



Woking Joint Committee Wednesday 26 June 2019



A320 Woking Town Centre (Victoria Arch Railway Bridge and road network south of the railway line)

Central government has awarded £95 million to Woking Borough Council/Surrey County Council to deliver significant highway and rail infrastructure improvements that will unlock 13 future housing development sites.

Background

For well over 30 years, the Council has been seeking a way of addressing infrastructure deficits in Woking Town Centre. In particular, solutions to the inadequacies of the A320 and Victoria Arch to improve north/south movements of traffic, cyclists and pedestrians. At the same time, improvements to the railway bridge and its environment have been sought.

Close partnership working between Surrey County Council, Woking Borough Council and Network Rail has resulted in a real opportunity to deliver road and rail infrastructure improvements which will address the current problems and unlock housing developments in Woking Town Centre. Woking's Core Strategy, adopted in 2012, identified Woking Town Centre (Policy CS1 and CS2) as a primary location to deliver homes for the future, whilst safeguarding precious green space.

By providing the necessary infrastructure, additional capacities on the existing 13 identified sites (see Appendix 1) within the town centre can be unlocked to deliver 3,304 additional homes over and above the 1,251 homes that have been planned in the emerging Site Allocations DPD. Of these 4,555 homes, 1,913 (42%) will be affordable. Detailed planning applications will need to be drawn up and considered in due course.

Fundamental barriers

The A320 is the main arterial road through Woking, and because of the restrictions imposed by Victoria Arch and the historic road lay-out, the area acts as a pinch-point for traffic which leads to significant congestion. This infrastructure deficit has stifled local growth and housing development opportunities for many years.

Highway modelling demonstrates that without removing these barriers, development within the town centre is unsustainable and will not meet local need and demand.

Therefore, the current situation in Woking represents a clear market failure because:

- there is high demand for housing
- there is a high cost of housing beyond the national average
- there is unmet affordable housing need
- developers are willing to develop but cannot because of a lack of infrastructure which places a significant burden on development viability.

The proposal

Through a partnership approach with Surrey County Council, central government has recognised this market failure by providing £95 million in funding to enable the

delivery of three critical elements that will support the delivery of a significant number of affordable homes within the town centre.

Highways improvements – the proposed improvements include the removal of the one-way gyratory system south of Victoria Arch (Guildford Road northbound, Victoria Road eastbound and Station Approach southbound) and the introduction of a two-way carriageway. It will also include enhanced pedestrian/cycle routes as well as four new controlled crossings for pedestrians and cyclists.

The introduction of an additional lane is essential for maximising traffic flow in and out of the town centre. This can only be achieved by extending the highway footprint to land currently occupied by 'The Triangle'.

Replacement of Victoria Arch - the proposal is to replace the existing Victoria Arch with a new modern widened bridge. This will provide four traffic lanes under the new bridge as well as five metre wide footway/cycleway on both sides. This will improve traffic flow as well as provide much needed safe and user-friendly extra space for pedestrians and cyclist. The new bridge will also support Network Rail's longer term objective of delivering additional rail capacity on the main lines through Woking.

Property acquisition and demolition – to achieve these objectives, all property located on land known as 'The Triangle' must be acquired. The Triangle is surrounded by Guildford Road, Victoria Road and Station Approach immediately south of Victoria Arch.

The Triangle currently comprises a mix of retail, residential and office buildings that need to be removed before any highway improvement works can commence. The site, once cleared, will facilitate the delivery a replacement bridge and enable the development of more than 300+ homes.

The strategic importance of The Triangle is such that without it, the overall project cannot progress unless it can be wholly acquired and removed. In December 2018, the Borough Council resolved to finance the purchase of these properties.

Delivery partners

Surrey County Council, Woking Borough Council and Network Rail are the key partners in developing this scheme. There is already well established joint governance arrangements in place between the parties and are fully engaged with a trusted professional team that has the necessary expertise to deliver the scheme.

Project milestones

A detailed schedule of works which covers all aspects of the project has been developed, as part of the funding bid process.

A commencement date for the project, however, is yet to be confirmed due to the fact that funding conditions from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government are yet to be determined.

At this stage it is anticipated that the project, including the housing provision, will be delivered by 2030.

Ray Morgan
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Woking Borough Council