

# Arborfield Cross Relief Road

## Frequently asked questions (FAQ's)

### Why do we need the Arborfield Cross Relief Road (ACRR)?

At present, some 2,250 vehicles per hour pass through Arborfield Cross roundabout in the morning rush hour, and 2,350 in the evening. Slow moving traffic queues extend through the village during the busiest periods.

By 2026 traffic volumes through the village are forecast to increase to some 3,200 vehicles during weekday rush hours, due to the impact of development at nearby Arborfield Garrison. Also, general traffic growth will happen even without new housing. As a consequence, congestion, queues and delays will get worse in Arborfield Cross without the Relief Road, and frustrated drivers are likely to use alternative routes including rural lanes which are unsuitable for through traffic.

The provision of new homes at Arborfield Garrison presents a one-off opportunity for a significant funding contribution to a relief road for Arborfield Cross.

### What will be the speed of the road?

The speed limit will be 50mph, based on alignment and feedback from the police. The proposal is to also amend the existing speed limit on Arborfield Road heading towards Shinfield, from the national speed limit to 50mph.

### Will it be lit?

It is intended to have lighting at the roundabouts at either end of the route, in line with design standards. The remainder of the ACRR will be unlit to mitigate environmental impacts and maintain the rural character of the area. We are not proposing to light the staggered junction at Swallowfield Road, although this is subject to the design being reviewed by an independent safety audit team.

### Why a staggered junction as opposed to a roundabout?

Both a roundabout and a staggered junction were modelled in the Wokingham Strategic Traffic Model. It shows busier traffic flow on Swallowfield Road when a roundabout is included, compared to a staggered junction. This also introduces delays on the relief road and results in traffic redistributing back through Arborfield Village which the relief road is intended to relieve. Therefore a staggered junction is being considered in preference to a roundabout.

A roundabout also needs more land than a staggered junction, requiring more trees and hedgerows to be removed and is more likely to need street lighting, creating further environmental impacts.

### How are the Public Rights of Way (PRoWs) being accommodated?

Through consultation with the Local Access Forum and planning authority, ARBO 17 will go over a new 'green bridge', which will accommodate pedestrians, cyclists, equestrians and provide an ecology corridor for badgers and bats.

The crossing point for ARBO 22 (at the northern end of the scheme) will be a road crossing with a pedestrian refuge island in the centre.

### **What pedestrian, cyclist and equestrians facilities are being provided as part of the scheme?**

A shared cycle / pedestrian way will be provided along the route, linking Arborfield Garrison, the Public Rights of Way, Swallowfield Road and Arborfield Road.

### **Will there be any increase to risk of local flooding?**

The ACRR is not located within the Environment Agency (EA) designated flood plain. However as part of the planning application, a flood risk assessment will be included in line with the National Planning Policy Framework, and in consultation with the EA and the lead local flood authority. That document will demonstrate how the road will mitigate any impacts.

An overall drainage strategy will be submitted at the time of the planning application. This will use Sustainable Drainage Systems to manage water quality and flow from the site.

### **How is the scheme being co-ordinated with the gravel extraction at Farley Farms?**

The two planning applications are being considered independently from one another. Assessment of each is based on their own merits and in accordance with established planning policy. Where an application is in close proximity to committed development or a potential development that could come forward, the cumulative impacts must be considered.

In January this year, CEMEX and the Farley Estate submitted a planning application to extract gravel on land to the west of Bridge Farm. The ACRR application must take account of these plans to extract gravel by considering the cumulative traffic and environmental impacts of both schemes (as required by the Town and Country Planning Act). This will be set out in the Environmental Impact Assessment and Transport Assessment as part of the ACRR planning application. Likewise the gravel extraction application must take into account the cumulative impact of local developments.

It should be noted that negotiations for purchasing land owned by the Farley Estate to deliver the ACRR are independent of the planning process, and do not involve the local planning authority.

### **Will a fourth arm on the northern roundabout be included to accommodate the CEMEX application?**

By itself, the ACRR only requires a three arm roundabout next to Bridge Farm to connect the relief road with the A327 Reading Road. However, a cumulative impact assessment is also needed to consider the cumulative impacts of both schemes, if consented. The proposed access for the CEMEX application (as currently shown) is not compatible with the relief road so the ACRR application must illustrate how this would be addressed as part of the cumulative transport impacts. The highway authority's preference is to accommodate this traffic through a fourth arm added to the Bridge Farm roundabout. This arm would only be built if the CEMEX planning application is granted and implemented. Construction of this additional arm would be at the council's discretion and subject to discussions with CEMEX / Farley Farms.

### **Who will be informed once the planning application has been submitted?**

Once it has been submitted and registered, the local planning authority will embark on a four-week period of formal consultation. Notification letters will be sent to approximately 2,500 residents living in Arborfield Village with details on how to go about providing comments. The letter will provide options to do so either online, or by post. All feedback will be passed directly to the local planning authority, which is responsible for assessing the application.

### **How will the relief road assessment consider other developments in the area?**

**Traffic** - Wokingham Borough Council is committed to the development of 3,500 new homes at Arborfield Garrison in addition to those around Shinfield, Spencers Wood and Three Mile Cross. Furthermore, the council is progressing other strategic development locations and associated infrastructure across the Borough. These committed developments have been taken into account and form the baseline scenario within the Council's adopted Traffic Network Model against which the impact of ACRR has been assessed.

**Environmental** - The Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Regulations 2011 require the likely significant cumulative environmental effects of a development to be considered. Accordingly, our application will consider the potential for cumulative or in-combination effects – this will be set out by topic area within a technical document called an Environmental Statement.

Consideration will be given to the timing and impact of the proposed scheme alongside other known developments, such as those planned for Arborfield Garrison, Shinfield, Spencers Wood and Three Mile Cross. It is assumed that planning applications permitted more than five years ago would have already commenced construction, and therefore would form part of the baseline conditions for the EIA. Any schemes located beyond 2km of the site would be unlikely to have significant cumulative effects with the proposed scheme and would therefore be excluded except for large scale development associated with the Strategic Development Location inc Shinfield / Spencers Wood.

### **What is the council doing about mitigating the impact of any road traffic noise?**

As part of the planning application, a noise (and vibration) assessment is being carried out. This assessment will determine the degree of any impacts as per national design standards, which will be mitigated as far as practicable. These will be assessed as part of the planning application process.

It is likely a 'low-noise' road surface will be used. Natural screening will also be provided and if these measures are not sufficient, acoustic barriers will be considered next to the road at key locations.

### **How will any potential archaeological impacts be monitored?**

A desk-based assessment and geophysical survey suggests there is potential for below ground archaeological remains. The council has agreed that trial trench evaluation of the area will be carried out to investigate this.

### **How will the road affect Air Quality?**

There will be some impact during construction and once the road is opened. During construction, there will be some dust created by on-site activities and increases in exhaust emissions from construction traffic and machinery. The contractor will produce a Construction Environmental Management Plan which will include details of how they will manage their activities to mitigate these effects so they are negligible.

Once the ACRR opens, improvements in air quality through Arborfield Village are anticipated but clearly there will be an increase in air pollution along the relief road from the traffic using it. This will be somewhat mitigated by the installation of additional landscaping.

### What landscape mitigation is going to be provided?

This will comprise hedgerow planting and small woodland copse planting, where appropriate. This will provide visual screening from properties and will help to integrate the proposed scheme with the character of the surrounding landscape. Hedgerows will contain native trees (such as Oak) to mimic the nearby roads and lanes, which are characteristic feature of the area. New hedgerow planting and the infilling of existing hedgerows will also help abate declining hedgerows in the surrounding area and promote local ecology.

The green bridge design will help maintain the existing natural ridgeline and allow tree and vegetation planting across the structure. This will help to reduce impacts on the natural topography and character of the wooded ridge. It will also serve to help visually integrate the bridge with the wooded ridgeline which forms a backdrop in views from the south-east, east, north-west and west.

### How are the impacts on ecology being mitigated?

These are being avoided, where possible, through sensitive design and the seasonal timing of works. The route's alignment has been selected to minimise the loss of woodland for example, and where vegetation clearance is necessary this will be timed to avoid nesting birds and minimise the risk of harm to wildlife including reptiles, badgers and other species within the construction zone.

Mitigation measures are incorporated into the design to minimise the significance of effects that will result from the ACRR. These include:

- a. Creation of replacement habitats as part of the comprehensive landscaping scheme for the relief road to include rich grassland, new hedgerow and shrub planting, and new tree planting
- b. Retention and relocation of existing habitat features such as deadwood, and parts of trees to provide suitable opportunities for roosting bats and nesting birds
- c. Incorporation of features to allow animals to safely cross the new road and avoid fragmenting their habitats, such as badger tunnels and importantly a green bridge along the route of an existing hedgerow which will maintain habitat connectivity for a range of species; and
- d. Sensitive lighting design to minimise the effects of new lights on nocturnal species including bats, and night-flying invertebrates.

### The Local Plan update (Call for Sites) shows land at Chamberlains Farm and Ducks Nest Farm – has the relief road design been future proofed against this development?

As part of its update to the Local Plan, the council has sought to understand what land might be available for housing in the future, beyond that which has already been allocated in the Core Strategy. As part of this process, a Call for Sites consultation was carried out in 2016, which was an open invitation for landowners to suggest land to be considered for planned future development. Chamberlains Farm and Ducks Nest Farm were both put forward to the council as potential development sites by the landowners. This was part of more than 200 other sites across the Borough that were also put forward. The submitted sites are currently being assessed and no decisions have been taken on their suitability. The council will be consulting residents across the borough for their preferred options once this assessment work has been completed. Any development area that might subsequently be adopted would have to demonstrate how it would be sustainable and accessed safely without adversely impacting the existing highway network, including the ACRR.