

TRAVELLING TO WOKINGHAM TOWN CENTRE

OUR VISION FOR THE FUTURE

INTRODUCTION

As we continue with our progress towards a regenerated town centre in Wokingham, we recognise how important it is that those who come to work, shop and enjoy the benefits of improved leisure and recreational facilities can do so easily, and that we offer choice about how they can do this.

This Vision sets out how we intend to deliver this choice, recognising that whilst the car remains the primary means of travel for many, increasingly our visitors may want to walk, cycle, or use public transport. The Vision follows the principles set out in the Wokingham Town Centre master plan and incorporates many of initiatives being brought forward through the MyJourney project.

Our ambition is to provide an integrated approach to travelling to Wokingham Town Centre which provides improved roads, cycle paths, footpaths, car parking and public transport so that visiting Wokingham is a positive experience for all.

John Kaiser – Executive Member – Planning, Highways and Transport

OUR VISION

Our vision is to provide the travel opportunities that make Wokingham Town Centre the destination of choice for our local residents, but also an attractive place to visit for those coming from elsewhere.

The regeneration of Wokingham Town Centre is well underway. Our regenerated town centre will deliver an improved offer for the growing number of residents in the borough, as significant housing development takes place on the edges of the town centre, in both north and south Wokingham.

In taking forward our town centre regeneration we have therefore modelled the demand for car parking in the town centre to take account of this growth.

We have already planned for a range of improvements to how the town centre can be accessed (and the pedestrian environment enhanced), some as part of the delivery of the strategic development locations, but others will require more work, and may be longer term ambitions. These improvements include making sustainable travel an easier option, for example through our My Journey initiative, which encourages residents to travel by alternative means to the car through public transport discounts, better cycle and pedestrian access and other options.

This Vision sets out our opportunities for both.

TRAVELLING BY CAR

When travelling by car, visitors will be concerned about both the ease of the journey, and where they can park their car when they arrive.

Improved traffic flows

We are investigating options for alternative routing around the town, and reviewing junction control to reduce congestion. This includes:

- Junction control at Shute End/Rectory Road
- Circulatory changes at Rectory Road/Wiltshire Road
- Re-allocating road space (specifically looking at the bus lane in the town centre)
- Routing through traffic on to new distributor roads north and south of the town
- Reviewing pedestrian crossings through the town

Car Parking

We need to ensure that car parking capacity across the town meets demand now and in the future. Our planned car park provision is based on surveys of existing use, a demonstrable under use of existing spaces, and consideration of development proposals for the town centre and strategic development locations going forward to enable us to identify

a) changes proposed to current parking provision

b) the level of car parking demand given as a result of this new/re-development.

In addition, we have built in an assumption that in order for car parks to operate successfully in practical terms we aim for our car parks to operate at 80 – 85% occupancy – this allows for turnover, and car drivers looking for spaces within a car park.

Taking all of this into account gives rise to a need to an increased capacity at Carnival Pool of between 260 – 375 spaces. For full details please see Appendix 1.

Park and Ride

Existing park and ride facilities only focus on Reading as a destination. As we improve Wokingham Town Centre, we want to provide park and ride facilities here too. We are therefore

- Pursuing options for park and ride facilities at Coppid Beech, making use of existing bus services.
- Exploring the possibility of 'micro-park and ride' from our smaller car parks outside of the town centre
- Talking to bus operators about services from the Winnersh Park and Ride into Wokingham Town.
- Working with developers to improve services from the new strategic development locations across the Borough

Civil Parking Enforcement – whilst we want to ensure that visiting Wokingham is a positive experience, we must also take account of the needs of our existing residents. We also need to address some bottle-necks, and safety issues raised by inconsiderate parking.

We are therefore considering introducing Civil Parking Enforcement to ensure that our residential roads do not become unofficial car parks. As part of this we will be looking options for how a Civil Parking Scheme could be operated.

TRAVELLING BY PUBLIC TRANSPORT

Train

Wokingham is easy to get to by rail with 8 trains an hour stopping off peak. This train frequency will increase in the future, for example, as First Great Western enhances the frequency of Reading to Gatwick Airport service.

We have a good facility with the new Wokingham Station building and footbridge, and much easier vehicular access through the development of the Station Link Road. This includes integrated bus facilities at the station making it easier to continue a journey from one means of public transport to another.

We now need to focus on how we make it as easy as possible for those visiting Wokingham by train/bus to travel into the town centre. This includes improved signage, better footpaths, and opportunities for cyclists.

Bus

We are working with bus operators to improve services and facilities on offer and this has already resulted in high quality modern buses operating on routes across the borough. This also includes

- Working with operators to introduce fare incentives and develop attractive routes
- Better shelters – we are currently working on a new contract to provide a greater number of good quality shelters
- Up to date information – this is key to making bus travel a realistic choice for visitors – we have begun and will continue to ensure that there is that there is improved information at our bus stops, and better information available online. QR codes at bus stops give access to live bus information and we are looking at further technology improvements to help users.
- We continue to support bus operators in bids to government for new buses, for example the Low Emission Bus Scheme.
- Working with bus and train operators and neighbouring authorities on the potential for smart ticketing

TRAVELLING BY BICYCLE

Work is well underway to provide cycle access along the A329 corridor. In addition to this we are ensuring, through the development of the strategic development locations that off-

road cycle paths that are safe for all link the new developments to the town centre. We are also

- Installing improved secure cycle parking facilities in the town centre, and at the station
- Exploring ways to extend cycle hire such as is already in existence in London and Reading into Wokingham.
- Developing a comprehensive network of greenways across the Borough that will improve access between key Borough centres.

We will be looking at opportunities to engage with users more effectively and using them to generate ideas for improving cycle facilities.

TRAVELLING ON FOOT

We understand the importance of ensuring safety for pedestrians as well as making walking an enjoyable activity. We are therefore:

- Providing high quality surfaced paths between all of the new developments, the station and the town centre.
- Improving foot crossings across the railway lines
- Ensuring clearly signed, well-lit and pleasant pedestrian routes from our edge of centre car parks into the town
- Carrying out an environmental improvement programme in the town centre, making it a much more attractive place for visitors as they travel around the town.

TECHNOLOGY

By improving our use of technology we can make it easier for people to choose how they travel and make travelling easier. We are currently investigating opportunities to improve how we disseminate travel data to residents on line such as car park space availability, bus times and walking and cycle routes. We are also using technology to improve road junction capacity.

LONGER TERM

We know that there is more to do, and opportunities that can be explored once some of the major development is in place. These include:

- Improving the wider environment as the South Wokingham Distributor Road takes traffic out of town – this could include single lane traffic on Peach Street, and a better pedestrian environment on Broad Street and Denmark Street.
- Addressing common concerns about commercial activities such as on-street deliveries to Peach Street

SUMMARY

This is an exciting time for Wokingham Town Centre. An integrated approach to transport is central to ensuring that Wokingham becomes a destination of choice not only for our local residents and but for visitors from further afield.

We will continue to review our approach as the regeneration of the town, and the development of the strategic development locations move forward to ensure that we maximise the opportunities to deliver our vision.

Appendix 1

Town Centre – Carnival Pool Car Park – Capacity Requirements

In order to inform the emerging proposals for the Carnival Pool scheme the Town Centre Regeneration Team has requested that the Council’s Highways Service confirms and justifies the capacity requirements for the new multi-story car park to ensure that it fulfils its purpose as set out in the Town Centre Masterplan SPD. This note sets out that requirement and justification.

To understand the capacity requirements for the rebuilt car park a study of Town Centre off street parking has been undertaken. This has considered:

- Existing car park utilisation
- Known proposed changes to provision
- Forecast demand for car parking, and
- Optimum occupation rates

Existing car park utilisation

Studies of usage were undertaken in 2013 and 2014. The study in 2013 reviewed the existing parking provision based on surveys undertaken between 7am and 7pm on Thursday 25th and Saturday 27th April 2013 at all off-street car parks within Wokingham Town Centre. The car park surveys have been repeated in 2014 as part of an on-going monitoring programme of parking demand and supply. The 2014 surveys were undertaken on Thursday 5th and Saturday 7th June 2014 between 7am and 7pm.

The surveys showed that the existing supply was 1886 spaces but that the car parks operated with a significantly high level of spare capacity as shown in the following table:

Table 1 – Existing parking demand and capacity

	2014 - Observed			2026 - Predicted		
Survey Period	Peak Demand	Supply	Surplus at peak	Peak Demand	Supply	Surplus at peak
Weekday	1274	1886	32%	1560	1897	18%
Weekend	987	1886	48%	1500	1897	21%

Known proposed changes to provision

The proposed changes to provision across the town have been advised by the Town Centre Regeneration Team and set out in the following table:

Table 2 – Proposed Changes to Town Centre Parking Provision

Location	Spaces lost (-) or gained (+)
Existing car parking provision removed	
The Paddocks	-212
Rose Street	-99
Wellington House	-81
Shute End (partial)	-53 (of 209)
New Parking Provision relating to the Town Centre re-development plans	90
New Parking Provided by enhanced Carnival Pool public car park	529 (increase of 366)
NET POSITION	11 (1897 total)

This gives a known future car parking supply of **1897** spaces.

Forecast changes in demand for car parking in 2026

This has been derived using the Wokingham Strategic Transport Model (WSTM) which provides the predicted parking demand during the AM peak hour for each car park in 2017 and 2026. The WSTM includes assumptions for growth in existing trips and allowance for new trips associated with development proposals in Wokingham Borough. Account has been taken of committed development, including the Strategic Development Locations and town centre redevelopment proposals as specified in the Local Development Framework. The impact of these proposals has been assessed using a set of trip rates representative of typical development in the borough. In addition to these rates, allowance has been made for changes in trip making behaviour associated with programmed Local Transport Plan measures and changes in travel behaviour.

For the town centre redevelopment itself, the following typical elements of retail associated trip making have not been taken into account:

- Allowance for pass-by trips;
- Linked trip assessment; and
- Increased duration of stay associated with an improved retail offer in the town centre.

These factors may impact on the out-turn trip rates for town centre retail, however their omission results in a robust assessment of parking accumulation for the town centre. The demand for trips to car parks in the town centre is based on the peak hour of parking demand for the busiest hour in the day.

This assessment has excluded the rail station car park as it is a dedicated facility that is assumed will be close to capacity to accommodate rail based car parking.

Since the completion of the initial study in 2013 the proposals for the town centre redevelopment has been reconsidered, particularly the element of the redevelopment around Elms Road. Additional work has therefore been undertaken on the modelling work in order to determine if the level of forecast car parking provision is affected.

The results of these tests have shown that the predictions previously made do not change significantly and the recommendations arising from the previous study remain valid.

The assessment identified the expected car parking demand in 2026 to be **1560** spaces during the week and **1500** spaces during the weekend.

Optimum utilisation rates

As set out above existing utilisation rates give rise to a significant level of under usage of the existing car parking stock. It is likely that drivers are opting to park as close to the town centre as possible, despite the fact that in most cases, this would result in an overall longer journey time circulating the town centre thereby giving rise to more movements on the network and increasing congestion.

However, for a car park to operate efficiently it is desirable to have some spare capacity so as to enable visitors to find a space if required without having to spend significant time circulating the car park or potentially having to go to a different car park, which could also be full. Based on best practice elsewhere, it is proposed that the town centre car parks should operate at approximately **80-85%** occupancy level.

The proposals for car park spaces allow us to achieve this occupancy level based upon the predicted demand.

Matt Davey
Head of Highways & Transport
Wokingham Borough Council
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