Earley Town Council (ETC) Response to Wokingham Borough Council's (WBC) proposals for using the Department for Transport's (DfT) Emergency Active Travel Fund (ATF) Tranche 2

Background

WBC has recently been awarded £576,650 from the DfT emergency ATF tranche 2, towards improvements to cycling and walking facilities

The 1st tranche was to support the installation of temporary projects for the COVID-19 pandemic. The 2nd tranche is to support the creation of longer-term projects

WBC has proposed 3 projects to improve cycling facilities

1. Earley/Reading active travel route
2. Woodley/Reading active travel route
3. Wokingham town centre/A329 London Road active travel route

ETC will comment on the schemes that directly affect their area

Scheme 1

Description

There is a main scheme with additional options, of which only one will be selected

Main scheme

Introducing cycle facilities on old London Road from the junction with Pitts Lane
Introducing a 20mph speed limit and side road treatments on old London Road to improve crossings for pedestrians

Description

Old London Road descends from Shepherds Hill towards Reading. Cars are parked on the road outside the houses on the south side, and also encroaching onto the open green space on the north side. It has a 30mph speed limit. At the bottom of the hill the proposed cycle route leaves the road and follows the tarmaced path, past the bus stop, to the existing controlled crossing over the A4 road.
Part of Old London Road is a bus route

Option 1

to connect with Suttons Seeds Roundabout and the borough boundary for onward connections with Reading.

Description

- create an off-road cycle path across the open green space, from the A4 crossing to the Mosque at the end of Old London Road

or

- go down the existing path, back to the Old London Road, with additional traffic calming or cycle segregation

The route then crosses the Sutton Seeds roundabout to the Reading Borough (RBC) boundary at the railway bridge

Option 2

to otherwise connect with Thames Valley Park (TVP) Business Park via Shepherd's House Lane.

Description

Improve the A4 crossing and install traffic calming on Shepherds Hill Lane, leading to TVP

Observations

- Traffic speeds appear fast on Old London Road. There may be an element of "rat running" for car cutting out the large Shepherds Hill roundabout
- Visibility is restricted by the parked cars in the downhill direction
- The parked cars make much of the road single file. Cyclists travelling westwards need to leave a safe space next to parked cars to avoid being "doored"
- Option 1 only makes sense if it connects up with RBC ATF scheme on London Road. On its own, on reaching the railway bridge, the only option is to join the busy A4 London Road
- Option 1 could result in a loss of the same public green space that ETC has sought to protect

Conclusions

We welcome the following aspects of the proposal

- Reduced speed limit on Old London Road
- Traffic calming on Old London Road
- Improved crossings on the A4
- Traffic calming on Shepherds Hill Lane
- Measures to reduce "rat running" on Old London Road
- Measures to stop parking on the open green space between Old London Road and the A4
- Cycleway markings, short of segregated cycle lanes

We regard the following as inappropriate

- Building on the open green space between Old London Road and the A4, apart from widening the existing tarmac paths
- Segregation for cyclists on Old London Road

- Connecting to the south side of the London Road at the RBC boundary, unless coordinated with similar cycling facilities on the Reading side

Scheme 2

Description

There is a main scheme with additional options, of which only one will be selected

Main scheme

Provide segregated cycle facilities between the junction of Woodlands Avenue/Lytham Road (Woodley) and the junction of Woodlands Avenue/Church Road (B3350)
Improve cycling facilities under the railway and motorway bridges in Culver Lane, to the RBC boundary

Description

Woodlands Avenue runs east-west between Woodley town centre and Church Road in Earley. The section between Fairwater Drive and Church Road there already exists continuous, segregated cycle paths. The remaining section all lies within the Woodley Town Council area
The railway bridge on Culver Lane, as with all Southern Railways' bridges in the borough, is typically ungenerous in width, most of which is given to road traffic, with only a narrow pavement on one side for pedestrians

Option 1

to also provide segregated cycle facilities on Church Road connecting with the junction at Anderson Avenue. Then to provide segregated cycle facilities on Anderson Avenue (taking advantage of a quiet route) connecting with the junction at Culver Lane for a connection with Reading via Palmer Park Avenue.

Description

Church Road is a busy, secondary classified route, acting as part of an unofficial eastern Reading bypass between the A4 at Shepherds Hill and the A327 at Shinfield. The road has a 30mph limit and is generally clear of parked cars. It runs neither up nor downhill over this section. The houses on both sides are on wide plots with plenty of room for parking.
The section from Woodlands Avenue to Anderson Avenue has moderately wide pavements and grassed verves. It is a bus route

Anderson Avenue is a residential street, running downhill from Church Road to Culver Lane. There is on street parking along the whole length and it has a 30mph speed limit. There is no direct road junction for cars with Church Road, but it is not a no-through road

Option 2

to provide segregated cycle facilities on Church Road connecting with the junction at Culver Lane. Then to provide segregated cycle facilities on Culver Lane for a connection with Reading via Palmer Park Avenue.

Description

Church Road is a busy, secondary classified route, acting as part of an unofficial eastern Reading bypass between the A4 at Shepherds Hill and the A327 at Shinfield. The road has a 30mph limit and is generally clear of parked cars. It runs neither up nor downhill over this section. The section from Woodlands Avenue to Culver Lane has wide pavements and wide verges

Culver Lane is a residential street, running downhill from Church Lane to Palmer Park. It has a 30mph speed limit and street parking on both sides. Speed humps already exist in the road. In the Reading direction it is a "rat-run", but less so the other way. It is a bus route.

Observations

- Traffic speeds are high on Church Road, despite its 30mph speed limit
- Impatience from car drivers towards cyclists on Church Road is noticeable
- There is a lot of pavement cycling already happening along Church Road
- There is an amount of vehicle parking fully on the verges on Church Road, despite the large driveways
- There is good parking discipline on Anderson Avenue
- There is a lot of pavement parking on Culver Lane
- Turning from Church Road into Anderson Avenue is a technical manoeuvre due to the numerous metal railings and lack of a dropped kerb

Conclusions

We welcome the following aspects of the proposal

- On-road, segregated cycle facilities on Church Road, even at the expense of losing some pavement width
- Cycle route indications in Culver Lane
- Cycle route indications in Anderson Avenue
- Improved cycle facilities at the junction of Anderson Avenue and Church Lane
- Reconfigure the Culver Lane railway bridge to give fair width to pedestrians and cyclists
- Lowering speed limits where possible

We regard the following as inappropriate

- Creating shared use pedestrian/cycleways on Church Lane

Future Projects

We note the following

- The lack of quiet routes connecting North Earley to Maiden Erlegh. The direct link between Mays Lane to Anderson Avenue was lost when the A329M was built, and now the only connecting route is over the narrow motorway bridge on Church Lane.
- We hope that the borough will make it a priority to reconnect physically the communities of Earley, separated by the motorway. We hope that this will be addressed in future ATF funding tranches or in the Local Transport Plan