

TITLE	South Wokingham Distributor Road – Eastern Gateway
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	The Executive on 26 March 2015
WARD	Emmbrook, Evendons, Norreys, Wescott, and Wokingham Without
DIRECTOR	Heather Thwaites Director of Environment
LEAD MEMBER	John Kaiser, Executive Member for Planning and Highways

OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY

Advancing the programme for the Eastern Gateway as part of the South Wokingham Distributor Road (SWDR) will:

1. Provide early delivery of a section of the SWDR including the rail bridge south of Montague Park;
2. Enable the closure of the Waterloo Road Level Crossing, significantly improving both road and rail safety for all users.
3. Assist in unlocking some development areas;
4. Assist in alleviating some road traffic cutting through residential roads to the north (leading to the A329) such as Priest Avenue and Rances Lane and in the longer term, and as part of the wider SWDR will ensure appropriate mitigation of traffic impacts from SDL development.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Executive agrees to:

- 1) progress with the preliminary design, site investigation works and all environmental and planning application provisions for the section of the South Wokingham Distributor road - Eastern Gateway;
- 2) Officers continuing to negotiate terms with Network Rail for securing Eastern Gateway as part of the overall South Wokingham Distributor Road.

SUMMARY OF REPORT

The road over rail bridge south of Montague Park is a key element of the South Wokingham Distributor Road. It will provide a key transport link across the railway and open up development land. The new bridge provides an opportunity to close Waterloo Road level crossing. To fit with Network Rail's timetable for a major resignalling project on this line the Council needs to progress design work on the bridge. This will potentially allow for the closure of the level crossing and for funds to be diverted from that to the bridge, thus reducing the costs to the Council. Closing the level crossing will also bring about traffic and safety benefits to road users.

The position and alignment of the bridge fits with the preferred solution following the public consultation.

Background

Policy CP21 of the Council's Core Strategy identified a requirement to improve 'transport capacity along the A321 and A329 including the provision of south Wokingham relief road from the vicinity of the Coppid Beech roundabout to the Finchampstead Road' to appropriately mitigate and enable the development of the South Wokingham SDL, as envisaged by the Core Strategy.

The Council indicated that a distributor road would provide the most effective scheme to provide access to the SDL and to mitigate the traffic impacts arising from the development.

On 27 November 2014 and following public consultation in summer 2014, the Executive approved the refinement of an alignment for the South Wokingham Distributor Road (SWDR) through the centre of the SDL. The consultation proposed closure of the Waterloo Road level crossing, but only once the SWDR bridge to Montague Park was open to traffic. There was a mixed response to this closure during the public consultation.

Figure 1 shows the proposed alignment for the SWDR, the location of the Waterloo Road level crossing and the Montague Park bridge:

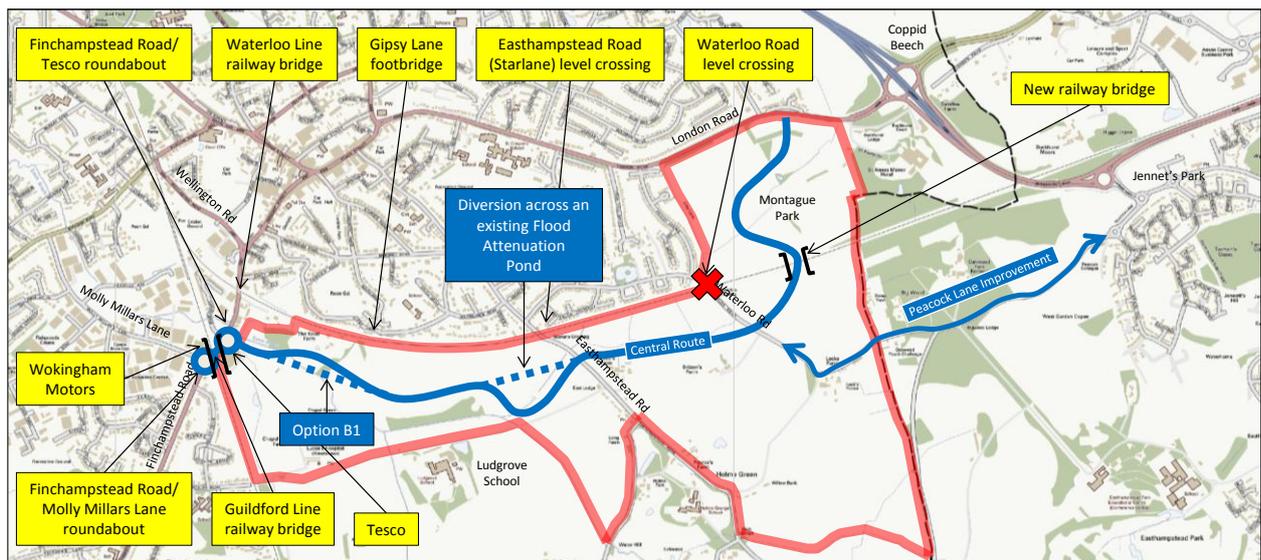


Figure 1 Central Route (the consultation alignment and suggested diversions)

Analysis of Issues

There is an immediate need to progress work on the SWDR progress as a result of the likely impacts by Network Rail from their Feltham re-signalling project. These impacts are detailed below.

Waterloo Road

Waterloo Level crossing has been identified as a location for a major level crossing upgrade. There have been a number of fatalities at the crossing as well as a high incident of misuse by vehicles and pedestrians.

The Council and Network Rail have discussed the potential for early delivery of part of the SWDR and in particular the Montague Park bridge (shown in figure 1) which would allow the closure of Waterloo Road Level Crossing. Figure 2 identifies this key section

of the SWDR and is referred to as the Eastern Gateway. It would provide the railway bridge and connection to Montague Park, and a section of the SWDR to a new junction with Waterloo Road. Later stages of the SWDR would extend west from this junction.

Network Rail Proposals at Waterloo Road

Network Rail (NwR) is currently undertaking a rail re-signalling programme known as the Feltham Re-Signalling Project, which is upgrading all rail signalling along the route between London Waterloo and Reading. This project includes the assessment and potential upgrade of level crossings in the area.

The re-signalling programme and Network Rail’s own strategic targets require them to assess and identify improvements, closures or alternative options such as new bridges for all its level crossing wherever possible. The Waterloo crossing has been identified as requiring rail safety improvement.

In order to meet its programme for the Feltham rail re-signalling project Network Rail needs to make an investment decision by March 2015 to either progress with the detailed design for the level crossing upgrade works or to switch funding to develop fully, with the Council, the Eastern Gateway. For Network Rail to make this decision, the Council needs to advance the design and further assessment of the Eastern Gateway beyond the planning application stage. Bringing forward this work would secure early delivery of the Eastern Gateway and comply with Network Rail’s timescales

The SWDR - Eastern Gateway

The Eastern Gateway makes use of land secured within the S106 agreement for Montague Park (north of the railway) to build an approach embankment to the proposed railway bridge. Council officers are currently in discussion with the development consortium for access to build the embankment and roads to the south of the railway.

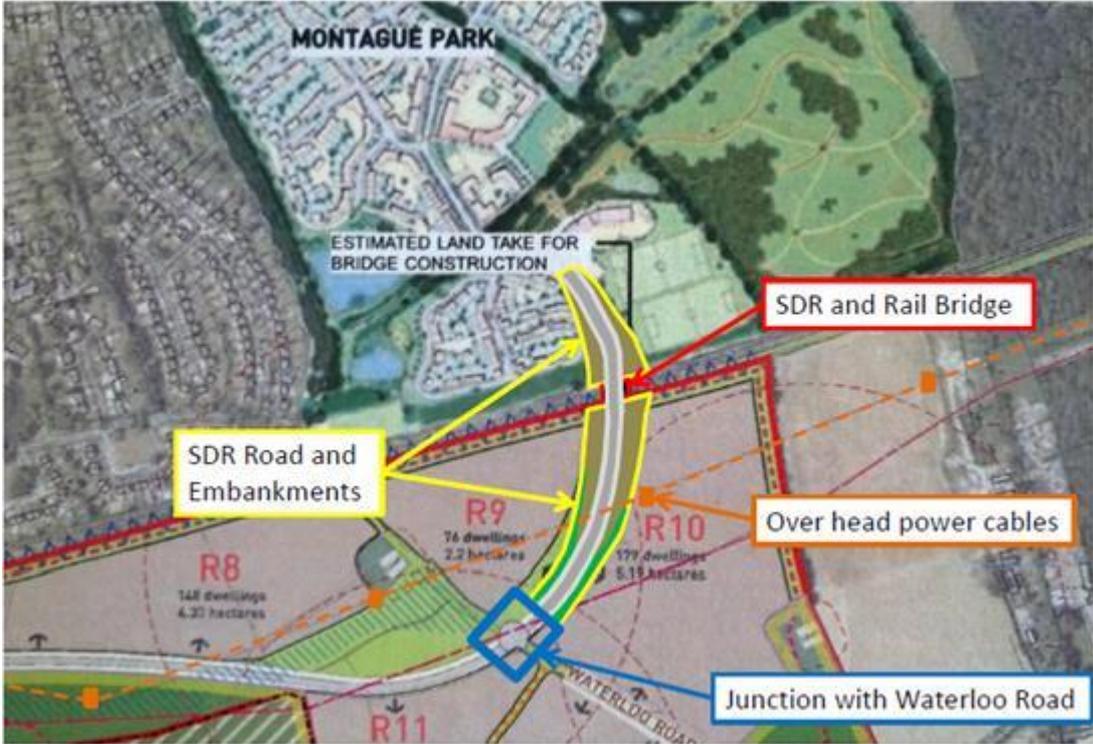


Figure 2 The Eastern Gateway.

The road alignment of the Eastern Gateway proposal connects to the SWDR through

Montague Park (already completed) and continues south west to a new roundabout on Waterloo Road. The existing section of Waterloo Road north of the proposed roundabout would be retained to provide access to land and property and provide for future SDL access.

The Eastern Gateway proposal requires Network Rail to instigate a closure of the level crossing via its own procedures. The project will also need to include the investigation of a pedestrian and cyclist crossing to maintain accessibility for these users in the vicinity of the closed level crossing.

At present neither the Council or Network Rail has fully determined how the new bridge, associated structures and earthworks would be constructed but negotiations are ongoing in order to determine the best possible method whilst managing the risks for all parties. Forward funding opportunities will also play a role in determining this.

Public Consultation

Public consultation was completed between 23 June and 22 August 2014. Around 300 responses were submitted to the Council. A report of consultation responses is available to the Executive for the purposes of this meeting. The report is in the public domain.

There was a mixed response from the public to the closure of the level crossing with some respondents thinking this only benefited Network Rail. The form of the consultation did not allow for a percentage in favour or against to be established for the closure of the level crossing and analysis of consultation responses did not indicate a majority of respondents would be against its closure. Responses were mainly concerned with the inconvenience to local residents living north of the level crossing wanting or needing to use the crossing to access destinations south of the railway, notably Bracknell and Crowthorne. Others suggested closure of the crossing would increase traffic demands across Easthampstead Road level crossing. In the longer term, the SWDR will increase routing opportunities in the locality, and traffic modelling indicates the net result of the level crossing closure and the SWDR will reduce traffic flows in the residential area north of the railway and south of London Road.

There may be short term traffic re-routing effects if the level crossing is closed before the full SWDR is complete, and the Eastern Gateway study work will investigate this and report as part of any proposals.

Works Required for Delivery of SWDR Eastern Gateway

In order to advance the project a number of design, investigation and planning work streams are required as detailed below.

- **Environment:**
 - Scoping for an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA);
 - Ecology surveys and works mitigation planning
 - Potential for a Flood Risk Assessment;
 - Agriculture and soil assessment;
 - Noise and air quality modelling;
 - Landscape and visual impact assessment with outline mitigation measures for these items.

- **Engineering:**
 - Preliminary engineering designs and earthworks design;
 - Preliminary junction arrangement at Waterloo Road;
 - Preliminary Bridge design work;
 - Flood mitigation investigation;
 - Topographical survey;
 - Drainage strategy;
 - Street lighting design;
 - Identification of utilities and diversions especially HV Cables;
 - Risk workshop;
 - Geotechnical survey; and
 - Update scheme construction cost estimate.

- **Traffic modelling** to inform noise and air quality assessment, report medium term traffic effects before the full SWDR is open, to refine junction layouts and to inform the Transport Assessment.

- **Production of Planning Documents**, which is likely to include, but not limited to:
 - Environmental impact assessment (the scope of which is still to be determined);
 - Transport assessment;
 - Design and access statement.

- **Meetings** with Network Rail, developers, landowners and other stakeholders.

- **Project management**, meetings and consultation with members and officers, and overall reporting and co-ordinating delivery of items above.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council faces severe financial challenges over the coming years as a result of the austerity measures implemented by the Government and subsequent reductions to public sector funding. It is estimated that Wokingham Borough Council will be required to make budget reductions in excess of £20m over the next three years and all Executive decisions should be made in this context.

The Eastern Gateway project would need be progressed as soon as possible to ensure ecological surveys are carried out within the correct seasons and do not delay the project. An overall project programme is appended to the report, identifying the key steps from now until construction. This programme is provisional whilst we discuss delivery timescales with Network Rail and also clarification on the EIA requirements from the Council's Development management team.

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	NIL	Yes	Capital
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	£250,000	Yes	Capital
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	£0	n/a	n/a

Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision
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Funding has been allocated to this project through the capital programme. Primarily the source of that capital will be a grant from the HCA. We are continuing to negotiate with Network Rail with regards to who carries out the work and the level of any financial contribution. It is hoped that this will result in the project costs being shared equitably and so reduce the overall burden on the authority.
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Cross-Council Implications

The work would advance infrastructure provision in order to release housing allocations as part of the Council's SDLs.
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List of Background Papers

None

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