

News story: Bristol buses released from undertakings by CMA

The undertakings, covering FirstGroup Holdings Limited, 'FirstGroup', and local authority bus services, were put in place following the 1989 merger of local bus companies Badgerline and Midland Red West, which was investigated by the Monopolies and Mergers Commission (MMC).

The MMC ruled in 1989 that the merger would remove competition for bus services contracted by the former Avon County Council. Local authorities tender for – and subsidise – unprofitable bus services to maintain important transport links for residents.

Badgerline was subsequently renamed FirstGroup Holdings Limited (a subsidiary of FirstGroup plc), which then became subject to the restrictions, including a cap on the amount they could receive from the local authority for running a tendered service – and a requirement to return any excess profit from such services.

The Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) has been [reviewing the undertakings](#) since January 2017 to consider if there has been any change of circumstances which would justify the removal or variation of the undertakings.

During the investigation it was found that FirstGroup's share of tendered bus services in the region has reduced significantly since the MMC report and that in the most recent tender rounds, FirstGroup did not win any contracts at 3 of the 4 Local Transport Authorities. The CMA engaged with local stakeholders during the investigation, none of which argued that the undertakings were having a beneficial effect and should be retained.

In June, the CMA launched a consultation on its provisional decision to remove the undertakings. No representations were received and the CMA has therefore decided to release the undertakings. A notice of release of undertakings is published alongside the [CMA's final decision](#).

Notes for editors

1. The CMA is the UK's primary competition and consumer authority. It is an independent non-ministerial government department with responsibility for carrying out investigations into mergers, markets and the regulated industries and enforcing competition and consumer law. For CMA updates, follow us on Twitter [@CMAgovuk](#), [Flickr](#), [LinkedIn](#) and [Facebook](#).
 2. Media enquiries to the CMA should be directed to press@cma.gsi.gov.uk or 020 3738 6798.
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Press release: Schemes across the country to receive £15 million of natural flood management funding

New allocations of flood management funding will allow homes, businesses and communities around the country to benefit from increased flood protection, [Floods Minister Thérèse Coffey](#) announced today.

34 community led projects have been named as winners of a [£1m government funded competition](#), the first of its kind, and will now be able to realise their innovative plans to use landscape features such as ponds, banks, meanders, channels, and trees to store, drain or slow flood water.

24 other catchment scale projects have also been allocated funding to develop larger scale projects which will benefit wider areas; with Cumbria, Greater Manchester Merseyside and Cheshire and Walsingham all receiving over £1m of funding.

Environment minister Thérèse Coffey said:

This funding will help more than 50 projects around the country take full advantage of innovative natural flood management measures. Flood defence technology and engineering is better than ever and by using a mix of natural and concrete defences, we can provide the best flood protection for individual areas.

Methods such as restoring floodplains and planting trees will not only help protect families, homes and businesses from flooding, they will also bring environmental benefits to the wider area and all the people who live in these many communities.

Minister Coffey announced the successful allocations in Sutton and Roxwell, where she visited two of the schemes which will receive funding.

Following flooding in Roxwell last year the community bid for funding to improve land and ditch management and reduce the risk of the local brook overflowing again. This project has been allocated £50,000 so the community can work with local landowners to help slow the flow of water down to the brook.

Sutton's sustainable drainage in schools project will receive £50,000 to improve the town's natural flood defences. This scheme will be run across seven of Sutton's schools, providing improved flood protection to over 100 properties.

Emma Howard Boyd, Chair of the Environment Agency, said:

Natural flood management is an important part of our approach, alongside traditional flood defences and helping homeowners to improve their own property resilience. There is no 'one size fits all' solution to flooding and this scheme is a fantastic example of how we can use a variety of measures that work together to reduce flood risk.

These allocations come from the £15 million of natural flood management funding which was announced in March, following the Autumn statement.

Details of the allocations are available [here](#).

News story: Defence Secretary announces £120m investment in UK air power

The deals will create 330 British jobs and help the RAF to continue to perform at its best by improving training for fast jet pilots and making sure the Hercules C-130J aircraft can continue to support the UK's Armed Forces around the world.

The Defence Secretary Sir Michael Fallon, said:

These contracts demonstrate our commitment to supporting the UK's air power, through maintaining battle proven aircraft and training the next generation of fast jet pilots.

This substantial investment will ensure our Air Force can continue to perform at its very best. Backed by our rising defence budget and £178 billion equipment plan, these contracts will create high skilled jobs in Britain and > ensure that our Armed Forces have the best equipment and training available to keep the UK safe.

The first contract, worth £110 million, is with British company Marshall Aerospace and Defence Group. It will replace the centre wing box for the RAF's Hercules C-130J aircraft and will create 330 jobs in Cambridge, adding to the over 5,100 UK jobs Marshall already support in the region.

This replacement will extend the Hercules C-130J aircraft's out of service date to 2035, making sure this essential aircraft can continue to transport

personnel and equipment around the world, having previously supported defence and humanitarian relief efforts in Iraq, Nepal and South Sudan.

The MOD has also signed a £9.5 million contract with QinetiQ to provide Typhoon pilots trained at RAF Waddington with the latest cockpit technology to prepare them for front line combat.

With the nature of global conflict ever evolving, it's vital that the Armed Forces are trained effectively to deal with a variety of scenarios. This technical update to RAF Waddington's training equipment will give Typhoon crews based at the station's Air Battlespace Training Centre 10 weeks of simulated battle training a year.

The trainee aircrew will be exposed to state-of-the-art, simulated battlefield situations and the training facilitators can develop scenarios, provide mission management support and post mission debriefs, ensuring the crews will be best prepared for deployment.

It will also allow instructors at RAF Waddington to connect to Typhoon training devices at RAF Lossiemouth and RAF Coningsby, guaranteeing fast jet pilots based across the UK access to the latest cockpit and simulated training technology.

Press release: New A5-M1 link road in Bedfordshire hailed by business and civic leaders

The A5-M1 link road has created a new northern bypass for Dunstable, taking long distance traffic away from the town centre, and opened up opportunities for thousands of new homes and jobs. It connects the existing A5 to the M1 at a newly created junction – junction 11A.

Today, Highways England invited local public figures, partners and supporters to join the project team for the A5-M1 Link scheme to celebrate the new road, which opened early and on budget in May.

Iftikhar Mir, Highways England's major projects director overseeing the A5-M1 Link project, said:

Since it opened on 11 May, the A5-M1 Link scheme has been providing a vital new east-west connection between the A5 and the M1.

Early anecdotal evidence is very encouraging. The new link road, built to modern standards, is already providing road users with

better journeys, and congestion through Dunstable's high street has also begun to ease.

We would like to thank local people and road users for their patience and support over nearly two and a half years while we have worked to deliver this new road on time and on budget.

The new A5-M1 Link road opened to traffic on 11 May 2017

Town Mayor of Dunstable, Councillor Gloria Martin said:

The Town Council and residents of Dunstable are pleased that after many years of suffering heavy traffic and poor air quality, we now have a northern relief road. "Since its opening the reduction in through traffic, particularly heavy lorries, has been noticeable.

We look forward to the de-trunking of the A5, the enforcing of a heavy lorry ban, improved air quality in the High Street and continued regeneration of our town.

Tina Barnard, Hertfordshire LEP board member and chair of Strategic Infrastructure Board, said:

This short but absolutely vital link between the M1 and the A5 is critical to help economic development and jobs growth both in Central Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire. Not only will it reduce journey times for long-distance traffic by giving HGV drivers easier access to the M1, it will also help to relieve congestion for residents and businesses by taking pressure off local roads.

This is a prime example of where local authorities and LEPs have worked hand in hand with Highways England to identify the critical interventions needed to grow our local economy.

Houghton Regis Town Mayor, Councillor Joanna Hillyard said:

Houghton Regis has watched the progress of the A5-M1 Link with interest and many members of the town were fascinated to watch the bridge demolitions.

The difference it has made to the town since its opening has been quite remarkable. As more and more people start learning to navigate the new roads and junctions, it is hoped that the roads through the town will see even less cars and lorries, which will improve the air quality and noise. Houghton Regis has welcomed this project and has enjoyed working with Highways England and its joint venture contractor Costain-Carillion.

Stephen Catchpole, SEMLEP's Chief Executive said:

The completion of the A5-M1 link, together with the new Woodside Link road, is a major contributor to unlocking economic potential of the area. This vital road infrastructure enables new developments that will assist growth by freeing up prime employment and housing land.

Discussing the benefits of the newly opened A5-M1 link road at today's opening ceremony

The £162 million, 2.8 mile dual carriageway and new motorway junction opened shortly after 4am on 11 May 2017. The new road is also set to make journeys between the A5 and the M1 safer, faster and more reliable.

It will also make a difference to local residents by unlocking 40 hectares of land for new business development and jobs and providing the infrastructure for 7,000 homes to the north of Houghton Regis.

The new M1 junction 11A, which is another key part of the scheme, is now linking the new road and Central Bedfordshire Council's Woodside link road to the M1, providing better access to the backbone of the national road network and opening the way for new and established businesses in Central Bedfordshire to faster connections with their customers in the UK and beyond.

The new road is the first major East of England project to be delivered in the Government's £15 billion investment in the strategic road network up to 2021. Now renamed A5, the A5-M1 Link road replaces a section of the A5 through Dunstable which has been handed over to Central Bedfordshire Council and Hertfordshire County Council.

The project included the building of a completely new dualled road, three new junctions including a new motorway junction, and six new bridges. Two old bridges over the M1 also had to be demolished to make way for the new junction 11A.

For more information about the A5-M1 Link, [visit the scheme website](#).

General enquiries

Members of the public should contact the Highways England customer contact centre on 0300 123 5000.

Media enquiries

Journalists should contact the Highways England press office on 0844 693 1448 and use the menu to speak to the most appropriate press officer.

Store First Limited – information for creditors, customers, investors and other interested parties.

Court outcome

On 30 April 2019 the court made an order to wind-up four companies in the public interest by consent between those four companies and the Secretary of State. The companies wound-up in court:

- Store First Limited, company registration number 07463355
- Store First Blackburn Limited, company registration number 07951785
- Store First St Helens Limited, company registration number 09664578
- SFM Services Limited, company registration number 07160642

The trial started on 15 April 2019 at the Manchester District Registry of the High Court and was presided over by HHJ Hodge QC. The Official Receiver has been appointed as liquidator.

The petition to wind up Store First Midlands Ltd was dismissed, also by consent between the parties following Store First Midlands Ltd transferring a storage centre it owned in Nottingham to Store First St Helens Limited. Store First Midlands has undertaken to the Court to no longer sell or market store pods as an investment or otherwise.

Liquidation

The Official Receiver was appointed as liquidator and has responsibility for dealing with the assets and liabilities of the four companies.

On 11 December 2019, the Official Receiver completed the sale of the freehold, associated assets and goodwill of the 15 Storage centres located in Blackburn, Burnley, Rochdale, Barnsley, Liverpool, Ellesmere Port, Wakefield, Glasgow, Preston, Derby, Leeds, St Helens, Manchester, Northampton and Nottingham to Store First Freeholds Limited.

On the same date the Official Receiver also completed the sale of the assets of SFM Services Limited to Pay Store Limited.

The Purchasers have confirmed that they intend to continue renting the self-storage units to end users and that Pay Store will continue to manage the storage sites on a day to day basis using the name Store First.

Queries regarding the day-to-day business at the 15 sites should be directed to Pay Store: customerservices@pay-store.co.uk.

Information for investors

Investors who have enquiries regarding the operation of the sites and their pods should contact Pay Store: customerservices@pay-store.co.uk.

If you completed a purchase of a storage pod prior to the Companies entering liquidation the sale of the sites will not affect the ownership of your pod.

The Official Receiver and the Purchasers have agreed that the Purchasers will:

- For a period of six months following the sale, attempt to complete purchases of storage pods which were not legally completed prior to the liquidation.
- Accept any requests from investors to surrender their pods. Pay Store will cover the costs of the surrender, but the investor will not receive any payment.
- Exchange pods which are unusable for a pod of the same size and dimension, subject to availability.
- Assist investors with applying for Business Rates relief.
- Will not market or sell pods to third parties for investment purposes.

Investors with enquiries regarding any of the agreements listed above should contact Pay Store: customerservices@pay-store.co.uk.

The Official Receiver is responsible for investigating the cause of the liquidation of the four companies, including any business dealings and affairs, and reporting on the conduct of the directors. If you have any information that may assist in these duties please send to PIU.North_StoreFirst@insolvency.gov.uk.

The Official Receiver is and remains the sole appointed liquidator of the companies by virtue of the court order dated 30 April 2019 and pursuant to s136(2) of the Insolvency Act 1986.

Third Parties not connected to the Official Receiver continue to contact individual investors requesting upfront payments. These entities are not connected to the Official Receiver in his capacity as the Liquidator of the companies and they do not have the authority to act on the Official Receiver's behalf.

The Official Receiver accepts no responsibility for these third parties and for any individuals who enter into agreements with such third parties and any loss suffered as a consequence.

All enquiries relating to the Companies' affairs should continue to be directed to:

The Official Receiver, Public Interest Unit, 2nd Floor, 3 Piccadilly Place, London Road, Manchester, M1 3BN. Email: PIU.North_StoreFirst@insolvency.gov.uk.