

Wokingham Borough planning and local roads

I welcome the appointment of Councillor David Lee to the important role of setting out plans for future development in Wokingham Borough and for the highways and other transport links this will require. Many people are concerned about the current pace of growth, and wish to see sufficient investment in schools, health facilities, transport links and green spaces as the new housing takes shape.

I accept that Wokingham is an attractive place to many, with plenty of demand for new homes when they are built. We will need to make further space available for development over the years ahead. I am also very conscious that if we allow too much, or do not put in place the right facilities and preserve enough green space we could damage the environment we currently enjoy and the community we value. I look forward to working with David if elected as your MP to persuade government of a sustainable and sensible pace of growth for the next planning period, which must take into account the substantial development already underway under present agreed plans.

I hope the Council will have a green strategy that recognises and protects green gaps between settlements, prime farmland, woods and other important green areas. When planning new housing there needs to be a substantial investment in additional facilities, put in in good time for the new development. This will include needing to manage water run off to avoid flooding, providing capacity for cars to avoid more congestion, and recruiting and retaining the additional teachers and health staff we will need for the new facilities. There also needs to be some catch up, as we are currently short of some capacity.

The local road network requires improvements on the two main local A roads , the A 329 and the A 327. The Council has begun work on a series of bypasses for Shinfield, Arborfield and Winnersh and will need to do more to improve capacity on these routes. It needs the completion of the northern and southern relief roads in Wokingham with a good bridge link across the railway line, the main cause of current town congestion thanks to reliance on a level crossing. The A 329M is also a local road and will need additional capacity, ideally with an extension to include a new Thames bridge. Congestion into Reading and Henley is great owing to reliance on the single carriageway Sonning bridge and the narrow two carriageway Henley Bridge with traffic lights at one end. So far Oxfordshire has been unwilling to allow a new Thames crossing and this may not be any more easy to change than it has proved in the past.

Reducing road congestion requires generous parking allocations at home and work so parked cars are not occupying highway, and needs better public transport alternatives for regular journeys. It needs improved handling of parents cars dropping off and picking up at schools. It also requires work to improve flows at main junctions, which can also improve their safety.

Roundabouts are often better than traffic light sets. Segregating right turning traffic from traffic going straight on can usually improve flows and safety.

The Council is considering whether Grazeley would be the best place for additional housing. If they do decide to favour this approach it will be the subject of a major consultation to assess the public reaction and to take on board suggestions for a good scheme. It will also be important to get some assurances from government that if Wokingham promotes a substantial development there it will not be required to undertake much building elsewhere as well. Such a settlement would need a major investment in transport links for rail and road, east-west, as well as north-south.

Yours thoughts would be welcome, as the Council comes to a view on these important matters. I want the best settlement for Wokingham we can achieve, which needs more work before the Council can conclude on what will be the best way to handle new growth and where to direct it.

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