

California Cross Improvements – Frequently Asked Questions

The History

We're going to make some improvements to the roads, pavements, and other public space at California Crossroads in Finchampstead, which we're required to do. This is part of an agreement that was reached when we gave planning permission for new housing on our major development at the former Arborfield Garrison site, a short distance away.

The California Cross project focuses on the intersection of Finchampstead Road and Nine Mile Ride Road. This is a key focal point for the local community with a primary school, nursery school, post office, and other uses. Currently, there isn't a strong sense of place and we have an opportunity to create this by introducing more shared space.

We want to create an attractive environment and a vibrant, viable local centre at the heart of the community. This scheme will be high in quality and imaginative design with a focus on materials, landscaping, and attention to detail.

This will encourage access by walking and cycling, safety for users, and a distinct character that uses innovative ways of allowing pedestrians and traffic to exist alongside each other.

Consultation and preliminary design

We appointed WSP, a consultant, in 2018 to carry out an initial investigation and provide concept designs, followed by a preliminary design to address the issues found. We consulted anyone who might be affected at various points to ensure that the design was developed in line with the community's wants and needs.

Throughout December 2018, we held a series of events to gather feedback on the developed proposal. Three drop-in sessions at Finchampstead Baptist Church allowed members of the public to view the plans, ask for more information, and submit written feedback. Large boards of the consultation leaflet were displayed, and the council project manager and designer were there to answer people's questions and explain the proposals. About 300 people attended and the consultation also allowed online responses.

What works are taking place?



Following the different options, surveys, and public consultation, WSP developed the above design, which uses an informal layout. This approach has been successfully used on many other schemes, including Poynton, Coventry City Centre, and Ponders End in London. In these examples, vehicles move more slowly through the junction than they would in a traditional layout.

The design hopes to achieve the following:

- **Strong visibility:** The approaches would be located to make clear to drivers that they are traveling from the public highway into a shared environment. Advance Directions signs (ADS) will also be provided on each approach.
- **Provide a high-quality street environment:** high-quality carriageway, footway, and street furniture materials have been proposed to create a stronger orientation away from vehicles.
- **Remove any priority at the junction:** an informal street layout will be provided at the two existing mini-roundabouts to redress the balance between vehicles and other users. This will be achieved by removing all traditional road markings and transforming the centre from a junction to a landmark. The mini roundabouts will be marked with a circular leaf pattern.
- **Courtesy crossings at commonly used paths:** The crossings will be placed in areas where pedestrians typically prefer to cross, in a very similar location to the existing crossing. Courtesy crossings will also be provided at the approaches as they provide short opportunities to cross the street, which is particularly helpful to people with disabilities. In

addition, the visibility splays at the proposed crossing are as good or better than the existing ones as existing planting will be cut back and street furniture moved.

- Prioritise the shopping parade for pedestrians: Car parking currently dominates the area in front of the shops. While vehicle access is essential, this area will be improved to prioritise pedestrians while keeping service access and parking. This will be achieved using high-quality materials and rearranging the parking layout.
- Improved school access: The Avery Corner car park entrance will be widened to allow two-way movement and the approach will be designed to give stronger pedestrian priority. Subject to ongoing land acquisition in this area.
- Introduction of “blended” crossings: We have proposed to include a “blended” pedestrian crossing at the Avery Corner car park entrance which forces drivers to slow down and gives pedestrians priority.

Has this approach been tried before?

Yes, this approach has been used in other parts of the UK, including Exhibition Road, Bexleyheath Town Centre, Ponders End, and Poynton. It is worth noting that the Poynton, Bexleyheath Town Centre, and Exhibition Road schemes have won awards.

What makes the proposed design better than the existing layout?

The project aims to create a stronger sense of place by shifting priority away from motor vehicles. This is to be achieved by the following goals and measures:

- Making it easier for non-motorists to move between and around the two mini roundabouts by:
 - Slowing vehicle movements with the installation of raised tables at the edge and the centre. These are spaced about 70m apart, which typically enforces speeds below 20mph and makes drivers more likely to give way.
 - Additional crossing points allowing more direct routes for non-motorised users
 - Contrasting design in crossing areas will also encourage drivers to give way.
 - Removal of traditional road markings and signs to make drivers more aware of pedestrians and encourage them to give way at crossings
 - Crossing points at right angles have been provided, which those with impaired vision may prefer to use.
- Making it easier for non-motorists to move around at Avery Corner, the shopping parade, and access to the school. This will be achieved by bringing the carriageway and other areas to the same level, giving non-motorised users priority and improving access for wheelchair users.
- Higher quality environment with
 - Embossed design on the footway paving
 - Leaf pattern printed on the carriageway and at crossings
 - High-quality lighting columns
 - Additional and new planting, at ground level and in hanging baskets
 - Bespoke bollards co-designed with Nine Mile Ride School
 - Bespoke Totems co-designed with Gorse Ride School
- Reduce congestion in and around Avery Corner with the following:

- Widen car park access to allow two-way movement, so people can move in and out at the same time.
- Shopping parade car park exit and entry switched, so those who cannot find a parking space in front of the shops, can move onto Avery Car Park more easily. It is hoped this will also reduce queuing from Avery Corner backing up into the roundabouts.

What have you done to ensure people's safety?

We don't expect the proposals to have a negative impact on road safety. Road Safety Audit (RSA) reports have been and will be, produced by an independent team following reviews at the completion of preliminary and detailed designs, the end of construction, and sometime after opening. These offer numerous opportunities for any problems to be flagged up and addressed.

What evidence is there that this will improve traffic capacity or road safety?

This isn't a traffic flow improvement scheme. Before the current proposals, other approaches were considered to improve traffic flow but were ruled out. These included:

- A roundabout - but this took land outside the public highway and didn't provide enough space for pedestrians to move around.
- Various layouts with traffic signals - but these also required land outside the public highway and caused sizable traffic queues in the peak periods.

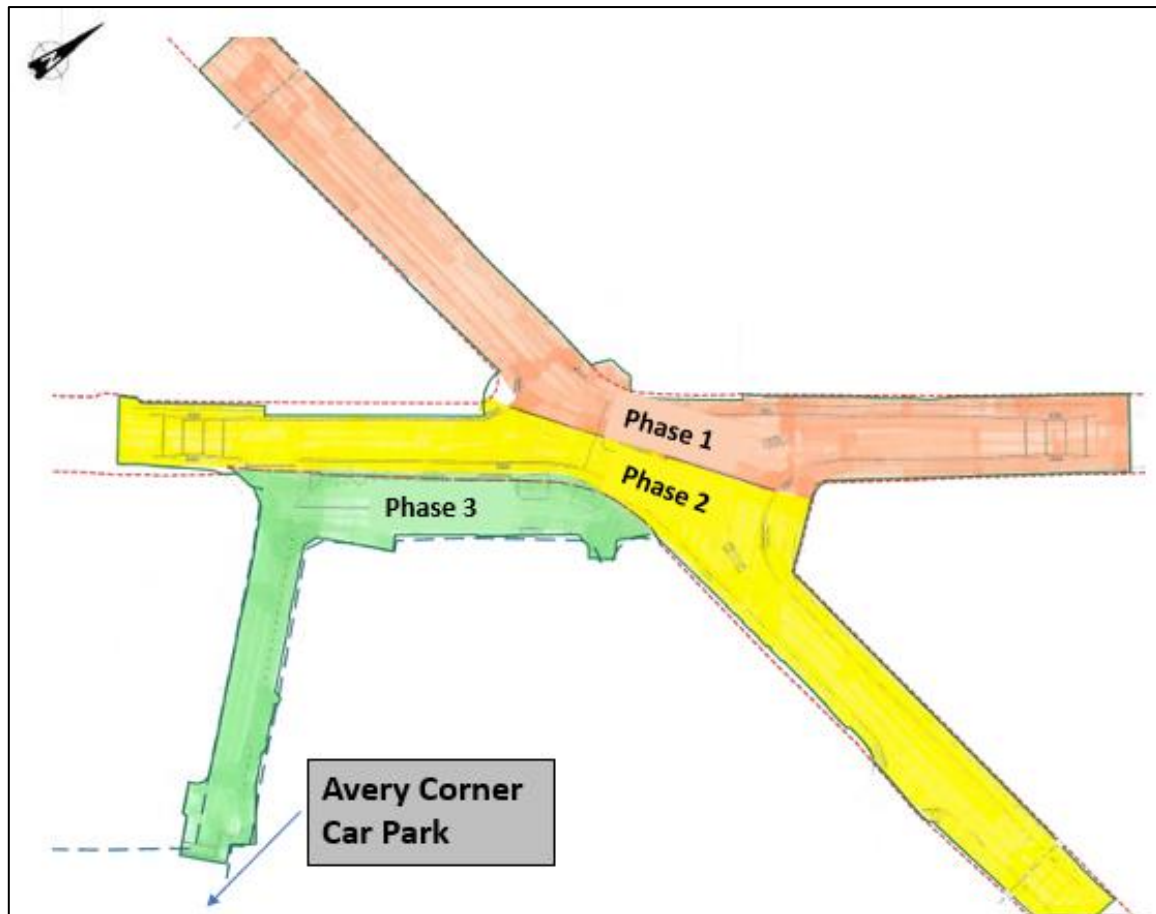
The scheme also isn't a safety improvement scheme because, after looking at road collision data for the site, we don't believe this junction is dangerous. However, during the consultation, it was felt that the area is dominated by vehicle movement and this had to be addressed. As such it was agreed between us, Finchampstead Parish Council, and others with an interest in the scheme that an informal design would be preferred.

When will construction works start and finish?

Major works like the carriageway are expected to start in February 2024, with an estimated completion date in September 2024. Currently, we have begun the planning phase of this project. The planning phase will continue until the construction works start. During this phase, we will be focusing on developing comprehensive plans to reduce any potential disruptions. We are working to ensure that the project is carried out efficiently, and every effort is being made to minimise disruption to businesses, schools, and residents in the area.

Will there be any road closures?

Although we aim to carry out construction works in phases to minimise disruption, there will be some closures while they take place - this is required for the carriageway works. Pedestrian access will always be maintained for all businesses and we'll do all we can to maintain deliveries to all businesses through traffic management.



At present, the works have been planned to take place in phases, see the drawing above which will provide you with a visual representation of the current construction dates below.

Activities	Start Date	End Date	Comment/ Note
Initial Surveys	August 2023	August 2023	Exact date to be confirmed
Construction start and end Date	05/02/2024	10/09/2024	Any further details will be provided as the project progresses.
Closure Phase 1	05/02/2024	30/04/2024	Residential and businesses access will be allowed. Any further details will be provided as the project progresses.
Closure Phase 2	30/04/2024	04/07/2024	Residential and businesses access will be allowed. Any further details will be provided as the project progresses.
Closure Phase 3	04/07/2024	10/09/2024	Residential, businesses and school access will be allowed. Any further details will be provided as the project progresses.

Please keep in mind that these dates could potentially change as we navigate through the planning and execution phases. However, I assure you that we are committed to keeping everyone informed about any updates or adjustments that may occur.