

Account of Purley on Thames

Failed Road Schemes

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Over the years there have been many road schemes affecting Purley which never materialised. Here are some of them.

The Purley-Pangbourne By-pass

In the Berkshire Regional Planning Survey of 1930 (ref 472) there is a recommendation that the proposals made in the Bradfield RDC Town Planning Scheme for a bypass for Pangbourne and Purley should be supported. The route envisaged made two diversions of the A42 to avoid Pangbourne and Purley. While they were essentially separate bypasses it was considered that they should go together.

The Pangbourne section started at the Basildon Skew bridge, ran parallel to the railway for a while, over the higher ground to the south of Pangbourne and rejoined the A42 near its junction with Sulham Lane.

The Purley section started near Purley Hall, ran to the south of the settlement and rejoined the A42 at Purley Copse. Originally the line ran around Beech Road and Bellesisle and through where now Cecil Aldin Drive is, however later the line was moved further south to follow roughly the Purley-Tilehurst border.

These proposals lay on the table for over 40 years, being occasionally dusted off and reviewed. The general line was preserved from development but nothing was done. During this period the A42 was reduced in status and renumbered A329.

In the early 1970s the Purley/Tilehurst guidance plan (ref 49) was drawn up and the route for the bypass more closely defined. It was proposed that it should begin and end with two roundabouts, one just to the east of Purley Hall and the other approximately opposite the gates to Purley Park. The route between would sit in a cutting and sever Long Lane, at the point where the Purley Tilehurst boundary was. The original plan called for it to be a dual carriageway but it was later reduced to a single carriageway on cost grounds. In meetings between Purley and Tilehurst Parish Councils it was agreed that this bypass should form the boundary between the parishes for a good deal of its length. Properties on Long Lane were compulsorily purchased by the County Council and everyone thought it was only a matter of time before the new road was built.

Apple Close was planned on the basis that the rear gardens to the south would adjoin the bypass and in planning the Wimpey estate the feeder road from Long Lane would join the Oxford Road at the easterly roundabout of the bypass. The Parish Council was concerned at the long narrow strip of unused land that would be left if the Wimpey Estate were completed before the bypass was built. They investigated several schemes ranging from a nature walk, through playing field to allotments to avoid it being taken over by gypsies or motor cyclists. Construction of the roundabout continued as part of the preparatory infrastructure for the Wimpey estate.

In 1980 however the County Council decided to rescind the protection of the line on the grounds that the bypass was unlikely ever to be built. The estimated cost had risen to 7 Million and pressure had been applied by local landowners whose properties were being blighted by the uncertainty.

Chief among these were the Bradley's who were trying to sell Purley Hall at the time. The decision caused a lot of ill feeling, particularly towards the County Councillor, Frank Lewis. The County Council held firm and the decision was finally taken in April 1980. (ref 352)

In consequence Wimpey revised their estate plans to include three spurs at the end of Warley Rise and Devonshire Gardens which became the northern end of Warley Rise, Brierley Place and Cornwall Close. Around the roundabout the plans were still very much only in outline but modifications were made to Goodliffe Gardens now that there was no need to dual the Oxford Road, the bypass entrance was converted to become Simons Close and the estate formed of Kernham Drive etc was completely replanned. The County Council sold the properties it had bought on Long Lane.

Thus within a few years the opportunity to bring a bypass around the southerly edge of Purley disappeared for ever. The Parish Council asked the County to consider linking the A4074 Caversham to Reading Road with the A329(M) to the east of Reading in order to reduce pressure on the A329 through Purley.

The M4 Route North of Reading

The M4 motorway was planned as a major road linking London to Bristol to relieve the A4, especially where it went through the town centre of Reading. They started construction from the London end and soon reached Maidenhead. The route skirted the south of Maidenhead and rejoined the A4 to the west near Maidenhead Thicket. It was envisaged that it would continue from there and skirt the north of Reading.

The proposed route would follow the southerly bank of the Thames as far as Norcot, cross over to Mapledurham Chauzey, and cross back again between Mapledurham Village and Purley River Estate, then going to the north of Purley Hall, down the Pang Valley to roughly where the M4 now crosses the Tidmarsh Road.

This was greeted with horror by the people of Purley, but engineering considerations prevailed as the cost of construction along the Thames flood plain was prohibitive. Thus the final selected route branched off from an earlier junction at Maidenhead and went to the south of Reading avoiding Purley by around three miles.

The Reading Outer Ring Road

In an attempt to address the traffic problems of Reading a proposal was made in 1987 by a local resident, Mr M W Neville, for an orbital Road around Reading. The route proposed in the Purley area was very similar to the combination of the early M4 proposal through Mapledurham and the later one for the Purley Hall to M4 link. It was vigorously opposed and never really got much further than an idea. (ref 411).

The Tilehurst Avoiding Road

When he surveyed the Thames valley in 1929, the Earl of Mayo foresaw the need for a ring road around Reading. (ref 303) His proposals for the north of Reading were very similar to that for the M4 in the 1960s and the Reading Cross Town Route in the 1980s, except that he envisaged this road connecting to the Caversham to Oxford road at Mapledurham Chauzey. From this junction he saw the need for a bridge over the Thames to Purley and a main road to the west of Reading to link up with the A4 near Theale.

This idea, like the contemporary proposal for a Purley / Pangbourne bypass, remained a planners' dream until after the Second World War when it was revised as the Tilehurst Spine Road which would link a roundabout near Tilehurst station to one on the A4 at Calcot thus avoiding Purley completely. The lower part of this became Overdown Road and eventually the roundabout on the A4 was built at Royal Avenue.

The route met with intense opposition from residents of the Birds Estate in Birch Copse and was closed off when houses were allowed to be built at Little Heath across the path of the proposed road. It had been intended to be a dual carriageway and when you look at Overdown Road and Oxford Road between Norcot Junction and the Kentwood Circle you can see the wide verges which were never turned into carriageways.

The traffic problems of West Reading however have refused to go away and nothing effectively has been done to relieve the problem. In a discussion document issued in 1987 (ref 473) the County Council proposed several options. The most favoured was to complete the Spine road but another option was to take a road from the A4 to the east of Purley Hall, up across the plateau to the south of the recreation ground, skirting Denefield School, the Dark Lane development and Little Heath and joining the M4 at junction 12 near Theale.

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