



Network Rail - Planning,
1 Puddle Dock, London,
EC4V 3DS

Marcus Watts
Development Management
Wokingham Borough Council
By email only

04/01/2023

Dear Marcus,

Supplementary Information: Planning ref. 223493 - Tan House Footbridge, Wokingham

I write to provide addition information to address the concerns raised during the consultation on Network Rail's proposal to replace the existing two bridges at Tan House crossing with a single span bridge.

Design / Accessibility

The prior-approval application has received numerous objections due to its stepped design. The project seeks to replace two stepped footbridges with a single span stepped footbridge to ensure that this public footpath remains safe and open to the public.

Network Rail are keen not to just replace 'like for like', and a number of improvements have been included in the new structure to improve user experience along with improving the accessibility when compared to the status quo.

A Diversity Impact Assessment was undertaken in May 2022 which concluded that there will be no negative changes to the arrangement, layout or operation of the footbridge. The new structure will bring the crossing up to modern day standards with improved lighting, surfacing, handrails and anti-trespass measures creating a safer access as well as improving accessibility for bicycles with the installation of a wheeled channel on the stairs as well as halving the number of stairs.

In order to provide a fully accessible bridge, 300sqm of land would be required outside Network Rail's land ownership. Due to the constraints of the built environment, allotments and the topography in and around the existing footbridges, the construction of an accessible bridge, is deemed to be unviable at this time. However, as per Network Rail's agreement with Wokingham Borough Council, the bridge has been designed to allow for modification to make it fully accessible should this become a possibility in the future.

Location

The new bridge is proposed in the location of the two existing bridges to ensure that the Public Right of Way (FP23) continues to provide the most direct and convenient route over the railway in this location. Should the proposed bridge be located elsewhere, this would involve a longer, more significant permanent footpath diversion.

Land ownership

Irrespective of who owns the land, from a planning perspective, Network Rail are able to utilise the limits of deviation of the 'Reading, Guildford and Reigate Railway Act 1846', and the 'Staines, Wokingham and Woking Railway Act 1853' to carry out development on land not owned by Network Rail.

Although this matter falls outside the remit of Town and Country Planning Act and cannot be considered as part of this Prior Approval application for completeness we would like to cover off the land ownership concerns and confirm that Network Rail will obtain all necessary land and property agreements to carry out the works.

Temporary diversion of PRoW

Figure 1 below shows the proposed public right of way diversion during the works.

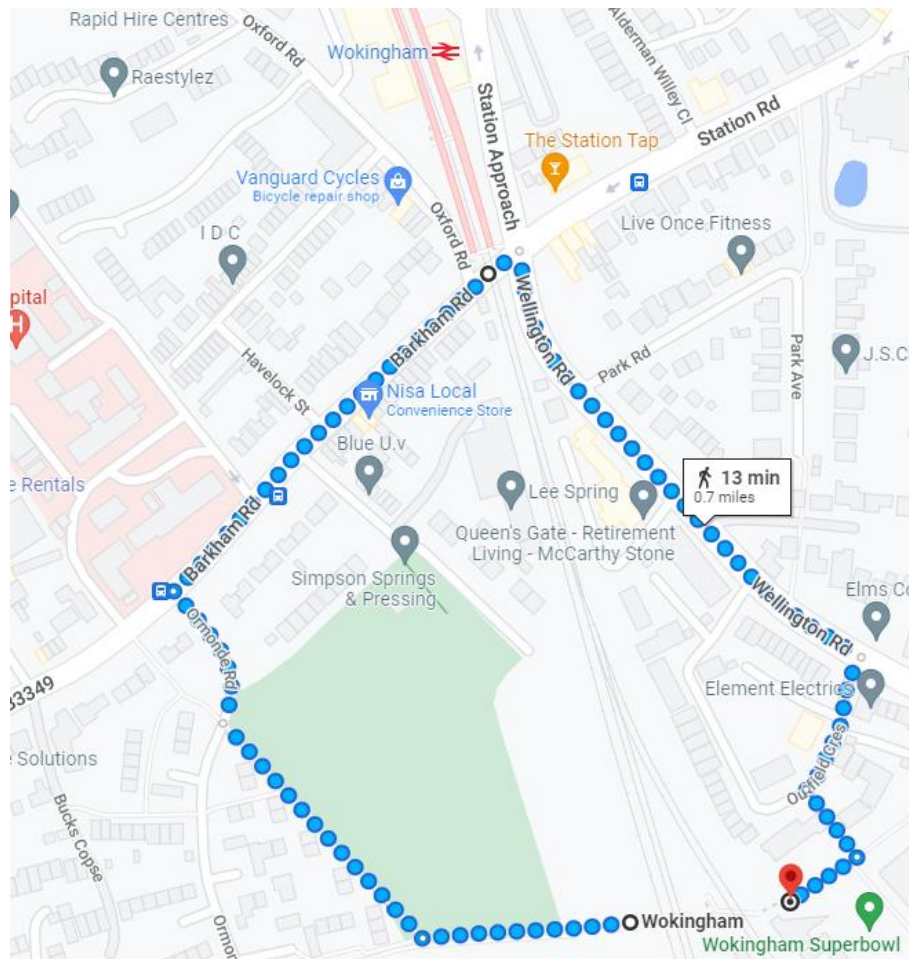


Figure 1 - Proposed PRoW temporary diversion

Network Rail recognise that a route of 0.7 miles could seem excessive to users who have difficulty travelling distances of that nature. The imposition of these diversions is necessary to replace the existing bridge. The project will minimise the requirement to close access to the existing footbridge unless absolutely necessary and the new bridge will be opened as soon as possible.

The agreed arrangements and diversion routes will be communicated 4 weeks in advance of the works commencing on site. Communications will also include information on when works will be taking place and the likelihood of noise impacting lineside neighbours.

In summary, this project cannot address the need to provide access for all users unless extensive land agreements are achieved. However, it will be providing a 2.5m wide bridge with a stairs solution which can be altered to provide a ramp at a later date at the council's discretion. The new bridge will not introduce any negative impacts for users with protected characteristics and provides a betterment on the status quo by creating a safer space and improved access by reducing the number of stairs by half and including a wheeled channel to assist cyclists.

I would also like to draw your attention to the Part 18 A.2(b) deals with [permissible] reasons for refusal of prior approval where the '*design [...] would injure the amenity of the neighbourhood and is reasonably capable of modification to avoid such injury*'. As stated above, the proposed replacement of the two stepped bridges with a single span bridge will improve the status quo and as a result will not injure the amenity of the neighbourhood. The appearance of the proposed bridge is also a significant improvement on the existing situation.

I trust that the above clearly sets out addresses the concerns raised on the proposal, please do not hesitate to contact me should you require more information.

Kind regards,

Nick Donoghue

Town Planner | Property (Southern)

Network Rail

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www.networkrail.co.uk/property