



FARINGDON
NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN
2016 - 2031

Faringdon Town Council
October 2016







Faringdon is one of the first areas in the UK preparing its own plan. A team of local people established to lead the project, working with the Council, the Vale of the White Horse District Council, consultants appointed to help with the project.

The Neighbourhood Plan will cover the same area as the Great Faringdon Parish, which stretches up to the north and also extends to the south east across the parish.

Please get involved, this is an opportunity to shape planning policy for Faringdon and how it develops in the future.

Faringdon Neighbourhood Plan Workshop
Thursday 20 July 2014

Priorities for the plan

My wish for Faringdon is.

LET US HAVE CHARM STATION OPEN (on London main line)
Need something for larger kids - adventure play
Folly
Sculpture park - need a series of follies.
Shopping - ie...
All future housing development...

FARINGDON NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN
FARINGDON TOWN COUNCIL
FOR THE PLAN PERIOD 2016 TO 2031

Dedicated to the memory of
Cllr Alan Hickmore 1942-2014

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CONSULTATION ON THE FARINGDON NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

Documents submitted for the formal consultation process are available online at <http://faringdowntowncouncil.gov.uk/council/neighbourhood/> or at the Faringdon Town Council offices in Gloucester Street, Faringdon SN7 7JA and at the Public Library, also in Gloucester Street.

Faringdon Town Council would like to thank the members of the Steering Group and pay tribute to their work since June 2012. The Town Council is also grateful for the help and the engagement of many others in the town and district without which it would not have been possible to produce this Neighbourhood Plan.

The original draft (March 2013) was prepared by Allies and Morrison Urban Practitioners on behalf of Faringdon Town Council. This version has been revised by the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group and Bluestone Planning with graphic design and layout by DPDS Consulting, and additional photographs by Al Cane Photography.

Left: Consultation events undertaken as part of the preparation of the draft FaringdonNeighbourhoodPlan
Previous page: Panorama of FaringdonfromHighworthRoad

GRAFTON AND RADCOT CP

Grafton

KEY

Faringdon's Neighbourhood Plan Boundary



Faringdon's Development Boundary



SCOTT CP

Eaton Hastings
ON HASTINGS CP

LITTLEWORTH CP

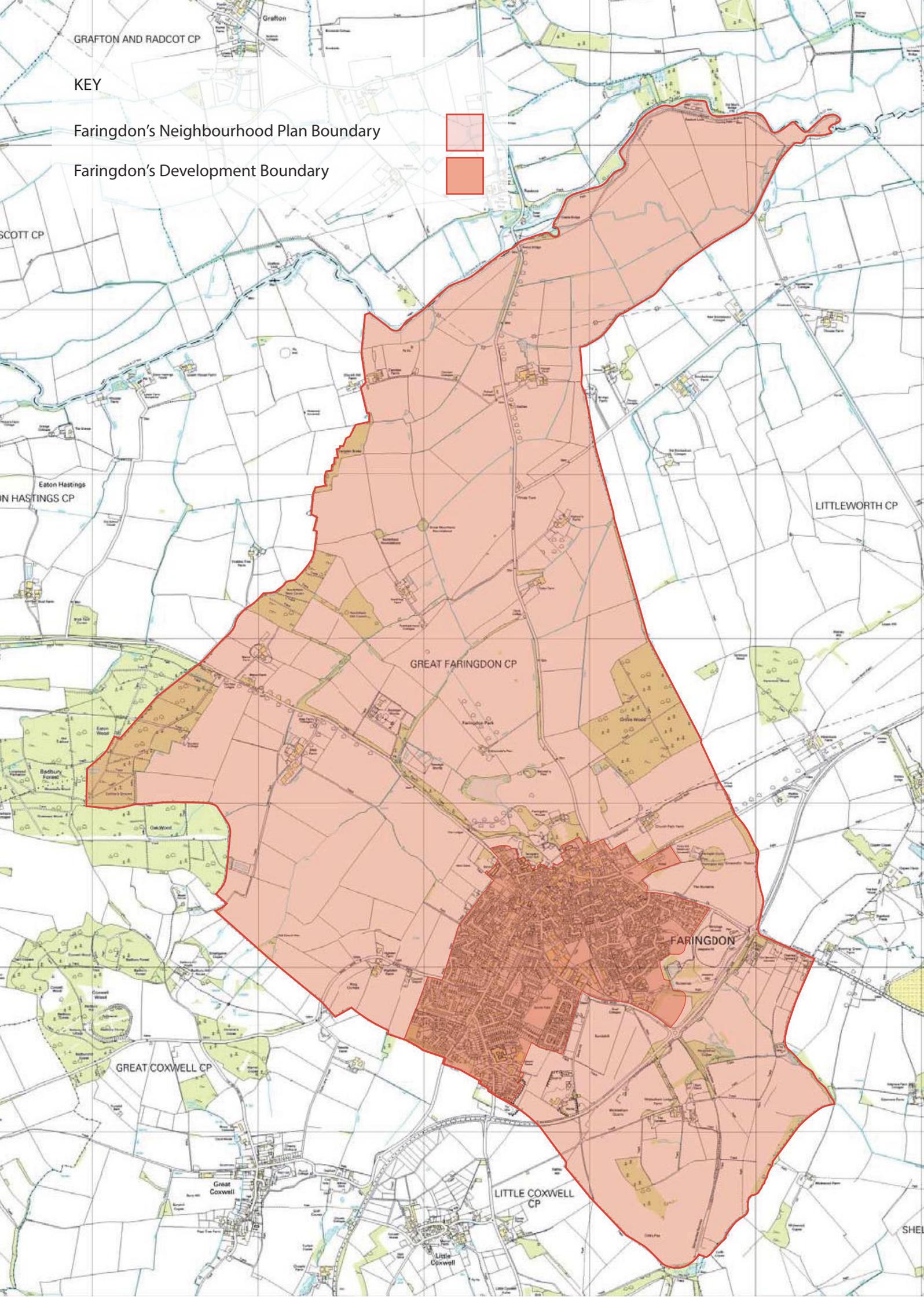
GREAT FARINGDON CP

FARINGDON

GREAT COXWELL CP

Little Coxwell
LITTLE COXWELL CP

SHEL



1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND

The Localism Act 2011 set out major changes in the regulatory framework for town planning that have since been taken forward through the implementation of a new National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, 2012). Local people, through a town or parish council or neighbourhood forum, can now produce their own planning strategy for their local area in the form of a Neighbourhood Plan.

Faringdon Town Council has been awarded Front Runner Status by the Government and the project is an excellent opportunity to develop one of the first Neighbourhood Development Plans prepared under the new regulations.

A team of local people was established to lead the project, working with the Town Council, the Vale of the White Horse District Council and consultants appointed to assist with the process. This document is the result of a significant collaborative process with a large number of local people and organisations. It is supported by a technical report that provides details of the research and consultation that have been undertaken.

The Neighbourhood Development Plan (the Neighbourhood Plan) will have an important relationship with the Vale of White Horse District Council Local Plan Part 1 (the Local Plan), which is targeted for adoption in 2015.

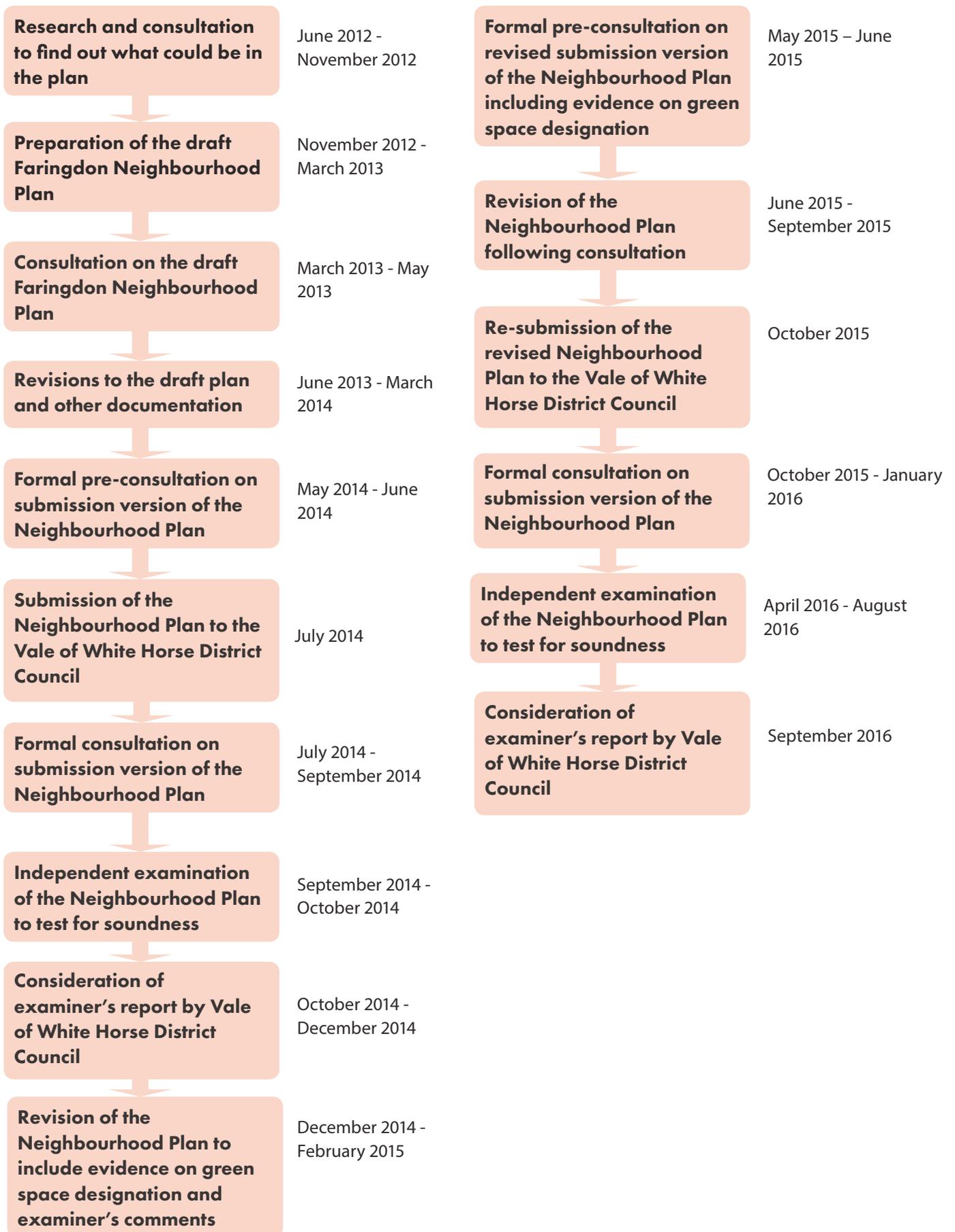
Left: Figure 1: Faringdon Neighbourhood Plan boundary, comprising the parish of Great Faringdon, and the town development boundary

1.2 SCOPE

This Neighbourhood Plan includes the whole of the Great Faringdon Parish, Figure 1, and covers the period up to 2031 to be coincident with the Local Plan Part 1 2031. It focuses on future changes in the town of Faringdon, which acts as the local service centre to the surrounding parish, as this is where most change is proposed; however, it also includes key ideas for the rural hinterland. Figure 2 shows Faringdon's location with respect to its nearest large settlements in the Thames Valley and Figure 3 its location in the Vale of White Horse.

Neighbourhood Plans can cover a wide range of topics, and deal with a range of issues and opportunities relevant to land use planning. However, there are some limits on what they can say, and importantly the plan must be 'in conformity' with the strategic policies of the Vale of White Horse Local Plan. This simply means that the local policies cannot contradict the main points in the Local Plan, but can add more information about how local people want to see those policies applied in Faringdon. Reference is made throughout this Neighbourhood Plan to the emerging Local Plan. A draft District Infrastructure Plan is also being developed and sets a benchmark for the delivery of supporting infrastructure to developments across the district.

A wide range of issues have been identified through the consultation. Those that do not relate to land use planning are noted in the Evidence Base Review that supports this document (available at <http://faringdowntowncouncil.gov.uk/council/neighbourhood/>). This is to ensure that they can be taken forward through appropriate groups and organisations.



1.3 PROCESS

This Neighbourhood Plan is the result of significant local engagement and input, and represents the latest stage in over ten years of local pro-active planning.

Pre-2012

Faringdon Town Council was one of the first bodies to undertake a town healthcheck¹. This involved a significant amount of information gathering and survey work, alongside prioritisation of issues and interventions by local stakeholders. The healthcheck helped to inform active investment in Faringdon as well as strategic policy at the District level. It provided a strong direction for local investment and, although some actions have been completed, it is still very relevant today.

In addition, over the last ten years various local groups have put significant effort into improving Faringdon and carving out a strategy for its future growth. The Town Council and groups such as Our Faringdon Our Future have contributed to planning discussions and helped influence development strategies.

2012 Onwards

The process of working towards a Neighbourhood Plan began in 2012. Consultants were appointed in June and the project began with a public launch evening attended by over 100 local people. The main phases that make up the neighbourhood planning process are outlined in the diagram on the facing page.

The first phase of work focused on collating information from existing surveys and talking to local residents, business owners, land owners and group representatives. As gaps in information were identified these were addressed and new information sought. Together the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group, its themed Sub-groups and the appointed consultants analysed the information thus obtained and identified the key issues that needed to be addressed. This stage of work culminated in the Evidence Base Review Report that brought together all the baseline information and analysis together with all the comments and suggestions made through the various consultation events (available at <http://faringdowntowncouncil.gov.uk/council/neighbourhood/>).

The second phase of work involved defining what the major elements of a local strategy should be. Various sites were suggested for different types of development and a range of options were put forward. A sustainability appraisal, produced initially by AMUP, since revised by URS, (available at <http://faringdowntowncouncil.gov.uk/council/neighbourhood/>) reviewed the potential of each of the sites to contribute to the sustainable evolution of the town and parish and a set of preferred options was identified. The Sub-groups then considered the assessment and put forward their preferred strategies for each theme. The outcomes of this process have informed the policies set out in the Faringdon Neighbourhood Plan.



Consultation

Since commencing the Neighbourhood Planning process the steering group has worked hard to engage as many local people as possible in informing the development of the plan. The following list provides an overview of the process to date:

1. Launch event - 12 June 2012
2. Stakeholder meetings - 29 June 2012
3. Market stall consultation - 10 July 2012
4. Initial information gathering and analysis by local groups - June/July 2012
5. Consultation with youth groups - June/ July 2012
6. Stakeholder issues workshop - 26 July 2012
7. Meeting with Faringdon Academy - 26 September 2012
8. Steering group presentation of emerging work - 26 September 2012.
9. Steering group meeting to discuss emerging options - 15 November 2012
10. Steering group meeting to agree preferred options - 28 February 2013
11. Draft Neighbourhood Plan issued for informal six week consultation - 31 March 2013
12. Comments on draft from consultees received and tabulated - 9 June 2013
13. Comments received from employment, retail and housing groups – 9 July 2013
14. Comments incorporated into draft Neighbourhood Plan for review - 15 July 2013
15. Comments reviewed, annotated and actioned - 17 July 2013
16. Draft Neighbourhood Plan reviewed by P&H Committee - 19 August 2013
17. Evidence Base revised, referenced and updated - 9 October 2013
18. Steering group meetings August 2013 to January 2014
19. Bluestone Planning appointed to revise draft Neighbourhood Plan – 19 Nov 2013
20. URS appointed to undertake Sustainability Appraisal – 19 Nov 2013
21. Screening in agreed with URS following screening report – 28 November 2013
22. Stakeholder meetings on specific sites held - January - February 2014
23. Revisions of draft Neighbourhood Plan January-May 2014
24. Revised Evidence Base approved by Steering Group - 17 March 2014
25. Consultation with statutory consultees on Scoping Report 24 March – 28 April 2014
26. Preparation of the Sustainability Appraisal
27. Approval of Neighbourhood Plan, Evidence Base and Sustainability Appraisal for pre-submission consultation by Faringdon Town Council - 14 May 2014
28. Launch of six week formal pre-submission consultation on Faringdon Neighbourhood Plan 17 May 2014 - 28 June 2014
29. Consideration of consultation responses; finalisation of the Neighbourhood Plan and Sustainability Appraisal; preparation of the Consultation Statement, Basic Conditions Statement and Equality Impact Assessment.

Left: Consultation events for the Neighbourhood Plan

30. Submission of Neighbourhood Plan and supporting documents to the Vale of White Horse District Council for seven week formal consultation period - 18 July to 5 September 2014.
31. Submission of Neighbourhood Plan and supporting documents to the Independent Examiner.
32. Report received from Independent Examiner - 22 October 2014.
33. Discussions with Vale of White Horse District Council on options following receipt of Independent Examiner's report - October to November 2014.
34. Following public response, decision to resubmit Neighbourhood Plan including evidence to support Green Space designations at Faringdon Town Council meeting - 10 December 2014.
35. Preparation of revised documentation - December 2014 to February 2015.
36. Launch of six week formal pre-submission consultation on revised Faringdon Neighbourhood Plan - 15 May 2015
37. Preparation of revised Consultation Statement, Neighbourhood Plan and Evidence Base Review.
38. Submission of revised Neighbourhood Plan and supporting documents to the Vale of White Horse District Council for six week formal consultation period - October 2015

Within this process, a number of bodies have been integral to the draft strategy presented in this document. They include:

- **Themed sub-groups** - a number of working groups was established by the Steering Group at the outset of the process to collate data, highlight issues and provide reports to inform the strategy options for the major topic areas reviewed in Section 4.
- **Faringdon Academy of Schools** - concurrent with the planning process, the Academy board has been involved in the process of education provision planning.
- **Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2031** - the team at the District Council has been drafting the new Local Plan and has met regularly with the steering group to review emerging policy to ensure the district policy facilitates the local desired strategy wherever possible.

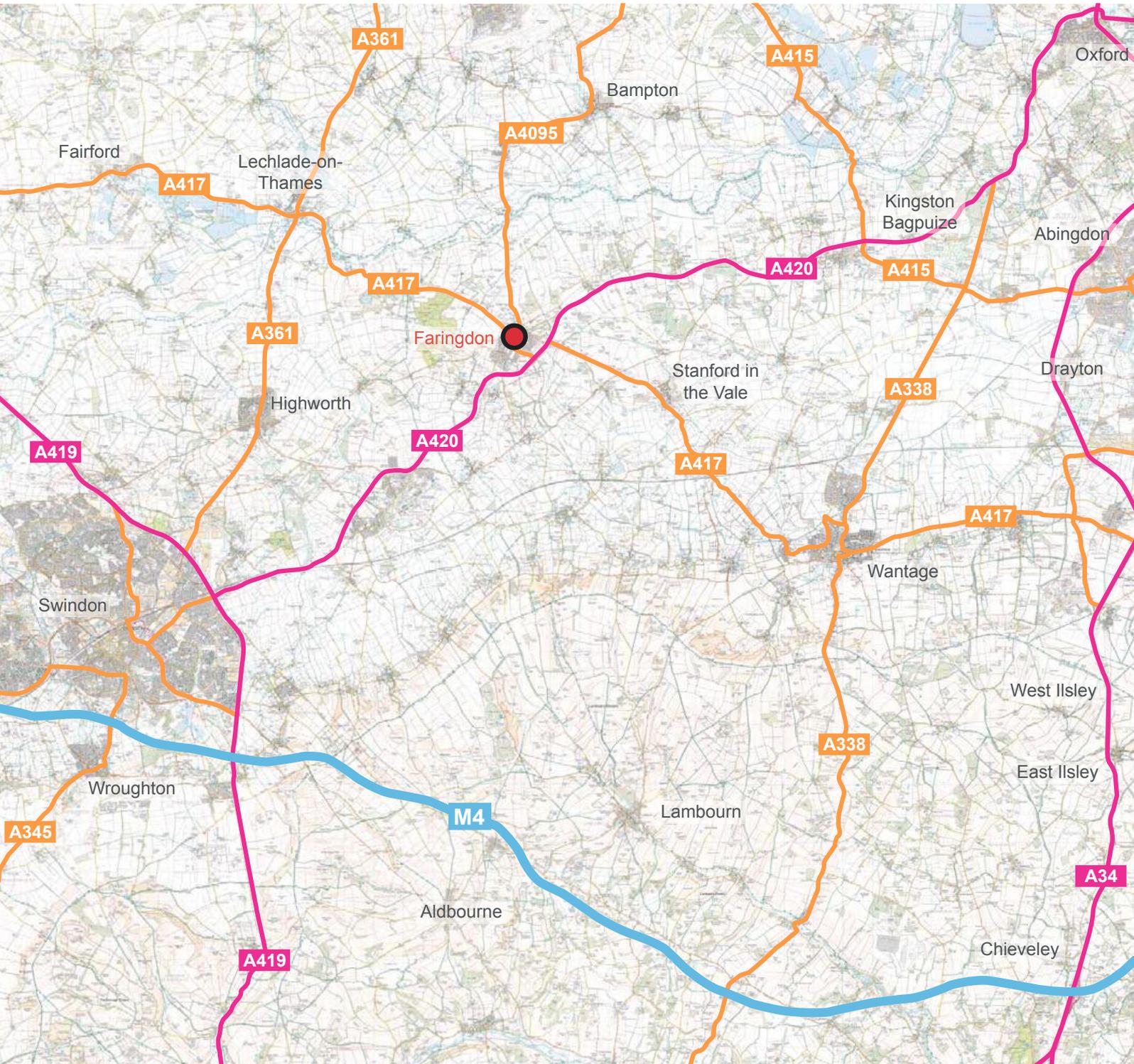
Current consultation and subsequent procedure

Following the previous public consultations, where local people were invited to comment on the emerging strategy and identify their preferences, a final draft Neighbourhood Plan was published for the six week 'pre-submission' consultation. Following final amendments, the Neighbourhood Plan and supporting documents were submitted to the Vale of White Horse District Council, the body responsible for presenting the documents for independent examination.

The Independent Examiner's report was received on 22 October 2014 in which various recommendations were made: one of these was to delete the section of Green Space Designation. All of the other recommendations were accepted, but there was strong local feeling that rather than going to referendum in February 2015 as planned, the Neighbourhood Plan should be re-submitted with the appropriate evidence supporting the Green Space Designation. This course of action was resolved at the Faringdon Town Council meeting of 10 December 2014.

A revised Neighbourhood Plan was then prepared including the Independent Examiner's recommendations, but with an amended section, evidence and policy on the designation of the ten Green Spaces agreed for inclusion. This revised Neighbourhood Plan and associated documentation was submitted for a second six week pre-submission consultation in Faringdon, prior to a second six week formal public consultation by the Vale of White Horse District Council after which the documents and all further comments were submitted to the Independent Examiner. He assessed the revised information, recommended any modifications to the Neighbourhood Plan and indicated whether a public hearing was necessary. The Independent Examiner's report was then sent to the District Council to decide whether it agreed with his recommendations and whether the plan should proceed to referendum. The District Council will publish the report and decision statement which will then be followed a period during which legal challenges can be made to the Neighbourhood Plan.

Finally, the Democratic Services Team of the District Council will organise a referendum for the electorate of Great Faringdon, in which the following question will be put: "Do you want the Vale of White Horse District Council (the Local Planning Authority) to use the Neighbourhood Plan for the Parish of Great Faringdon to help decide planning applications in the neighbourhood area?" If 50% or more of those voting, vote in favour, then the plan can move forward to be 'made' by the District Council providing it does not contravene any Human Rights Conventions.



2 LOCAL ISSUES

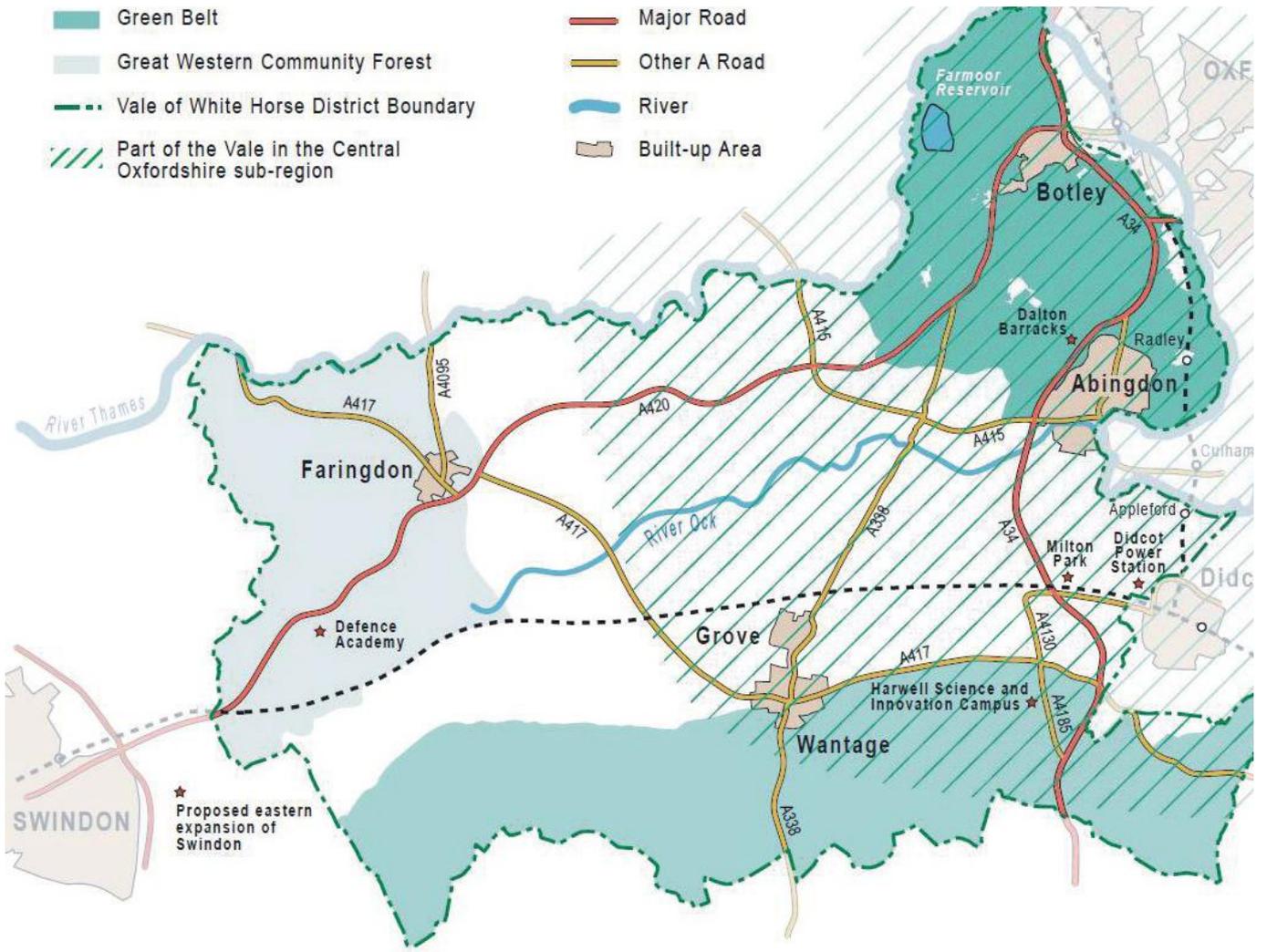
2.1 INTRODUCTION

The 'Penny Cyclopaedia' of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge published in 1833 notes that in 1831 Faringdon had a population of 3,033 people, significantly larger than the small village of Swindon a few miles to the south west that had a population of just 1,742. In 1840 Brunel's railway carved through the vale and changed Swindon practically overnight. Faringdon, however, retained its charm as a small thriving market town with a population that had barely doubled until the latter part of the twentieth century.

Faringdon has a rich and intricate history, with an ancient church, a market that has been held weekly since 1218 and its distinctive Folly, located on the site of an ancient hill fort. It has also had its fair share of eccentrics, including Lord Berners, infamous for dyeing his doves in curious colours, and Doctor Foster, the famously wet visitor to Gloucester. More recently, Faringdon became the first Fairtrade Town in the south east; a little unconventional at the time, but subsequently acknowledged as visionary and now very much part of the mainstream. A huge part of the town's appeal is that it not only retains its historic core of coaching inns and 17C Market Hall (Old Town Hall), but also includes a significant network of streets that are still lined with older buildings. These establish a very clear character that is not challenged by too many modern interventions.

Faringdon is a market town set within an extensive rural hinterland. A significant number of local villages, hamlets and farms have historically used Faringdon as a market town and local service centre. Beyond this role, there is no one overriding factor or connection upon which Faringdon operates. It has a selection of local employers, but no one strong sector. The town centre does perform its role as a service centre for residents in the parish and beyond, but it could do this much better, although it is also fortunate to retain a good number of local shops. There has been a steady pattern of fewer and fewer people using the centre as their primary service centre, and more and more using out of town supermarkets and centres further afield. Barclays closed its branch in October 2013, which now leaves Faringdon with only one major bank branch.

Left: Figure 2: Faringdon location plan



²Population estimate; M L H Wise for FTC; Appendix E to the Evidence Base Review

³The 2011 census indicates an occupancy rate for households of 2.33, or 2.36 overall for dwellings. Oxfordshire County Council has variously used figures of 2.48 to 3.15 for new estate dwellings, according to the style of the estate proposed. An average of 2.55 (i.e. Fernham Fields) has been used in these estimates.

However, Faringdon is growing; between the 2001 and 2011 censuses, the population of the town grew by 15% to over 7,000. Since then it has already grown to over 8,000^{2,3}, with planned housing developments, approved or under construction, likely to add another 22% to the current (December 2013) population taking it to almost 10,000. The additional sites allocated in the Vale's emerging Local Plan will increase this number to around 11,000. When all these new houses have been built the town's population will have increased by 55 %, since 2011 and by over 75% since 2001.

Much of this has happened while the Neighbourhood Plan has been in preparation and has already exceeded the predicted population growth expected during the lifetime of the Plan. The principal task for this Neighbourhood Plan is, therefore, to set out how the town should respond to this change, and to provide guidance on the ways in which change can contribute to the identity of Faringdon.

2.2 HEADLINE ISSUES

Together, the Steering Group, sub groups and workshops helped to identify a set of headline issues to steer the Neighbourhood Plan.

These are set out in detail in the supporting Evidence Base Review (available at <http://faringdowntowncouncil.gov.uk/council/neighbourhood/>) and summarised overleaf:

Left: Figure 3: Vale of White Horse

2 LOCAL ISSUES



Whilst Faringdon town centre experiences low vacancy rates, footfall is dropping significantly and the future vitality of the town centre is under pressure.



The 2011 census shows that Faringdon had 50% more social housing than the Vale average, thereby helping to meet the growing local need. The town also had proportionally fewer properties in Council Tax bands F, G and H.



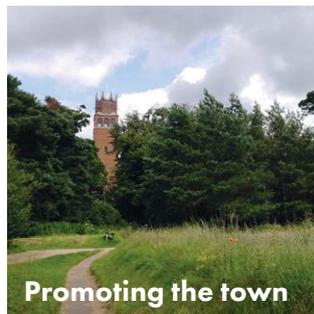
The size and number of shops offer a limited range, which is felt to be the primary reason for lack of footfall.



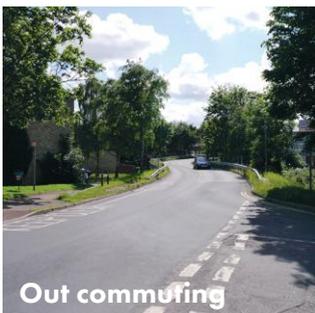
Housing provision should be better matched to the needs of local people, with sufficient affordable housing to enable Faringdon people to live in Faringdon together with a mix of larger houses.



Opportunities for Faringdon residents to work locally are limited; therefore, it is essential to ensure that employment land is available for businesses to grow and residents to work locally.



Faringdon has a low profile for tourism despite its proximity to key attractions, and having its own historic assets.



A high proportion of residents travel more than 30 km from the parish to work. Key employment destinations are Swindon (20 km) and Oxford (30 km).



Recent developments in the parish have not been successful in reflecting local character and there is a need to raise the quality and character of future developments.



Faringdon has a good reputation as a family friendly town. However, education and leisure facilities need to change and expand as the town grows to ensure that this is maintained.



While the Faringdon A420 bypass, opened in 1979, has removed most of the through traffic, congestion is regularly experienced through the confined streets in the centre, partly due to illegal on-street parking.



Between the 2001 and 2011 censuses, Faringdon experienced an increase in the proportion of residents over 60 years old (from 18.7% to 22.2%). Services and facilities need to adapt to keep step with this trend.



The quality of the streets and public spaces in and around the historic core has deteriorated and needs real improvement to support the success of the town centre and attract new commercial investment and visitors.



The town boasts a fine array of historic buildings, particularly within the Faringdon Conservation Area. Long term uses and ongoing investment are needed if they are to continue their attractive role.



Pedestrian connections between different parts of the town are often limited and are not as attractive as they could be. Wider pedestrian and cycle connections within the parish are not well used and need improvement and promotion.



Faringdon has grown significantly over the last decades, a trend that is continuing today. There is a real local concern that, if unchecked, this growth could encompass adjacent villages.



Whilst bus services to Oxford and Swindon are good, there are no direct bus services to Abingdon, where district and health services are located, or Witney, the nearest A&E hospital and location for mental health services.

Local character

Playtime

Local jobs

Ideal homes

Weekly shops

**Family friendly
Faringdon**

Community life

Walk to school

**A well-proportioned
town**

Links to the land

3 VISION

3.1 THE VISION FOR FAMILY FARINGDON

Faringdon is a growing market town with a great deal to offer. It is large enough to provide education, employment, housing, amenities and shopping for its residents but still benefits from a compact town centre and attractive rural setting that enhance its intimate character.

The vision for Faringdon is of an inherently sustainable town with a high degree of self-containment that enables a wide range of people to live, work and socialise, and that meets their day-to-day needs.

Faringdon is a small market town and it should stay that way, retaining its character and culture with an intimate and friendly feel.

Faringdon has a strong historic character and sense of place. This will continue to be protected and enhanced through the careful design of new developments, streets and spaces. The town will be an attractive, clean and pleasant place in which to live and spend time.

The market square will be the bustling heart of the parish.

Faringdon will act as a strong centre for the local parishes and a hub for public transport connections to all surrounding towns.



4 STRATEGY AND SUGGESTED POLICIES

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter has been divided into twelve sections that examine in depth the key themes identified by local stakeholders. These themes have been developed for the Faringdon Neighbourhood Plan to reflect the issues and opportunities identified through the consultation:

A Well-Proportioned Town

Faringdon needs to be a well-proportioned town that is self-sustaining in terms of everyday living; e.g. schools, shops, health care and other essential services.

Connections

The parish needs to be well connected, both within the town itself and to neighbouring towns and villages.

Town Centre Shopping and Services

The town needs to meet the weekly shopping needs of the local population.

Local Jobs

There should be a diversity of employment to suit a range of skills; links to the land need to be enhanced to unify the parish, bringing local produce into the town and extending enterprise opportunities to rural areas.

Family Housing

The town needs good family housing to meet the needs of local people.

Design

Development should reflect and express the historic character of Faringdon.

Appropriate Infrastructure

The increasing number of houses and employment sites must be matched by a corresponding improvement in facilities needed to support the increased population.

School Provision

There should be a school place in the town for every resident of school age.

Sport and Leisure

Faringdon should provide a range of sports and leisure opportunities for people of all ages and abilities.

A Caring Community

Local community facilities, including health provision, need to grow and adapt as Faringdon changes.

Landscape

The town's setting in the landscape needs to be protected and its links to the land enhanced to unify the parish by bringing local produce into the town and extending enterprise opportunities to rural areas.

Tourism

The important work of the Tourist Information Centre in promoting Faringdon as an historic town should be built on and the neglected Thames river frontage developed.

Left: 20th anniversary celebrations of the twinning between Faringdon and Le Mêle-sur-Sarthe in Normandy



N S



Except buses, taxis and loading by



oyds

"A town which is well-proportioned - not too big and not too small"

4.2 A WELL-PROPORTIONED TOWN

Context

Although this Neighbourhood Plan relates to the whole of the Greater Faringdon parish, many of the core issues and aspects relate specifically to the town of Faringdon itself and how it can best evolve to meet the needs of the whole parish.

The vision for the town of Faringdon focuses on the feel of the town and maintaining the strong community spirit that exists. Local stakeholders are keen to avoid losing the character and friendliness of the town in the face of growth. Many stakeholders describe the town in terms such as 'neither urban, nor rural' or 'a small market town / big village'. Whilst these qualities cannot easily be classified, there is a desire to ensure that growth does not force it across a threshold into a different type of town.

Objectives

Much of the discussion and debate around the Neighbourhood Plan with local residents and other stakeholders has focused around the degree to which the town should grow. There is general consensus that some growth is acceptable with the following reasons given:

- Additional residents would help support the critical mass of the town and help it become more self-sustaining.
- Additional population would boost the number of potential customers to the town centre, helping to reverse declining footfall and support a greater range of shops.

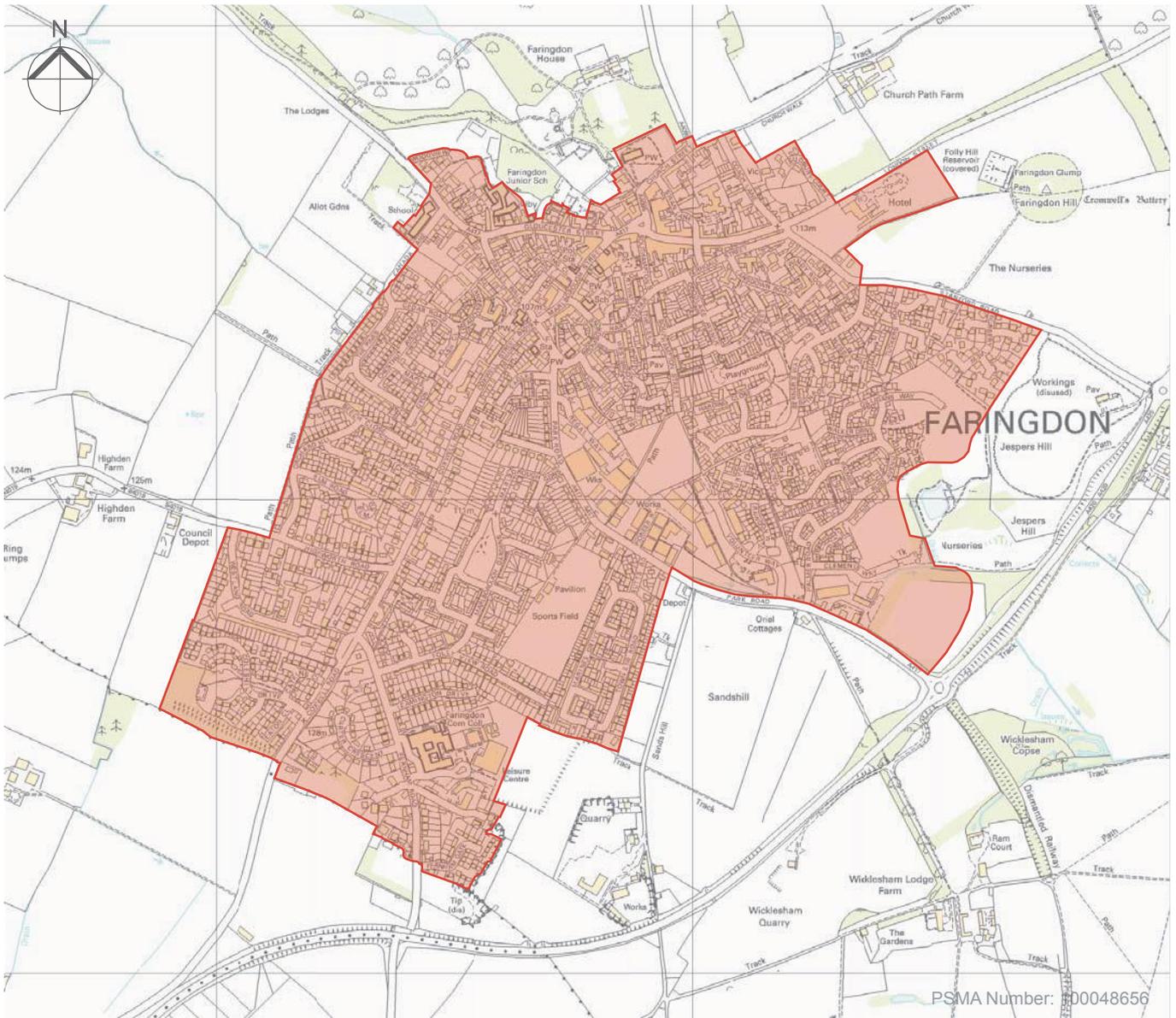
- Additional population would help support the business case for better public transport services, thus supporting better connections for all.
- A larger population might support the case for better community facilities within the town, including the scale and scope of health care provision.

Much of the debate has focused on what the total population of the town should be limited to. The town currently has a population of around 8,000 people. Existing residential development currently being planned could add up to 3,000 new people to the population and, therefore, the population level could reach around 11,000 in the next ten years and beyond.

Oxfordshire County Council is aware of the huge problems faced by local traffic increases on the A420, which will become more of an issue as the proposed houses are built and occupied. The infrastructure for schooling, medical care, library facilities and social amenities need to be developed to meet the needs of the growing population.

Many people who live in Faringdon work outside the town in, for example, Swindon/ Oxford/ Abingdon/Science Vale/Wantage and Didcot and will tend to shop where they work, so, it is imperative that the shopping experience, road access and car parking are improved to encourage greater footfall in the very attractive market centre.

Figure 4: Faringdon's development boundary as defined in Vale Local Plan 2011



KEY

Faringdon's Development Boundary



Policies

After much debate, it has been decided that this Neighbourhood Plan does not set a maximum population level. This is not so as to allow growth to go unchecked, quite the opposite. Such a strategy will allow each development proposal to be decided on merit and would guard against developers using a population maximum as a target and tool to gain planning permission. Along with this approach, it is recommended that the Neighbourhood Plan includes a strong policy to keep the existing development boundary (as defined in the adopted Vale of White Horse Local Plan (2011)) as it is except for the proposed strategic site allocations set out in the emerging Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2031 Part 1 (Core Policy 20), or where changed as a result of the policies in the adopted Neighbourhood Plan.

The housing target and sites for the Plan period will be set out in the adopted Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2031 (Parts 1 and 2) or its successor document(s). The Town Council will seek to have full representation in negotiations between developers and the District and County Councils in this regard.

The policies set out below are important to ensure the proposed development is delivered in the most appropriate way by adding positively to the town and its services and facilities.

Policy 4.2A: Residential Development within the Development Boundary

Infill residential development within the existing development boundary of the town will be supported in principle, subject to compliance with the policies in the Development Plan. All development in Faringdon should be carefully planned to respect the special character of the town.

Policy 4.2B: Infrastructure Requirements

Qualifying development proposals should contribute to achieving the objectives in the Neighbourhood Plan through Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) contributions made in accordance with the Vale’s CIL Strategy (once adopted, or any equivalent policies in the Local Plan 2031), planning obligations or other relevant mechanisms.



Summary

In summary, Faringdon's growth should be well controlled and the town should not be allowed to sprawl towards nearby villages. Faringdon should remain as a small market town with a clearly defined development boundary. In particular:

- Further major housing developments (i.e. >10 dwellings) outside the development boundary will not be supported.
- Any additional development within the Parish that adversely affects the setting of the Town or the green corridors leading to nearby villages will be resisted. All development in Faringdon should be carefully planned to respect the special character of the town.
- Approach roads (other than Park Road) leading into the town, now bordered by trees, fields and hedges should not be developed. These form a pleasant and appropriate setting for the town.
- The Faringdon Neighbourhood Plan supports paragraph 109 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2012):
"The planning system should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by minimising impacts on biodiversity and providing net gains in biodiversity where possible"

Left: Ceramic plaque produced by Karen Vogt to commemorate 20 years of twinning between Faringdon and Le Mêle-sur-Sarthe in the Department of Orne, Lower Normandy. The blackbird is the symbol of Le Mêle (le merle in French) and the pink pigeon is a feature of Faringdon commemorating Lord Berners' surrealism. The leaves on the tree are hands of friendship and the link between the towns is made by the fish swimming from Faringdon down the River Thames, across the sea, up the Loire and into Le Mêle via the Sarthe.



"A town which is easy to get to and to get around"

4.3 CONNECTIONS

Context

Bus services are necessary to enable Faringdon residents to get to work, to access national and international transport services, to shop and to access services and facilities that are not available in Faringdon. This is particularly important for those who do not drive, especially the young and the old. It is equally relevant for those who live in neighbouring villages who need to access facilities in Faringdon such as schools, medical and dental services, library, market and shops.

Faringdon is centrally located between Oxford, Swindon, Witney, Wantage and Abingdon. It has good road links to surrounding towns with good bus connections to Swindon and Oxford and less frequent bus connections to Wantage. There is a need to ensure that any gaps in strategic public transport connections are addressed. In particular, direct bus connections to Witney, Wantage and Abingdon are needed given the important roles these towns play in providing public health and social services not available in the parish itself. It is interesting to note that when the frequency of the 66 Swindon to Oxford bus service was increased from hourly to half hourly in 2011, passenger use increased by 80% despite the comparatively low density of population along the route⁴.

The traffic situation has changed radically in Faringdon since the bypass was opened in the 1970s. The population has grown considerably and car ownership is now much higher. This has led to increased traffic through the town, and a growing demand for on-street parking which, because of its limited availability in certain areas, often results in illegal parking and the obstruction of major routes.

A comprehensive study of roads and traffic volumes and flows is needed to understand the impact of any changes. From this can be established an integrated transport policy that meets, in a safe and secure manner, the needs of all those who live, work and use Faringdon. This will best be done when the areas allocated for housing, business development and schools have been finalised. A parking survey was undertaken by a group of residents under the auspices of the Town Council in 2004; however, this was not accepted by either the Vale of White Horse District Council or Oxfordshire County Council. The Vale of White Horse District Council has received funding from Section 106 planning gain from a recent development for another parking survey; this took place in late 2014, undertaken by consultants GKS Ltd.

Left: Faringdon should provide a good pedestrian environment to suit all needs

One of the attractive features of the older parts of Faringdon is the network of streets and open spaces. This creates distinct and attractive routes between different places in the town. By contrast later development has tended to be cellular comprising large cul-de-sacs of distinct building types and land uses. Whilst there are some very useful pedestrian short-cuts that link these together, there are opportunities to provide a more cohesive network of streets that will make Faringdon better for pedestrians and cyclists.

The way in which Faringdon has expanded over time has made the town very asymmetric, with the historic town centre to the north and most of the later growth to the south and east. This makes the quality of walking and cycling routes all the more important, as connections to the 'town centre' are longer for those living at the edge of the urban area than would be the case in a more conventional town plan; this is particularly true for those living in the new developments situated on the periphery of the town.

Objectives

The following statements have been drawn from local input to date and define the aspirations for the town's connections:

- Faringdon should be a safe and pleasant place for everyone - pedestrians, cyclists, old and young - to move around and spend time in.
- Faringdon should be easy to get to and from, whichever mode of transport is chosen, so that people are encouraged to live, work, shop and visit the town.
- The wider parish should be well connected to Faringdon via public transport services to enable its use as their primary service centre.
- Traffic in the town should be better managed, without inhibiting traffic flows.
- Cycling in and around the town should be encouraged.
- There should be easy bus access to neighbouring towns and villages.
- Walking and cycling should be encouraged through campaigns supported by the Town Council and the Faringdon Academy of Schools and the cycle routes shown in Figure 5 developed.'

Policies

To achieve these objectives, there are some key aspects around which the Neighbourhood Plan can stipulate policies, and the options that need to be considered.

Strategic connections

Faringdon needs a comprehensive network of public transport connections to reflect the needs of local people. Whilst many of the existing services are very good there are some important destinations that are not served at all. In particular, the community amenities and services provided in Witney and Abingdon (including hospital Minor Injury Units, cinemas and higher order shops) are not easily accessible by public transport from Faringdon and new, direct bus services are needed.

In addition, there is an ongoing need and demand for a more easily accessible rail connection. The Neighbourhood Plan supports the reopening of either Grove or Challow stations, with the provision of good bus and cycle links between Faringdon and the new station.

Improved facilities for long distance/express coach routes, such as a designated stop at a convenient lay-by on the A420, would also be welcomed as helping to support public transport options.

Connections within the town

As a general principle, areas of development should connect with one-another. Simple and clear street connections are greatly preferred over pedestrian cut-throughs as these feel clearer and safer. Opportunities should be sought to improve linkages between existing areas and to link existing areas with any new development. Where a new development forms the edge of the urban area it should establish the potential for further connections to be made in the future.

Additionally, connections between housing and employment areas will aid the integration of various activities and will perhaps help to blur boundaries in a way that allows their use to change in respond to demand.

Policy 4.3A: Connections

New developments should create attractive street connections into the town centre that encourage walking and cycling. Opportunities to create or improve routes between existing parts of the town should be maximised.

Streets and spaces

Streets and spaces in Faringdon should be simple and conventional. This applies both in terms of the form of the streets, which should have clearly defined pavements and carriageway, but also in terms of layout, which should avoid the use of cul-de-sacs and allow interconnectivity for easy access.

For any schemes that are considered in the Conservation Area it is important that appropriate design standards are applied to signage, street furniture and elements such as tactile paving to create an appropriate context for the historic buildings. English Heritage's Streets for All publication can provide a useful source of advice.

Pavements in Faringdon are old and uneven making it difficult for wheelchair and pushchair users and those with restricted mobility. Some particular areas need improvement:

- The pavements in the old town need to be repaired/replaced appropriately;
- Drop kerbs and pedestrian crossing places need to be reviewed;
- Good, safe pedestrian links from any new housing developments to the market square must be considered.

The cleanliness of the market square and surrounding roads has improved greatly in the last year. However, surrounding streets have been given a lower priority and are less well cared for; these need attention. In the design of streets and signage, priority should be given to pedestrians and cyclists particularly given the narrowness of the streets and pavements in many older parts of the town.

Policy 4.3B: Streets and Spaces

Insofar as planning permission is required, streets and spaces, including street paving, soft landscaping, lighting and street furniture in the Conservation Area, shall be designed to preserve or enhance its character or appearance.

Movement

For journeys around Faringdon, walking and cycling should become the preferred means of transport, particularly for the school run.

Links to the sport and leisure facilities including the Country Park to the east of the town need to be improved. The provision of a safe pavement surface and well-lit route should be designed to ensure that it is possible to walk and cycle to these facilities.

Because people visit the Folly Park sports and leisure facilities by car, consideration should be given to creating a link from the A420 roundabout into the car park but without a connecting route through to the town that could provide a 'rat run' for other traffic. This would help to reduce traffic through the pinch points in the town centre.

The historic town centre is always going to be a limit to vehicular movement and will be difficult to change. A more sustainable long-term solution is to consider how patterns of use and behaviour can be influenced.

⁵A woonerf is a living street where pedestrians and cyclists have legal priority over motorists as implemented in the Netherlands and in Flanders

Changes to traffic movement within the town must both increase the ease of pedestrian and cycle movement whilst ensuring good traffic flow. It has been suggested that inspiration could be drawn from the Woonerf⁵ or Living Street movement. In the UK a number of "shared spaces" that prioritise pedestrians and cyclists over cars have been successfully implemented, many in historically sensitive environments.

In Faringdon town centre the delivery of an attractive movement solution is closely related to parking issues, in particular the problem of illegal parking, which is a contributing factor in causing traffic congestion, and delays and inconvenience to buses.

Policy 4.3C: Shared Surfaces

Any shared surfaces in new developments must give priority to pedestrians and cyclists over motorised vehicles with that priority clearly indicated.

Parking

Parking

There should continue to be free parking in the town centre with differential time limits according to location to attract both visitors and shoppers. There should be an evaluation of how parking can be managed to make best use of the space available, bearing in mind the competing needs of residents, town centre workers and visitors/shoppers for long or short stay parking, respectively. Any parking additions will avoid the major bus routes.

Given the narrowness of the streets and the apparent low levels of policing, people need to park with consideration for the needs of others to ensure that traffic is not unduly restricted. Vehicles should not be allowed to park on pavements if this restricts the space for the visually impaired, pedestrians with push chairs and trolleys, users of mobility scooters, etc. to proceed safely.

There is a need to provide additional parking to alleviate the on-street parking shortage. Opportunities to deliver additional car parking for the town centre, for both residents and visitors, should be explored alongside future retail development.

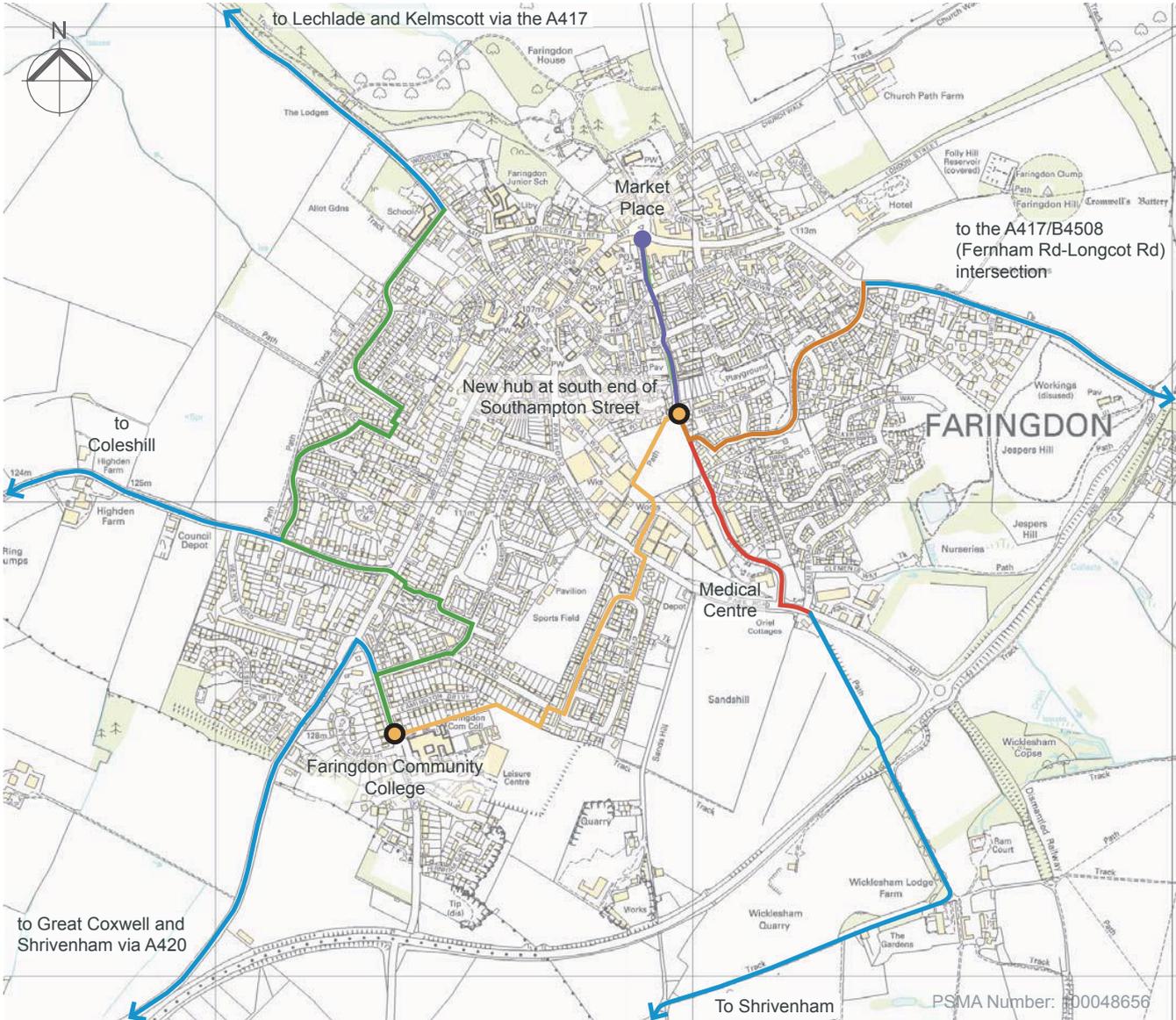
In addition, to support greater tourism activity in the town and parish, there is a need for designated coach park outside the town centre. This could possibly be located in the Park Road Industrial Estate.

Policy 4.3D: Parking

Proposals for delivering more off-street parking for visitors and workers in the town centre, together with a coach park outside the town centre, will be supported where they accord with other policies in this plan.

For the longer term, there is a need to have a full review of traffic speeds and flows alongside the demand for worker and visitor on-street parking to inform both an effective enforcement regime and a longer term solution for prioritising pedestrians in the town centre.

Figure 5: Proposed Farcycle cycle routes including routes within the town and longer distance routes to surrounding settlements



KEY

Proposed Cycle Routes



Cycling

Proposals for a much improved cycle route network were prepared by the Farcycles group in 2009, and are set out in detail in the Neighbourhood Plan Evidence Base Review, pages 61-62 (<http://faringdowntowncouncil.gov.uk/council/neighbourhood/>). These proposals are strongly supported locally and it is recommended that the Neighbourhood Plan supports the delivery of these routes.

The proposed routes include links within Faringdon town itself to ensure attractive and safe cycle connections between residential areas and the town centre and to key leisure and community facilities. In addition, new routes from Faringdon out to the wider parish are supported. Safe crossings over the A420 are needed at both the Fernham Road and Stanford Road junctions.

Supportive actions

Enhancing how vehicles, cyclists and pedestrians move around the parish can be influenced by other actions beyond planning policies.

It is suggested that the following actions could be promoted across the parish through other strategies and programmes:

- Parking - Businesses should work together to consider how staff could be encouraged to park outside the core town centre to leave more space available for shoppers and visitors.
- Walking and cycling - greater promotion of new and existing routes, particularly those out into the wider countryside, is needed.

Policy 4.3E: Footpaths and Cycleways

New developments should contribute to the delivery of improvements to the quality and extent of the pedestrian and cycle network in and around Faringdon and connecting with the adjoining parishes (including those identified in the 2009 Farcycles' report). In addition they should contribute towards the provision of new lockable cycle parking facilities close to local amenities. These will be sought through developer contributions.



⁶Vale of White Horse Footfall Survey Results 2009-2012

⁷<http://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/news/2014/2014-02/increased-footfall-provides-boost-vale-high-streets>

"A town where you can do your weekly shop, peruse the market and pick up a quirky gift"

4.4 TOWN CENTRE SHOPPING AND SERVICES

Context

Faringdon's existing shopping offer

Faringdon has a small but attractive town centre with a mix of shops and services. Faringdon benefits from a number of good local food shops, including a butcher, a baker and various others that help to meet regular needs. There is also a selection of cafés, bars, restaurants and public houses that provide choice for eating and drinking. The town is also host to a number of valuable destination shops including a nationally renowned piano retailer that draws in customers from some distance.

Despite these assets, a large proportion of residents choose to shop elsewhere. Retail surveys carried out by Savills (2008, 2010), Nathaniel Lichfield & Partners (2013) and Tesco (2010) indicated the need for another supermarket because of the low level of food purchases (~20%) made within the town by Faringdon residents. In the most part this was due to a lack of range of shops and in particular the absence of a larger food store that could provide the typical weekly family shop. As a result, other shops in the town were losing out on the higher footfall that a centrally located food store would bring to the town, creating a self-reinforcing downward spiral that has seen footfall in the town centre gradually decline. In some parts of the town centre footfall had dropped by up to 50% from 2009-12⁶. However, the Vale of White Horse District Council reported that a footfall survey undertaken in October 2013 in Faringdon showed a doubling over the previous year with the average number of people walking through the town centre during a typical two hour period increasing from 178 in 2012 to 395

in 2013⁷. This increased footfall may be partly explained by the introduction of two hours free parking in 2011, the renovation of the Budgens supermarket in 2012 and the opening of more retail outlets in the Town centre.

Food shopping provision has been increased by the opening in late 2013 of a Tesco food store on Park Road and a small Kwiksave food store on London Street. The latter has provided additional competition in the Town centre and helped to increase footfall.

The detailed retail assessments undertaken on behalf of the District Council in 2008 and updated in 2010 found there to be some capacity for additional retail, but the 2013 survey concluded that the Tesco commitment would absorb growth in Faringdon for the foreseeable future. However, on 5 September 2015, the District Council gave outline planning permission for an additional 2,817 m² of A1/A5 retail floorspace on part of the 4&20 site (site 2 in Figure 8), previously designated as employment land, as it was considered that this was the best opportunity for this site to be developed and that it would provide ca. 120 jobs. Although this has been a shift towards service employment, rather than to B2 (general industrial) and B8 (storage and distribution) employment, we would not wish to see further loss of B2/B8 employment land as this would undermine our employment strategy.

The Local Plan, therefore, emphasises Faringdon as a service centre for the surrounding rural catchment, a role that is to be reinforced, maintained and enhanced with larger shopping, tourism and community facilities. There is a clear aspiration to see footfall increase in order to secure the long term future of the town centre and to help Faringdon build a role as a sustainable town and local service centre.

Left: Local shops and produce in Faringdon

Features of successful small town centres

Small town centres that have succeeded in recent years have been those that have a strong local character and that offer an attractive experience in terms of the shops, services and produce available. Many towns have also managed to establish a reputation for a particular niche activity that has helped to attract people in from a wider area. The future vision for Faringdon is that the town centre will be able to meet the regular weekly needs of most people in the town, providing food shopping and other convenience and durable goods. To achieve this the overall retail offer needs to expand, with improved food retail, whilst protecting and developing the attractive local businesses.

Improving existing retail

It is important that Faringdon supports and extends its existing range of local shops to ensure that it can retain a viable role as a service centre that meets the regular needs of local people. There are also opportunities for the existing town centre businesses to work together to consider how the assets of the town centre can be presented in a collective way. Similarly, there is potential for physical changes such as shop front improvements

The weekly market is not well supported and does not contribute significantly to the vitality of the town centre. There is a need for the market to be re-energised, with a stronger emphasis on quality and local produce so that it properly complements the shops in providing an attractive offer.

However, the monthly Faringdon Farmers' Market, which offers a wider choice of fare, has successfully operated in the market square for the last 13 years and is well patronised.

Services and supportive activities

A successful town centre is about much more than just retail activities. Faringdon has historically acted as a local service centre for the surrounding villages and hamlets. It continues this role today, and is the focus for leisure facilities, community activities and local employment. Within the town centre are a host of supportive services upon which the parish's wider population depend. Emphasising the importance of these services in the town's long term vision is essential, and opportunities exist to improve the range of services on offer, despite the fact that recent years have seen the loss of opportunities for savers with the closure of building societies. In October 2013 Barclays closed its branch leaving Lloyds as the only 'high street' bank. This means that Faringdon residents who are customers of other banks have to travel to Carterton (HSBC), Lechlade or Wantage (Barclays), etc. or even Oxford or Swindon for 'across the counter' banking services.

An attractive setting for shopping

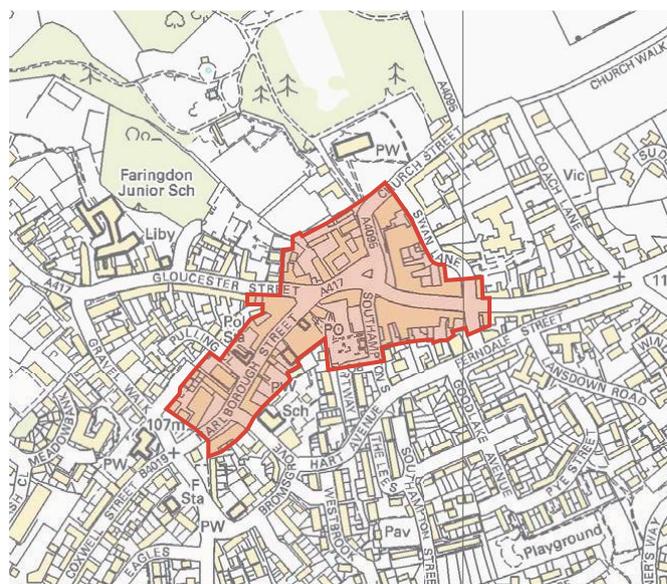
Recent improvements in the public realm around the market square have made a notable difference in improving the setting of the shops. However, there are opportunities to consider how more social and commercial activities can take place in the market square to generate life and activity. Such improvements will help encourage local shoppers to keep using the town centre in the long term and limit the potentially negative impact of internet shopping on the town centre.

Objectives

The following statements have been drawn from local input to date and define the aspirations for the town centre and in particular the town's retail offer:

- Support the town's existing retail businesses;
- Support the town's "destination shops" and ensure these are promoted as part of the town's visitor appeal;
- Extend the range of shops in the town - working towards meeting the bulk of local residents' weekly shopping needs within the town;
- Support the town centre as a hub for shops, services, community and leisure activities; and
- Continue to promote the market square as the heart of the town and encourage its role both as a location for businesses, community activities and markets.

Figure 6: Faringdon town centre boundary

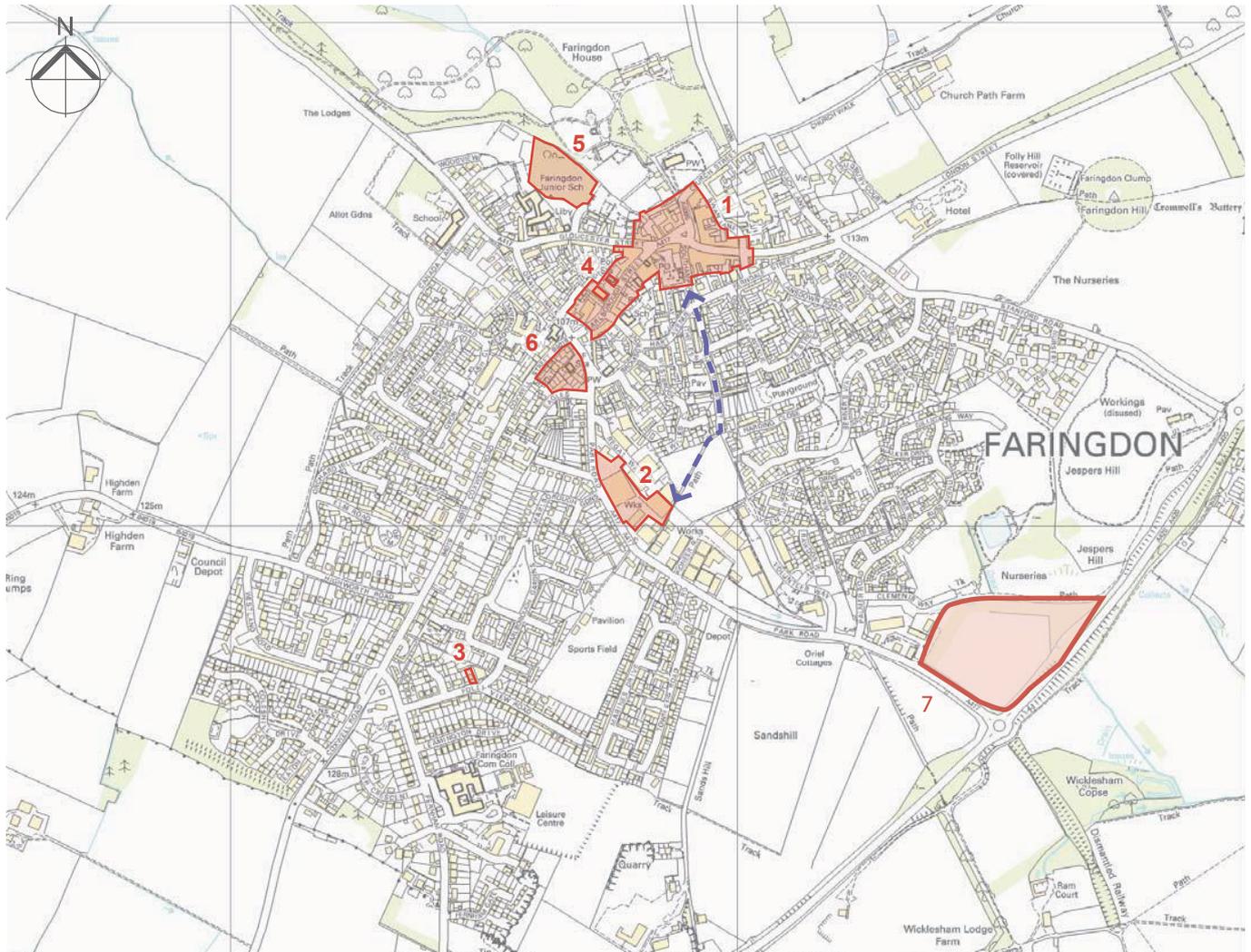


KEY

Faringdon town centre boundary



Figure 7: New major development sites



KEY

Local retail and potential retail development sites:

Existing town centre, local retail and potential retail development sites:

- 1. Existing town centre
- 2. Tesco development site
- 3. Local Costcutter shop



Improved Link between the town centre and Tesco



Further opportunity sites:

- 4. Sites within the town centre boundary - BT Exchange and Police Station site
- 5. Land north west of Gloucester Street car park
- 6. The Fire Station
- 7. Part of the 4&20 site now has outline planning for A1/A5 retail

Policies

In order to realise these objectives, some policy stances are set out to steer development and activities towards achieving a more sustainable town centre.

Extending the retail offer

Whilst the town centre (as defined on the Vale of White Horse Local Plan (2011) Proposals Map under policy S5) includes a small number of attractive shops and services, the current potential for growth is severely constrained by the lack of available premises or the availability of any easy potential development sites. The existing food store offer includes a Budgens supermarket (renovated in 2013) and another small convenience store (Kwiksave) in the town centre, a small Costcutter located away from the town centre on Folly View Road, and a Tesco supermarket on Park Road. Only Budgens and Tesco have car parks, the former being a pay-and-display car park owned by the Vale of White Horse District Council with two hours free parking.

The Tesco food store on Park Road opened in November 2013 and although not located in the town centre, as defined above, it is situated in the town's geographical centre and within walking distance of the majority of housing.

It has 1260 m² of convenience space and 145 m² of comparison space and, most significantly, a 148 space car park (132 plus 10 family and 6 disabled) with, currently, no restrictions. This has made a significant change to parking provision in Faringdon and could encourage more visitors to the town, so helping to reduce loss of trade to other centres by providing a platform for the gradual improvement in the retail offer around the core town centre.

In order to encourage shoppers, there should be strong linkages between the Tesco site and the town centre to facilitate pedestrian movements between the two as this will increase town centre vitality. As part of this and prior to its opening there were discussions with Tesco about this issue and as a result the footpath between the store and Southampton Street was resurfaced. However, this is only a start and more needs to be done to promote the town centre to visitors to the store.

As the town centre is constrained by both the historic nature of the buildings and by land ownerships it is difficult to identify opportunities for town centre retail expansion. However, as the population of Faringdon grows, opportunities to deliver more retail floor space including some larger units would be welcomed.

The proposed development of the 4&20 site will include an Aldi (1,254 m² of sales area), a small Waitrose (650 m² of sales area) and a drive-through Costa Coffee (165 m² of floorspace).

Policy 4.4A: Minimising the Loss of Retail Space

Any net loss of retail (Use Class A1) space in the defined town centre will not be permitted other than where one or more of the following circumstances can be demonstrated:

- a) The site has been marketed for retail (Class A1) use for a period of one year with no viable offers received; or
- b) A replacement premises of equivalent size, function and accessibility is to be provided in the town centre in exchange so that there is no net loss; or
- c) The loss of the retail use allows the implementation of other policies or proposals in the Plan.

Policy 4.4B: Extending the Town Centre Retail Offer

Within the Town Centre Boundary as defined in Figure 5 of the Neighbourhood Plan planning permission will be supported for the change of use or redevelopment of sites currently not in retail use (Use Class A1) to retail use. Other uses that underpin the retail function of the town centre will be supported.

Policy 4.4C: Extending the Wider Retail Offer

Where sites become available on the edge of the town centre or on the main routes between the town centre and the Tesco Park Road site, following the sequential approach, favourable consideration will be given to the redevelopment or change of use of those sites to retail (Use Class A1) and other uses that support the retail function of the town centre providing more suitable sites are not available within the town centre.

The sites that would be considered under policies 4.4B and 4.4C include:

- Under-developed or lower quality sites within the town centre such as the BT exchange and the Police station site (see Figure 7 sites 4)
- Part of the site to the north of the Gloucester Street car park (a small amount of retail may be supported within a wider mix of uses on this site - see Policy 4.5C and Figure 7 site 5)
- The Fire Station on Station Road (see Figure 7 site 6)

Any development or redevelopment on sites 1, 4 and 5 should conserve or enhance the special architectural and historic character of the Conservation Area.

⁸Communication from Sjoerd Vogt, Organiser of Faringdon ECOWEEK. http://www.ecoweek.info/Food_-_Drink/ECOFARMS/ecofarms.html shows organic farms comprise 26% of the land area in a four mile radius of Faringdon cf. 3.5% of the land area in the UK as reported in the Soil Association Organic Market Report 2014.

Ensuring a 'linked up' shopping experience

To maximise any potential for linked trips between different shops and retail areas, way-finding and signage should be improved together with the quality of the pedestrian environment.

In particular, the pedestrian routes between the town centre and the Tesco Park Road site need attention to ensure any customers shopping at the food store are encouraged to make use of the town centre shops in the same trip.

Policy 4.4D: Improving Pedestrian and Cycle Links

New developments between the town centre and the Tesco and 4&20 Park Road sites will be required to contribute to an enhanced pedestrian and cycle environment that ensures that linkages between the development and the town centre are attractive to pedestrians and cyclists. Additionally, any development of the land north west of the Gloucester Street car park should contribute towards providing a high quality pedestrian link between the site and the town centre (see also Policy 4.5C).

The intention of this policy would be to improve retrospectively the pedestrian route between the Park Road site and the town centre. Enhancements might include an improved pavement and footway, the delineation of a cycle route or lane, additional street tree planting and improved signage.

For the link between the Gloucester Street site and the town centre, physical improvements such as an improved footway, signage and lighting will be expected.

Supporting Actions

In addition to policies linked to planning and development activities, there are also a number of more general actions that would help support the objectives identified.

Existing retail businesses

To further support the town centre there is a need to find other opportunities to increase or improve its offer and draw people in. This could include programmes to improve shop fronts and to look at ways in which businesses collaborate to boost the presentation of the town centre.

Local produce

Opportunities that promote the integration of local produce with the town centre should be supported to enhance the links between the town and the surrounding countryside. Such efforts will support a high quality choice for local shoppers and help to draw in visitors from further afield.

Faringdon has at least 16 certified organic farms within a four mile radius of the market place, encompassing dairy, beef and vegetables with 'veggie boxes' delivered over a large area. This green land area makes Faringdon the largest organic producing area in the UK⁸.



Public Houses

Public houses are important community assets providing places for people to meet, relax and play games. They often provide additional important functions that support the local community including hosting events, supporting local sports clubs etc.

Viability and Marketing - Where applications for a change of use or redevelopment of a public house are received, supporting evidence will be required to demonstrate that:

- A comprehensive sustained marketing campaign (agreed in advance with the local planning authority) has been undertaken, offering the public house for sale as a going concern and using an agreed realistic valuation of the premises;
- The marketing campaign has run for a period of at least twelve months before the planning application is submitted;
- If marketing has been based wholly or partly on an alternative community or employment use, there has been prior discussion with the local planning authority on the principle of the proposal;
- The public house has been offered for sale locally, and in the region, in appropriate publications and through specialised licensed trade agents;
- The public house is not financially viable; in order to determine if this is the case, the application must be accompanied by detailed trading accounts for the last three full years in which the pub was operating as a full-time business;

- The CAMRA Public House Viability Test, or a similar objective evaluation method, has been employed to assess the viability of the business and the outcomes (to be shared with the local planning authority) have demonstrated that the public house is no longer economically viable.

Where applications for a change of use or redevelopment of a public house are received, supporting evidence will be required which demonstrates that:

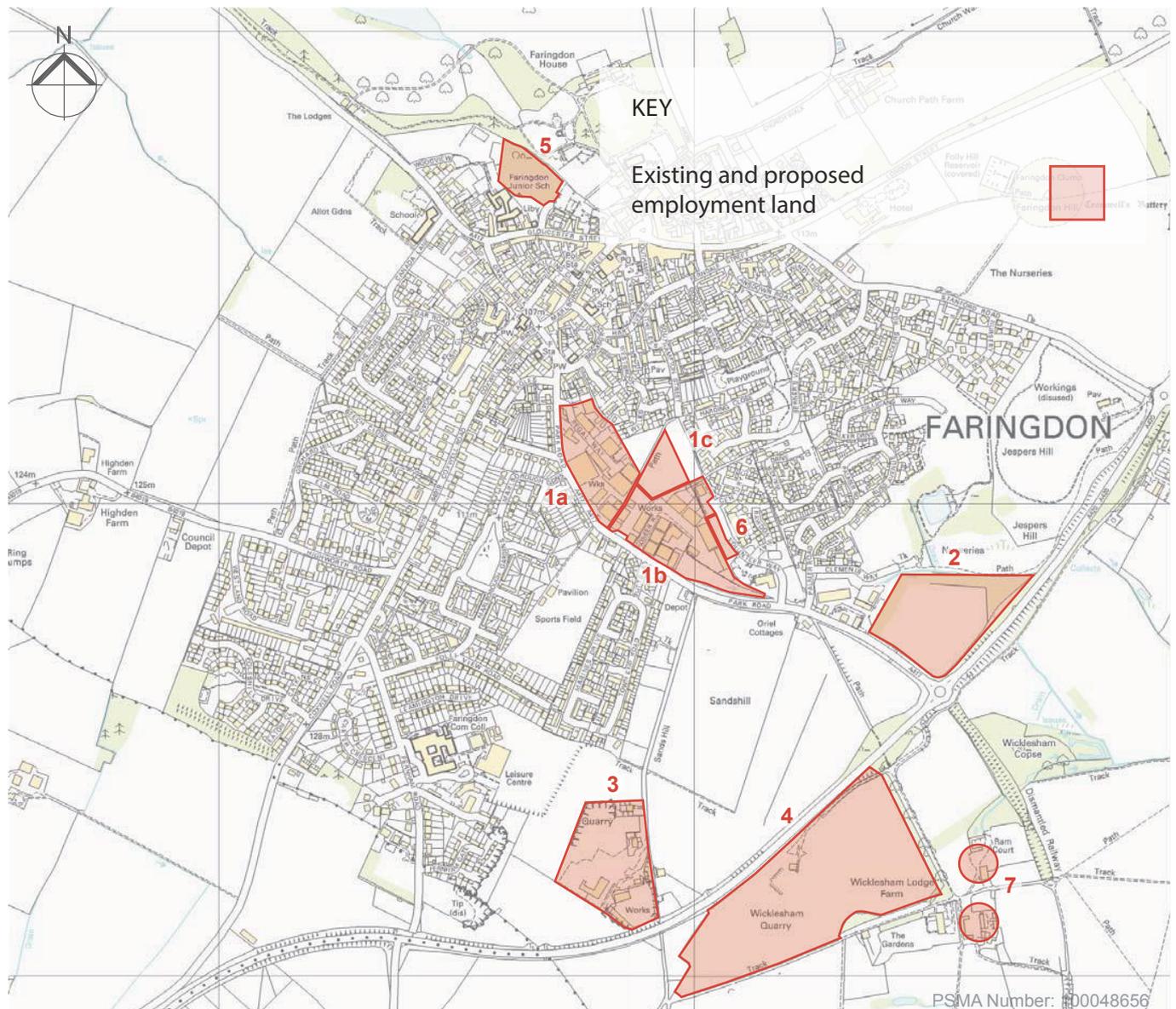
- There is no significant local support for its retention;
- There are alternative licensed premises within easy walking distance of the public house;
- Any such alternative premises offer similar facilities and a similar community environment to the public house that is the subject of the application.

Policy 4.4E: Public Houses

Proposals for the conversion or the redevelopment of public houses will not be supported unless:

- i) robust evidence can be provided to demonstrate that the public house is not economically viable; and
- ii) the public house is no longer required to meet the needs of the local community.

Figure 8: Existing and proposed employment land:



1. Existing Park Road sites (1a and 1b) and proposed 1c. Land behind Pioneer Road
2. 4&20 site (part of this site has outline planning permission for A1/A5 retail use)
3. Rogers Concrete (although 3 ha is allocated employment use in the Local Plan Pt 1 only half of this 4 ha site is usable owing to geological constraints)
4. Wicklesham Quarry
5. Land north west of Gloucester Street car park
6. Volunteer Way
7. Wicklesham Farm

"A parish where you can choose to work locally, work from home, set up your own business or commute to surrounding employment centres"

4.5 LOCAL JOBS

Context

As part of being a town that supports and promotes sustainable lifestyles it is important that more employment opportunities are provided in and around Faringdon. This will bolster the general vitality of the town and the town centre, and also help to reduce out-commuting.

The area around Faringdon offers a strong business base, with major commercial centres including Oxford, Swindon, Abingdon and Witney and the cluster of science and business operations around Didcot. Faringdon has good road links, particularly to Swindon and Oxford, but needs to put in place the framework for new business investment.

As well as identifying sites through this process and the Local Plan, this relates to wider issues such as local training and skills and provision of fast broadband fibre optic connections. This will require action beyond planning policy.

The 2013 Employment Land review prepared on behalf of Vale of White Horse District Council characterises Faringdon as an important location for B1 (business offices) and B2 (industrial) employment uses and is influenced by Swindon, which is an important location for blue chip companies. Faringdon is located within this wider Thames Valley West sub-regional employment property market that is dominated by B1 and B2 uses. In addition, the connection to Oxford is strong and could also attract future employment activity. Whilst sites within the Science Vale Oxford area (Milton Park Enterprise Zone, the Harwell Campus Enterprise Zone and

Grove Technology Park) will likely absorb any large scale science-related industries within the District, associated services and industries could well be attracted to locate in the west of the Vale. In addition, commercial opportunities stemming from universities in the wider area should also be maximised.

Although the focus of employment opportunities within the Vale are at the Enterprise Zones close to the District's eastern boundary, the Local Plan recognises the importance of supporting the economy of towns and rural areas in the west of the District in providing a range of employment opportunities close to where people live. Faringdon is located at the western boundary, hence, the Local Plan emphasises the need to allocate land for strategic employment growth at Faringdon to complement the Science Vale Oxford sites.

The Local Plan Part 1 allocates a number of sites in Faringdon for future employment development, in particular the 4&20 site and employment use within the development mix for the Sandhill site south west of Park Road (formerly Rogers' Concrete). The Local Plan Part 1 allows for further non-strategic employment sites to be allocated through the Neighbourhood Plan.

⁹Our Faringdon Our Future; Faringdon Chamber of Commerce; Appendix 2b to Evidence Base Review

¹⁰The 2011 census defines working age as 17-74 and shows that 49.9% of the total population were in employment.

¹¹Population estimate; M L H Wise for FTC; Appendix E to Evidence Base Review

Local analysis suggests that the "do-nothing option" would result in a net loss of potential jobs despite a predicted population growth of ca. 3,000 people. As with the 4&20 site, other employment sites may see job levels reduce (as outlined in Appendix 2b¹ to the Evidence Base Review; e.g. The 4&20 site is expected to provide 120 jobs in the retail part of the site and possibly another 11 on the remainder, compared with the 490 jobs predicted in the URS Vale of White Horse Employment Land Addendum 2014, Table 3.1). This is felt to be unsustainable. Faringdon would like over a third of the working age population to have the option for local employment or at least a third of those in employment to be employed locally to reduce out commuting. (According to the 2011 census¹⁰, 50% of the total population were in employment.) This would translate to a minimum aspiration of ca. 1,500 jobs for residents¹¹ or a target of ca. 2,000 based on a final population figure of ca. 11,000.

Objectives

The following statements have been drawn from local input to date and define the aspirations for employment activity in the parish:

- Support existing businesses in the parish and help facilitate expansion where required;
- Ensure that the total number of jobs in Faringdon matches 38% - 44% of the working population of the Faringdon parish¹¹;
- Allocate enough employment land to meet the requirements of at least 38% of the working population of the Faringdon parish within a 5 km radius of the centre of the town;

- Resist the existing trend of B1, B2 or B8 employment sites being lost to residential or retail development;
- Support provision of four and five bedroom executive homes to attract business leaders to the town;
- Provide incubation and small business start-up facilities, always ensuring that enough employment land is available to meet the subsequent needs of a growing business;
- Establish a sustainable level of employment that matches the town's residential growth and that also allows Faringdon's existing economy to expand;
- Through greater employment land allocations give local residents the option to work locally within the parish;
- Reduce the scale of out-commuting to support greater vitality during the day and a more self-sufficient town;
- Encourage new types of B1 and B2 business into the town;
- Attract and support entrepreneurs and new business start-ups; and
- Support the full range of employment activities across the parish including rural jobs, whether traditional agriculture or diversified business activities.

In order to help to meet these aspirations, new employment uses on all opportunity sites should be promoted in order to boost the scope for local employment. This will help to stop the loss of industry from and encourage new businesses into the town. It will also help to alleviate the wider traffic issues that result from out-commuting.

Policies

There are a number of distinct strands to the employment strategy, reflecting the fact that a range of opportunities are needed if Faringdon is to attract a healthy mix of employment and enterprise.

Existing sites

The following strategic sites currently provide an important focus for employment activities within the parish:

- 1a. Park Road Industrial Area (Regal Way)
- 1b. Park Road Industrial Area (Old Sawmills Road and Pioneer Road)

These strategic sites are safeguarded for employment use in the Vale's draft Local Plan 2031 (see Core Policy 17). It is suggested that these sites could further support the employment needs of the town through intensification.

Policy 4.5A: Existing Employment Sites

Intensification or redevelopment of the existing industrial areas along Park Road for employment purposes will be supported where this enhances the quality of employment opportunities available, provided that the Park Road frontages are of a good quality design with an attractive landscape setting, in accordance with Policy 4.7E, and that there would be no adverse impacts on the amenities in the surrounding area.

- 1a. Park Road Industrial Area (Regal Way) - encourage Class B1 uses and trade counter style employment uses.
- 1b. Park Road Industrial Area (Old Sawmills Road and Pioneer Road) - encourage Class B1/B2/BB uses.

Additional sites

The following sites (see also Figure 8) have been allocated or protected through the Vale of White Horse Local Plan (2011) for employment use and remain in the Local Plan 2031. They form an important basis for future employment growth:

1. 4&20 site adjacent to A420 (site 2). (Although part of this site now has outline planning permission for A1/A5 retail, but will provide ca. 120 full and part time jobs)
2. Rogers Quarry (Land south of Park Road as part of the mixed use strategic allocation - site 3)
3. Volunteer Way (site 6)

Each of these sites is essential to the town's future employment development and must be protected for such growth. Volunteer Way should be retained for B1 employment use.

Local business people feel these allocations will not bring forward the number of jobs needed locally and have therefore assessed the potential of other sites to support the employment land allocation. A set of additional sites (see Figure 8) are therefore proposed for allocation:

1. Wicklesham Quarry (site 4)
2. Land north west of Gloucester Street car park (site 5)
3. Wicklesham Farm (site 7)
4. Land behind Pioneer Road (site 1c)

Each of these sites is essential to the town's future employment development and must be protected for such growth. Some of these sites are already in employment use or allocated for such use, however the intention is to expand the scale of employment they offer.

At the Wicklesham Farm site, limited expansion would be acceptable to help address unmet demand for units here. The site contains a Grade II listed barn and granary; their setting will be conserved or enhanced.

Of the new sites, Wicklesham Quarry is considered by local stakeholders to be a significant opportunity site that would expand the provision of local jobs. Quarrying activities have finished on this site and it is now being restored to agricultural use with some woodland planting and ponds.

This is in accordance with its current permission which requires the removal of the buildings, plant, machinery and structures and the completion of restoration of the site by 30 September 2016.

However, in locational terms it is considered that this site could accommodate some employment use to provide B2/B8 industry in the town with the associated jobs. In addition, it would help to reduce the number of heavy goods vehicles and general traffic currently using Park Road. A site of this scale could also encourage new types of businesses into the parish to help diversify the range of local jobs on offer. The development of the site would need to also deliver a safe crossing over the A420 to serve pedestrians, cyclists and horse riders. This is addressed in the first criterion of the policy. There would be an expectation for a pedestrian crossing of the A420 and which would need to be controlled by traffic signals. Such a pedestrian crossing would be required pursuant to a S278 agreement upon a planning application. Any development on the site would need to be sensitively designed so as to be hidden within the landscape; and, as it is designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) it could only proceed following completion of a geological assessment in consultation with Natural England.

Any future proposals for employment development would need to ensure a sensitive relationship between the former quarrying restoration conditions and the scale, nature and the location of any proposed employment development within the site. Policy 4.5B requires that any employment development of the site provides access to visiting members of the public with an interest in its geological importance. This will ensure that the special geological interest is better revealed and provision made for the protection and enhancement of the geodiversity interest of Wicklesham Quarry.

The land north west of Gloucester Street car park is considered an appropriate site to be allocated, in part, for employment use (Use Class B1) and, in part, for retail use (Use Class A1) as a mixed employment and retail development bearing in mind the impact of any development on the green aspects of the site and its sensitive heritage location. Adjacent to the town centre, such uses would help support both town centre services and sustainable travel patterns. Proposals that facilitate the provision of new and enhanced pedestrian connections with the town centre will be encouraged. In this context, there is an aspiration to recreate 'Nut Walk', which would link the eastern end of the site through to the north western edge of the Market Place.

In developing the Gloucester Street site the adoption of 'Living Streets' principles will be encouraged.

The Land behind Pioneer Road (site 1c) was allocated in the Vale of White Horse Local Plan (2011) for Use Class B1 employment use and a landscape buffer. However, the emerging Local Plan 2031 does not propose to continue to allocate this site for development. It is important to maintain a variety of employment opportunities in the town and therefore the allocation of this site for B1 employment use is proposed to continue through the Neighbourhood Plan.

The employment land allocations identified in the Local Plan 2011 (as continued through to the Local Plan 2031) should be supplemented with the following sites:

Policy 4.5B: Wicklesham Quarry

Wicklesham Quarry will be safeguarded for employment uses (Classes B2 and B8) following the completion of quarrying and restoration activities on the site. Employment development will be supported on this site if no other suitable sites closer to the town centre are available, providing there is demonstrable need and subject to the following criteria:

- i) appropriate transport mitigation is provided; and
- ii) appropriate provision is made within the site for pedestrians and cyclists; and
- iii) the proposed employment development does not have a detrimental impact on the relationship between the site and the wider landscape in which it sits; and
- iv) appropriate ecological mitigation and enhancement measures are incorporated into the proposals; and
- v) any development would not result in demonstrable harm to the geological special interest of the site; and
- vi) employment proposals should incorporate measures to provide access to the protected site for the visiting public.

Policy 4.5C: Land North West of Gloucester Street Car Park

Proposals for mixed employment (Class B1) and retail (Class A1) development will be supported on the land to the north of Gloucester Street car park as shown in figure 8.

Proposals that include retail use must demonstrate no suitable and viable town centre site is available.

All proposals should comply with the following criteria:

- i) the development should preserve or enhance the character and appearance of the conservation area and the significance of any other heritage assets in the immediate vicinity; and
- ii) the development should safeguard the amenities of adjacent land uses; and
- iii) the development should incorporate appropriate ecological mitigation measures and compensation; and
- iv) the development should provide an acceptable drainage (surface and foul) solution; and
- v) the development should provide satisfactory access and servicing arrangements (including the provision of high quality pedestrian links to the town centre as requires by policy 4.4D)

Policy 4.5D: Wicklesham Farm

Limited expansion of the Wicklesham Farm site (Use Class B1) will be supported where this provides for expansion of existing uses and/or meets an identified need for units of this type in order to support the success of this location. Proposals should incorporate retention of the grade II listed barn and granary and conserve or enhance their setting. Proposals should also respect the rural location of the farm and its relationship to the wider countryside.

Policy 4.5E: Land behind Pioneer Road

New employment development (Use Class B1) will be supported on land behind Pioneer Road, as shown on Figure 8. A landscape buffer shall be provided between the site and the housing development to the north at Willes Close, which will be protected as open space.

Other, larger sites were considered for employment use within the town and discounted for the following reasons:

Sandshill - the area of this site next to the A420 forms part of the proposed strategic allocation in the Draft Vale Local Plan 2031 (Part 1) and is needed to protect the landscape setting of Faringdon and to provide informal open space, allotments and noise mitigation for the adjacent housing due to the proximity to the A420 (see draft Local Plan 2029 Appendix A). This Neighbourhood Plan therefore recommends that this site should be retained as a green buffer to the development edge. There is a strong desire locally to see all potential non-residential sites, whether allocated or not, protected from residential development in the long term. Many previously identified employment sites have been developed for housing in recent years and there is a need to guard against this happening in the future.

Town centre employment development

Achieving a sustainable and viable town centre in the long term will require greater activity to achieve a critical mass within the town centre. Employment uses in and around the town centre can be important in supporting daytime activity.

The town centre already has a number of smaller businesses and opportunities should be sought to encourage further commercial uses in the town centre as this supports the vitality of the town. It is important to protect and support business growth in the centre as many sites are likely to come under pressure for housing development.

The town centre could provide an attractive location for small businesses and new business start-ups,

hence, it is recommended that opportunities to introduce more offices and employment uses into the town centre should be encouraged as part of the wider mix of uses. This approach would necessarily need to follow on from wider town centre improvements, particularly with respect to retail development, ensuring that the town centre provides an attractive option to new employers.

Where units become vacant or under-used they should be considered for employment uses as and when demand exists. This would not strictly involve allocating units for employment, but operate more as an 'employment first' policy for refurbishment proposals/change of use.

Policy 4.5F: Town Centre Employment

Subject to policies on town centre development, employment development (Use Class B1) will be supported within the town centre, particularly as part of wider mixed developments or in promoting the use of under-used space. Traffic and parking implications will need to be considered in each case and suitable solutions proposed. Contributions towards improving town centre parking will be sought. Proposals should be consistent with the other policies in the Development Plan.

Wider parish

A series of opportunities exist in the rural parts of the parish to support enterprise and innovation:

Rural diversification – recognising the importance of local jobs in the wider parish, the policy will be to support appropriate levels of diversification with a particular emphasis on tourism.

Existing farms – existing agricultural businesses will be supported and encouraged to expand/diversify to support long term economic viability.

Redundant farm buildings - the conversion of redundant older farm buildings for enterprise space, workshops and tourism development will be encouraged, provided they can be clearly identified as surplus to agricultural requirements.

Policy 4.5G: Rural Diversification

Diversification of existing farms will be supported through the reuse, conversion or adaptation of existing buildings and potential new build where economic benefits can be demonstrated, and where proposals do not negatively affect the landscape character or historical or architectural significance. New development must be sensitively designed and be of appropriate character with respect to the local context.



