

Wokingham to Reading vegetation management to railway lineside by Network Rail (October 2019 to March 2020)

Questions and answers

1. Please provide the specification of work that will be undertaken. Especially the criteria for when trees and bushes that will be removed completely and the criteria for when branch reduction or removal will be used instead.

The specification which defines areas of vegetation to be managed and a brief rationale for each is attached in document 'Site Spec RDG2 Wokingham Reading including rationale'. The Preliminary Ecological Assessment (PEA) for this route is also attached.

2. For the work undertaken a few years ago on the mainline for Paddington to Reading, there was a compensation scheme set up to fund environmental work that could offset the impact of the tree loss. Is there such a scheme in place for this work as offsetting the canopy reduction and environmental impact is essential?

The work on the mainline Paddington to Reading route was associated with the construction of new overhead line infrastructure which involved clearance of vegetation to facilitate the provision and operation of the new equipment. The work on the Wokingham to Reading line comprises vegetation management necessary to ensure the safe operation of train services and safe access for track-side staff on this route. No compensation scheme will be implemented for vegetation management work between Wokingham and Reading.

3. Can you please provide an estimate of the number of trees proposed to be felled in these works?

At present we cannot provide an estimate of the number of trees that will be affected by our vegetation management. We will be maintaining records of affected trees during the course of the work.

4. What efforts have been made to plan out which individual trees absolutely must be felled and which can be trimmed back hard (as has been done along the Sonning stretch of the Paddington line)?

The work has been very specifically scoped to make sure the work creates a managed lineside environment that complies with Network Rail standard NR/L2/OTK/5201 Lineside Vegetation Management Manual. Further information about the rationale for each section of the work can be found in the 'Site Spec RDG2 Wokingham Reading incl rationale' document provided.

5. Will this programme affect the trees behind the fencing at Earley station?

We would need to understand which trees you are referring to. We would be happy to meet with you at Earley to review this.

6. When you mention replacement "small shrubs", which species do you have in mind and will this mean no overall loss of tree cover in the area?

Vegetation management will see the eventual re-establishment of grasses and smaller shrubs that are more appropriate for the operational railway line-side. Whilst no re-planting is planned, the management of lineside vegetation will see the natural establishment of undisturbed scrub and grassland alongside the railway.

7. Have the planners made note of the fact that the verges along Winnersh station exist as meadow with a noteworthy collection of wild flowers and, if so, can you keep that surviving instead of turning it over to shrubs and grasses?

We are happy to meet with you on site to review this and understand if this area can be preserved.

8. Can we assume, after the criticism that Network Rail has received about felling trees during the nesting season, that the dates for work would not fall during the nesting season?

The work is planned to take place outside the nesting season. As an extra precaution against disturbing nesting birds, site operatives undertake daily nesting checks and complete Network Rail's bird nesting check form. An exclusion zone is created around any active nests that are found, and work within the exclusion zone will only take place once it is confirmed that the nest is no longer active.

9. How are you engaging with lineside neighbours?

We will be sending letters notifying the local communities and inviting them to drop in sessions for residents to have the opportunity to meet the project teams and learn more about the work will be doing and why, as well as ask any questions they may have regarding the work. Visuals and aerial drawings will be displayed at drop in sessions to give the local communities a better understanding of the vegetation work. We will continue to engage with the local communities and all stakeholders during this period of work.