.1 The Stage 2 ‘Options Appraisal report (November 2016)’ (Appendix 3) examined options to deliver the objectives of the commissioned study, taking on board stakeholder needs and requirements established from Stage 1. A number of sites (10 in total) within and around the town centre were identified and then evaluated against a set of established appraisal criteria. It is worth noting at this stage that land not in the ownership of the Council was also considered as part of the report, to assess any potential merit in acquiring land for the future if needed to provide a workable solution.

3.2 The report concluded that the Bedford Wharf site, part of which lies within the Council’s ownership, represents a suitable potential location for the re-provision of bus layover from the town centre. This could be supported with a series of on street bus stops within the town centre, as have been provided successfully in other town centres elsewhere, such as Brighton and Reading, and have been proven to be a workable option that would meet the needs of bus providers and users alike.
3.3 The exact configuration of a bus layover facility, together with associated issues relating to access and egress, would still require addressing. These matters will be examined in further detail in the next stage of technical work.

3.4 The Stage 2 report also considered the use of the Arriva Bus Depot site in Leas Road, which could potentially offer an alternative option for the relocation of bus layover facilities from the town centre. However, use of this site is dependent upon relocation of the existing bus depot elsewhere. Discussions with Arriva are still ongoing.

3.5 The second element of the Stage 2 report is the delivery plan, focused on how the preferred solution could be practically delivered. This work is nearing completion. This will then be followed in 2017 by a further study (Stage 3 – yet to be commissioned), which will take the Stage 2 reports forward to detailed design, including traffic modelling. The Stage 3 study will also focus on examining detailed matters associated with the construction of the new bus stops and layover arrangements.

4. **Focused Stakeholder Engagement**

4.1 Before commencing this detailed Stage 3 study, it has been decided to carry out further focused stakeholder engagement, to build upon the engagement undertaken by Arup in Stage 1. It is proposed that this work would be undertaken on behalf of the Council by external stakeholder engagement experts.

4.2 This focused stakeholder engagement is planned to take place in January 2017, with results published as part of the stakeholder engagement report in March 2017. The report would then be shared with the consultants commissioned to undertake the Stage 3 technical work so that any feedback can be taken on board. It is intended that full consultation on the preferred bus station option would follow once the phase 3 work is complete with traffic modelling.

4.3 The Council remains committed to finding a solution to the Friary Centre bus station to enable the North Street development and wider regeneration of the town centre to take place. The Council seeks to achieve this by working with all stakeholders including town centre user groups, bus operators and Surrey County Council, in their capacity both as the local highway authority and management company for bus contracts in Guildford. The proposed solution must be workable from an engineering, operational and customer perspective. Continued dialogue with stakeholders in tandem with the further development of technical work will be considered critical in reaching the most optimal solution; however, from the technical studies undertaken to-date officers are very confident that a workable and successful solution can be found.

5. **Legal Implications**

5.1 Whilst it is likely that implementing the finally agreed solution for the replacement of the bus station will raise a number of legal issues that will need addressing at the appropriate time, no specific legal implications arising from this report itself are identified.

5.2 Ultimate responsibility for securing the relocation of the Friary Centre bus station will rest with the Council and the County Council and consultation with the bus operators concerning a relocation facility and will be separate from any contractual obligations
between the Council and M&G concerning the delivery of the North Street development.

6. **Human Resource Implications**

6.1 There are human resource implications for both the Major Projects Team and the Public Relations and Marketing team in commissioning and managing external contracts for both the stakeholder engagement and the production of the Stage 3 Technical Study. These can be met from within existing structures and human resource budgets.

7. **Financial Implications**

7.1 Both the Stage 3 technical work and focused stakeholder engagement will be solely funded and undertaken by, or on behalf of the Council. The Stage 3 technical work is estimated to cost in the region of £100,000. This cost can be accommodated within the North Street development approved capital budget of £405,000 for 2016-17. The focused stakeholder engagement will also be funded from the North Street development budget.

8. **Conclusion**

8.1 A comprehensive review of bus provision in the town is required, and it is considered the existing bus station, which is tired and dated, must be moved to enable a modern, fit for purpose facility and service for the town.

8.2 Options to relocate bus operations within the existing Friary Centre bus station were examined as part of the Arup work commissioned jointly by the Council and Surrey County. The work undertaken by Arup in Stages 1 and 2 culminated in the recommendation that, rather than replacing the bus station with a new formal facility, the needs of operators and passengers can be met through the provision of a number of on-street bus stops in the heart of the town centre, together with suitable layover facilities for drivers elsewhere.

8.3 In addition, the Council has considered a number of options for the delivery of a redevelopment scheme on North Street. It is still firmly believed that a high quality mixed-use retail led development is desirable and is achievable on this site, but such a scheme would not be workable or viable with the existing bus station in situ.

8.4 Further technical study, modelling and design work is required to deliver an on-street solution with layover and this work will be commissioned in the early part of 2017. However, before commencing Stage 3 of the technical work, the Council should seek to build on engagement already undertaken during the course of the Arup study to carry out focused stakeholder engagement, to understand the views and opinions of key groups. The results of this are anticipated to be published around March 2017 and will be used to refine detailed design options developed during the course of Stage 3, with the final chosen bus option being the subject of subsequent public consultation.

9. **Background Papers**

North Street re-development: proposed exclusivity agreement, 27 September 2016 Executive report
10. **Appendices**

Appendix 1: ‘Technical note on existing conditions (Arup, May 2016)’
Appendix 2: ‘Technical Needs Note (June 2016)’
Appendix 3: Options Appraisal report (Arup, November 2016)