

AGM 2016: Questions & Answers

Summary of questions to Cllr. Malcolm Richards, Executive for Highways & Transport and answers received.

1. Route of the South Wokingham Distributor Road

Q: When will the route for the South Wokingham Distributor Road be confirmed?

A: The target date for publication of the alignment completion of the main spine road and access road by Tesco (Western Gateway Phase 1) is September 2017. **

There will be a public consultation prior to a planning application.

2. Completion of the South Wokingham Distributor Road

Q: When will the South Wokingham Distributor Road be completed and open for traffic? Could funding be a delaying factor?

A: The target date for delivery of the main spine road and access road by Tesco (Western Gateway Phase 1) is April 2021. **

This is the target date for the road sections only of the development.

Funding is in the Wokingham BC financial plan and is not currently a constraint to delivery.

3. Finchampstead Road Improvements

Q: When will the improvements to Finchampstead Road and the reconstruction of the Guildford Line railway bridge take place? How long will Finchampstead Road be closed?

A: The current estimated completion of this part of the project (Western Gateway Phase 2) is July 2019. The design of the proposed improvements is currently due for planning application and public consultation by December 2016. **

Wokingham BC currently predicts a road closure for up to 13 weeks.

*(** GLRA Comment: The order of delivery and planning applications for the Main Spine Road and Western Gateway Phase 1 and the Western Gateway Phase 2 projects is currently described as "interchangeable". Presumably, the relative priorities for these projects has yet to be determined by WBC.)*

4. Bridge from Montague Park

Q: If the Montague Park Bridge is not provided, how would traffic volumes be affected?

A: Wokingham BC is proceeding with the project to provide a bridge from Montague Park (the Eastern Gateway). Publication and consultation is due in September 2016 and WBC and Network Rail are aiming for delivery by December 2018.

(GLRA Comment: The full response from Wokingham BC refers to the Network Rail re-signalling project. This project involves the closure of the Waterloo Road level crossing.

Great Langborough RA has written to Councillor Malcolm Richards, Wokingham BC emphasising the importance of keeping this crossing open until the Western Gateway Phase 2 project has been completed and the Finchampstead Road is again open for traffic.)

5. Traffic volumes and queue times at town centre junctions.

Q: What are the predictions for the traffic volumes at key town centre problem roads and junctions? What plans does Wokingham BC have to alleviate the impact of these?

A: The Carnival Pool and the Denmark Street/Langborough Road roundabouts are identified as being the most impacted by increased future traffic volumes. The Carnival Pool roundabout is being re-engineered to improve its flow. Improvements are expected from the new road connecting Wellington Road to Shute End and the North & South Wokingham Distributor Roads. Land constraints limit improvements to the Denmark Street/Langborough Road roundabout. However, the road infrastructure developments referred to above should have a beneficial impact on this junction.

More accurate traffic projections are expected from a new transport computer model by the end of 2016.

(GLRA Comment: we will request access to the remodelled estimates.)

6. Town Centre Parking and Enforcement

Q: When will the overall parking strategy for Wokingham be published?

A: This is published and is viewable at <http://www.wokingham.gov.uk/parking-roads-and-travel/transport-and-travel-passes/transport-and-roads-guidance-and-plans/?categoryesct19152969=9259>

Q: What are the current plans for decriminalisation?

A: Wokingham BC aims to take on enforcement powers from May 2017. This should improve compliance and lead to a reduction in congestion and road safety improvements.

Q: How can the utilisation of the Elms Road multi-storey car park be increased?

A: Wokingham BC operates this car park on behalf of the owner. Discussions are in place on this matter.

Q: How will the evening & weekend charges affect town centre businesses?

A: This is as yet unknown but is being monitored by measuring ticket sales. The Regeneration Team has been involved throughout the process.

Q: How can residents apply for their road to be considered for Resident-Only parking?

A: The protocol for Resident Only Parking is available by following the link above.

(GLRA Comment: we are willing to discuss our experience and views on this topic with any resident who approaches the Committee)

7. Affordable Housing

Q: How will Wokingham BC meet overall affordable housing targets?

A: These are set out in the Local Development Plan. This is secured via negotiations with developers via the planning process and/or securing commuted sums which we use to commission our local housing company or others to develop on the Council land. We also use our own assets and/or funding from the Council's capital programme to commission specialist housing provision such as extra care housing for older people or specialist young people's accommodation.

Q: Can you limit viability assessments circumventing the requirement in many planning applications?

(GLRA Comment: Viability assessments seek to evaluate whether developers can afford to meet targets for affordable housing contributions from a particular scheme.)

A: For the first 5 years from the S106 being granted there is no formal obligation upon the Council to discuss or negotiate viability assessments. However, if the Council is pro the development, it may be in the Council's interests to be open to these discussions/negotiations. After a 5 year period there is an obligation on the Council to be open to such approaches.

(GLRA Comment: Planning obligations define developer contributions to affordable housing, along with highway contributions and the Community Infrastructure Levy.

The above answer confirms that in any particular planning application, the council will consider waiving all or part of the normal affordable housing target if it is in favour of the development, as long as its overall targets for the Borough are on track. This has applied in Montague Park and Elms Field housing schemes.

The current Borough Housing Strategy sets a target of 1,000 additional affordable houses over a 3 year period. The number completed per year has averaged under 115 during the last 5 years; 2015/16 was 123. See page 9 of the Housing Facts and Figures Update January - March 2016 <http://www.wokingham.gov.uk/council-and-meetings/open-data/plans-policies-and-strategies/?categoryesct19084667=7738>

GLRA has written to Councillor Mark Ashwell, Wokingham BC highlighting the apparent inconsistency between recent completions and future targets and requesting clarification.)

8. Aircraft Noise

Q: How is Wokingham BC responding to the perceived increased in aircraft noise over the Town Centre?

A: After 2014, Heathrow Airports established the Heathrow Community Noise Forum in which Wokingham BC is a member. WBC plays a full part in this and via the Local Government Association to ensure that the interests of Borough residents are represented.

There was a routing trial in 2014 that was aborted because of complaints. There have been some changes in landing and take-off direction choices, according to wind direction.

More noisy aircraft are penalised through higher landing charges. Newer types of aircraft and modifications to existing planes are progressively improving noise levels.