

NEWS RELEASE



**WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL**

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HELP US MAKE IT EASIER FOR YOU TO WALK AND CYCLE AROUND THE BOROUGH

Everyone who lives or works in Wokingham borough, or visits regularly, is invited to share their thoughts on two proposals to make walking and cycling around it safer and more accessible.

From 11 July to 19 August, Wokingham Borough Council is firstly seeking people's views on its draft Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) – a strategic document which suggests improvements to help people walk, wheel, scoot or cycle and will be used to apply for funding for them.

The finished version will be completed in the autumn but will always be open to updates and new ideas. It will outline the most beneficial active travel routes and propose specific measures in places where the community wants them, subject to funding and further public consultation.

The council wants to know people's views on these routes, including suggestions for ones that might be missing, and whether the suggestions would help them walk and cycle more. These could include better cycleways, footways, crossings or bridleways, new road layouts and lower speed limits.

Between these dates, the council also wants comments on its revised plans for a new £4 million cycling and walking link from Woodley to Palmer Park, at the Reading borough boundary, which could mostly be funded by significant contributions from the Department for Transport's Active Travel Fund. This was amended in response to residents' concerns about an earlier design in the spring.

The new version addresses as many of these as possible while providing a useful access to Woodley town centre and several schools and leisure facilities. Changes include the removal of a proposed one-way system on a section of Woodlands Avenue, between Lytham Road and Howth Drive, so that traffic can continue to flow in both directions.

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For more information and to comment, visit the following links or call the council offices on 0118 974 6000 for help and alternative formats:

- Local cycling and walking infrastructure plan: <https://wokinghamboroughlcwip.commonplace.is>
- Woodley to Reading active travel route: <https://engage.wokingham.gov.uk>.

Helping everyone get active more often

By drawing up an overarching, long-term vision for improvements, the council aims to increase the number of journeys made by active travel - which also includes wheelchairs, mobility scooters or push scooters - and make it the natural choice for shorter journeys and parts of longer ones.

It will remove barriers that discourage some groups or make it harder for them for them to get around, like wheelchair users or people pushing prams and buggies, allowing more people to enjoy the health and environmental benefits of making fewer trips by car.

The council has been developing the plan for some time and held a public consultation in early 2020, which helped identify priority areas. Now it wants people's views to ensure any improvements, none of which are set in stone, work well together and are as safe, convenient, and inclusive as possible.

As well as reducing traffic congestion, an increase in walking and cycling will result in fewer vehicle emissions, which will improve air quality and help tackle the climate emergency. The council declared this in 2019 and has pledged to do all it can to make the borough a net-zero carbon producer by 2030.

The Government has announced similar goals in its national transport policies and, in future, local authorities will be more likely to receive funding for walking and cycling schemes if they have produced their own LCWIP.

Listening to people's views at every step

Cllr Paul Fishwick, the council's new member for active travel, transport and highways, said: "We want to significantly increase walking and cycling journeys in Wokingham borough, alongside taking the train or bus, but we can't just to ask people to leave the car at home – we've got to make it safer and easier.

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“The Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan will play a key role in this for years to come, which is why it’s important that you come forward now. Feedback from our communities has been incredibly helpful at earlier stages and we urge you to do the same again as we work on the final details.

“Historically, planning for things like footways and cycle paths has been an afterthought in this country. By making them a priority and setting out clearly what we want, we can build in a far less piecemeal way and work more closely with neighbouring authorities to improve links outside the borough.

“We’re also delighted to be sharing the latest proposal for of our Woodley to Reading active travel route, which we hope the community will support. We took their concerns seriously and these are reflected in what we’re now putting forward.”

A bigger vision for a greener future

The plan is part of the council’s vision for increasing active and sustainable travel, which is important as transport accounts for about a quarter of carbon emissions nationally and, despite improvements in vehicle technologies, remains the biggest source of harmful pollutants like nitrogen dioxide.

Reducing traffic congestion will make essential car journeys easier, while helping residents get active outside more often will improve their physical and mental health. Experts say a short daily walk can add years to peoples’ lives while reducing stress, lowering blood pressure and boosting immunity.

Steps to achieve this include the council’s growing network of greenways, or generally traffic-free routes, between key destinations in the borough. This will be rolled out over the next decade or so, with work now under way on a link between Wokingham town and Arborfield Cross via Woosehill.

It will soon produce the latest draft of its local transport plan, which it must publish alongside other documents guiding future development across the borough, and will consult on it later in the year. This will strongly support active and sustainable travel wherever possible.

Alongside this, the council educates residents on the benefits of green travel through its My Journey Wokingham team, which is challenging people to log their active and sustainable journeys on the free Innovation Valley Rewards smartphone app this summer for the chance to win prizes.

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Empowering communities to make a difference

Cllr Clive Jones, the council's new leader, said: "We know that traffic congestion is frustrating for everyone who lives or works in this area, but it's just the visible symptom of a much bigger problem.

"More importantly, vehicle trips produce a dangerous level of emissions, which in turn contributes to air pollution and climate change and threatens people's health as well as that of our planet. We can't simply manage this problem at a superficial level – we've got to get people using cars less.

"This vital change won't happen overnight but our walking and cycling plan will provide the framework for many improvements, down to the level of individual neighbourhoods, to help people change their travel habits and build a more sustainable future for Wokingham borough."

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More from Cllr Paul Fishwick, executive member for active travel, transport and highways, at paul.fishwick@wokingham.gov.uk or Cllr Clive Jones, leader of Wokingham Borough Council, at clive.jones@wokingham.gov.uk