

A Development Strategy for Faringdon

2008 - 2026

**Faringdon Town Council
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Introduction and Summary

Introduction.

The Development Strategy for Faringdon has been produced by Faringdon Town Council for four main reasons:

1. The South East Region and the Vale of White Horse District Council are presently working on a 20 year local development framework (LDF) that will be the basic template for the long term strategic planning decisions within the VWHDC area.
2. When the LDF is finalized it will become one of the most significant and far reaching influences on the day to day prospects and wellbeing of all the residents of the Vale and particularly Faringdon. It is important that the planning officers and VWHDC members are aware of the aspirations that we have for our Town at a stage before the LDF is finalized. This paper is an attempt to achieve this.
3. The Town needs to have a long term perspective of how it could be developing in the future. Without such a perspective decisions may be made by, not only the FTC, but also voluntary organizations within the Town.
4. For some time it has become clear that FTC planning and highways committee needs to have a fundamental strategy against which it can benchmark its recommendations to the District Council.

This strategy is not an attempt to write a development framework nor is it a detailed and costed plan. These matters will come later when the LDF is finalized. It is an attempt to lay down a framework of aspirations and broad objectives upon which future detail can be based. Neither is it a research document (although some basic statistics are included as an appendix). There will be a requirement for more detailed research (most of which is no doubt being carried out by officers of VWHDC) in the near future.

It is not intended that this strategy should become a rigid framework. As circumstances change it will be reviewed in order to meet them.

The paper has been submitted to over 40 organisations in the Town and has been advertised in the local press and on Faringdon.org. The responses received have been reviewed by the FTC P&H committee and, where it is considered appropriate, have been incorporated into the strategy. The final plan remains as the position of Faringdon Town Council. A copy of all the submissions (in some cases summarized) has been included as an appendix.

Summary

1. Core strategy
 - I. Put environmental and social sustainability at the core of the strategy.
 - II. Ensure the provision of an infrastructure that is essential to the proper functioning and future development of the Town.
 - III. Protect and enhance the ancient architectural and social structure of the Town.
 - IV. Make the best use of the available building land to achieve these objectives and ensure that new housing is built to the highest environmental standards.
 - V. Reduce the need to travel by improving access to employment, shopping, services and recreation by increasing provision for residents' needs within the Town.
 - VI. Reverse the lack of employment provision in the past by ensuring that all significant development includes provision for a significant element of employment land.
 - VII. Encourage the production and distribution of locally produced food and agricultural products.
2. Housing/population.
 - I. Enable an increase in the population up to 10 -12,000.
 - II. Accept the affordable/private housing mix agreed by VWHDC.
 - III. Restrain any further significant housing development until after 2011.
3. Economy
 - I. Employment growth should be strongly encouraged to more than match population growth.
 - II. Basis of new employment opportunities should be concentrated on technology industries and (out of Town) warehousing.
 - III. Employment provision should not be of a type that would radically change the appearance and character of the Town.
4. Retail Growth.

Retail growth and diversity should be encouraged in order to service the increasing population.
5. Tourism

Encourage the expansion of tourism in order to benefit the economy of the Town.
6. Transport.
 - I. Review and improve bus routes to and from:
Witney/Wantage/Abingdon/Highworth and Lechlade.
 - II. Review timetables in order to ensure the availability of bus services to and from work and
 - III. provide a bus service from the local villages into the Town centre.
 - IV. Review road structures in the light of increased use by residents and visitors.
 - V. Support the opening of a railway station at Wantage/Grove.

- VI. Provide cycle and pedestrian routes.
- VII. Review and improve parking provision.

7. Facilities & Infrastructure

- I. Increase primary and secondary education provision.
- II. Review health service provision.
- III. Review policing.
- IV. Maintain or increase the playing field provision at the schools and improve the facilities at the parks and recreation grounds.
- V. Maintain and improve the leisure centre.
- VI. Maintain and improve the indoor facilities and entertainment centres.

8. Roads

- I. A full review of the road structure and in Town routing.
- II. Restriction on further major development until congestion on Park Road has been resolved.
- III. Review parking provision and policy.

9. Water, Sewage and Other Services

- I. Water pressure and sewage removal should be improved before any further major developments.
- II. Expand the library and fire service.

A Development Strategy for Faringdon 2008 – 2026.

1. Core Strategy

The strategy for Faringdon will provide for development to deliver the Town's housing requirements and build on its business, economic, cultural and geographical strengths. Particularly in the areas of employment development capitalising on its close proximity to the education, science and technology strengths of the Oxford sub region as outlined in the strategy for the South East Region. This will be achieved in ways that will:

- I. Put environmental and social sustainability at the core of the strategy and ensure the provision of an infrastructure that is essential to the proper functioning and future development of the Town.
- II. Protect and enhance the social and ancient architectural structure of the Town.
- III. Make the best of the available building land to achieve these objectives and ensure that new housing is built to the highest environmental standards..
- IV. Reduce the need to travel by improving access to employment, shopping, services and recreation by making provision for resident's needs within the Town.
- V. Reverse the lack of employment provision in the past by ensuring that all significant developments include a provision for a significant element of employment land.
- VI. Encourage the local production and distribution of food and agricultural products.

The main focus of population and employment development will be along the Park Road corridor into Faringdon, along with "infill" development within the Town.

I. Housing/population development

I. Principles

It has been an objective of Faringdon Town Council since 2003 that the Town should develop up to a population level of between 10 – 12000 people. This level of population is seen as:

- A number that will ensure the commercial and social viability of the Town. Below this level we can only foresee the Town going into a decline and becoming a dormitory commuter Town supplying Oxford, Swindon and beyond with a workforce, but losing the ancient function of the Town as a commercial and social base in its own right.
- The number is not so high as to lose the inherent character of the Town. It would remain small enough to continue its tradition of friendly neighbourliness that has marked it throughout the centuries.

- Enabling the retail and commercial sectors of the economy of the Town to grow and flourish. With a growth in diversity of shop types and some addition of national chains, the Town would once again be attractive to the people of the surrounding villages, returning to its ancient place as the natural hub for the South West Oxfordshire area.

This policy objective was supported by an opinion poll held amongst the people of the Town in 2003. It was also a key objective of the “Healthcheck” process. The Town Council restated their support for the policy in the “vision statement” in 2008.

Following the revision to the Draft District Plan in 2005, the population of the Town has started to move in the direction that the Town Council has envisaged. 400 houses are being built within the next few years at the Bloor Homes development off Park Road. An additional 100 houses are in process as “infill” within the Town, primarily in Coxwell Road/Street. These 500 houses will increase the population to about 8000.

During the first half of 2008, the planning committee of the Town Council has received presentations from 4 landowners. All of these own land on Park Road and could, in combination, provide some 600 houses. In principle, the Town Council takes a sympathetic view of these proposals. In combination they would bring the population levels very close to those to which we aim.

II. Housing mix.

The Town Council accepts the objective within the South East Region plan for 35% of new housing to be “affordable” with 25% as housing provided by housing associations and 10% other forms of “affordable” housing (joint ownership, key worker etc.). The point at which developments should include this level of affordable housing mix should be 10+ units.

III. Relationship with the South East Regional plan.

The plan envisages 66 new dwellings per year up to 2026 within the Vale of White Horse area outside of the part that falls within the Oxford sub Region. This is in the process of consultation following the revisions suggested by the Secretary of State.

IV. Timing.

Despite a downturn in housing starts nationally, the housing growth in Faringdon is going ahead at a rapid pace. It would be difficult for the road and transport infrastructure to cope with any more major developments until the present developments mature. We therefore suggest that any major development should not start before 2011. After that date, we would look for rapid implementation of this strategy.

V. In some cases mineral extraction could precede housing construction in order to not only provide a valuable resource but also to allow remodelling of the landscape to blend development into the countryside.

3. Economy

I. Overview

Faringdon is ideally placed to take advantage of some aspects of the outline of the economy of the Oxford sub Region as shown in the South East Region plan.

It is:

- Very close to 5 universities, all of international standing.
- Located on the A420 about equidistant from Oxford and Swindon and the M4 and M40.
- Within easy distance of Didcot, Oxford and Swindon railway stations.
- Within about 90 minutes to London, Birmingham and Bristol.
- In close proximity to the Defence Academy at Watchfield.
- An advantage that the Community College has engineering status.
- A centre for organic farming.

With these advantages the economy of the Town should be able to develop a combination of high technology, administrative and distribution based industry whilst continuing with its success as an agricultural centre. This process has begun with the plans for a business park at the junction of the A420 and Park Road and the proposed development of Wicklesham Quarry.

Despite these advantages Faringdon still suffers from low average disposable income compared to the Oxfordshire average.

It is the view of the Town Council that all residents of Faringdon should have the opportunity to work within the Town for wages that equate to at least the Oxfordshire average.

II. To achieve this objective we would look for:

- a) Employment growth to match the population growth. As a principle we seek a commitment from all large housing developments to match the housing element with a concomitant employment element.
- b) As a general statement, employment development should be focused on a technology industries basis within the Town, with a distribution base located at Wicklesham Quarry.
- c) Employment development should not be of a type that would radically change the appearance and character of the Town.
- d) Provision of public transport to local employment centres.
- e) Improved facilities to take advantage of high speed digital communications technology. This will be essential for both existing and future business users. It will necessitate an improvement in the current offering.
- f) Reinstatement of the functions of the Faringdon Gateway project.

III. Retail growth.

Faringdon has a thriving retail community even though the number and variety of shops has dropped despite the growth in population. Any shops that become vacant are rapidly filled and

many have been in trade in the Town for many years. There is a shortage of multiple retail groups and of certain trades – noticeably clothing and greengrocery. There is a market held on Tuesdays, which is in need of development. It would be disadvantageous to the Townspeople if the current diversity of privately owned shops were to disappear. At the same time the current near monopoly in some trades does not provide the dynamic that competition can give to the retail sector.

At the date of this strategy there are three possibilities that have been explored in the planning arena in the near future:

- The possible building of a Tesco supermarket/superstore in Park Road.
- A retail/residential/offices/parking/communal development on land north of Faringdon Junior School.
- A redevelopment plan which at this time is confidential until January 2009.
- Development of the Budgens store.

All of these have been the subject of comprehensive consultation.

FTC has formed a policy on town centre retail development:

- a) It accepts the need for another supermarket, possibly located on Park Road.
- b) In conjunction with such a development it seeks the development of comparison shopping in the Town Centre. This could be as a development of the proposed Faringdon House site or on a site created by CPOs near to the Southampton Street car park.
- c) There is a need for a Town Centre Healthcheck and a sequential development plan.

In addition it seeks to

- a) Ensure the provision of small retail units within any future shop development areas.
- b) Provide a general retail store within the Bloor Homes development.
- c) Enable the provision of a bus link between local villages, the Town centre and any future shop development areas.
- d) Improve visitor and resident shoppers' car parking provision within the Town centre through the introduction of at least the first two hours parking free of charge.
- e) Discourage conversion of retail premises to home occupation within the Town centre.

IV. Tourism.

Faringdon benefits from a reasonably large tourist trade. Very little effort is expended to promote this area of economic development beyond the production of tourist guides and an excellent Town Council operated Faringdon Community & Tourist Information Centre. The Town has three hotels but there is a shortage of B&B accommodation and a diminishing number of beds.

In order to expand the tourist attractions of the Town there is a need for:

- a) A visitors' coach park.
- b) Camping sites.
- c) Improvement to the toilet facilities in the Town Centre.
- d) Improved cleanliness.
- e) Trained and available tourist guides.
- f) The Town needs to undertake a "character appraisal" of the conservation area with a view to establish standards for materials, signage etc.
- g) Funded walking, cycling, historical guidance notes.
- h) A car park at Folly hill.
- i) Support for initiatives that encourage the development of the visual and performing arts.

4. Transport.

I. Bus routes.

Following a section 106 agreement between Bloor Homes and the Oxfordshire County Council, the route between Swindon and Oxford via Faringdon has been designated as a "premium" route. This has greatly improved the route.

There remains a major problem with the routes to Wantage, Abingdon, Didcot, Witney, Clanfield, Highworth and Lechlade. This needs to be addressed as the Town develops.

Careful attention will be needed to bus timetables in order to ensure convenient access to employment for bus users.

The Town currently benefits from a voluntary community bus that undertakes a scheduled morning service within the Town and also some local villages. This service needs to be extended to include more villages, the new housing areas and the employment areas.

Whether this extended service is provided by the community bus or another provider will need to be discussed.

II. Motor vehicles.

The A420 bypass removed from the Town centre a huge congestion problem in the 1970s. Whilst that level of problem is unlikely to recur, the envisaged growth of population for the Town will create severe congestion in a small number of key exit points. Notably:

- The junction with Park Road and the A420.
- The mini roundabout at the Town end of Coxwell Street.
- The "narrows" in the Town centre.

Detailed solutions to these problems are not the function of this paper, but the County Council should be made aware of them.

III. Other forms of transport.

- a. Provision of a railway station in the Wantage/Grove area would help to reduce the need for car usage to and from the existing stations. It would be necessary to ensure that a bus route was available to it.
- b. There is also the possibility of re-opening the Faringdon/Uffington railway (if only for freight from the proposed industrial area at Wicklesham). The track bed is still in place.
- c. Paved bicycle routes and pedestrian routes within the Town will need to be extended to incorporate new retail developments as well as tourist routes – for example to the Folly Tower. (see appendix)

5. Facilities and infrastructure

I. Overview.

Faringdon is an ancient Town built for horse borne transportation. Most of its support infrastructure dates from a period before motor transport when it was a much smaller place. That said the Town has grown in both population and in the expectations of the Townspeople over the last 50 years. The infrastructure has not kept pace with either the population growth or expectations in that time.

II. Education.

There is one infant, one junior and one secondary state school. In addition the Town has two pre-schools and a private primary school. All these schools have demonstrated their quality and success to a high degree; however these will be insufficient to cope with the anticipated growth in population.

There is a need for, and the FTC will support, a new primary school on the proposed site south of Park Road. In addition, a comprehensive plan for the development of an area group would be supported.

The secondary school is located on a site that will allow expansion. Expansion will be necessary.

III. Health provision

Faringdon is fortunate to have an excellent health centre operated by two surgeries. With an increase in population it will be necessary to consult with them in order to ascertain whether an increase in their facilities is needed possibly in the areas of: a small injuries unit, X-ray provision, an improved ambulance service and maternity provision. FTC will continue to support the First Responders organisation.

Car parking provision at the centre is already under severe stress. An increase in the parking facility should be treated as essential before any more significant developments are started.

IV. Police.

The policing of Faringdon has improved with the introduction of community police officers. The police authority will need to be consulted on whether there will be a need to open the police station on a full time basis.

V. Outdoor recreation.

As a principle the Council believes that existing school playing fields should be maintained and, wherever possible, expanded.

With the expansion of the country park, the re-siting of the cricket and rugby clubs, and the introduction of a skate park, recreation opportunities have improved. However a significant growth in population will put a strain on these facilities.

There will be a demand for the provision of facilities for other games such as hockey, netball, volley ball etc.

There will be a need to:

- a) Expand the use of Tucker Park in order to include other sports as well as football. An all weather multi sports pitch will be needed.
- b) Refurbish and expand the Town Council tennis court facility.
- c) Make use of the land at the Country Park (that is not needed for cricket/rugby) for outdoor events.
- d) Ensure that all new housing developments provide adequate and funded recreational facilities.
- e) There will be a need for increased provision of allotments up to the national standard of 1 hectare/1000 population.
- f) Provide cycle routes to the Thames and the Defence Academy.

VI. Indoor sports facilities.

Faringdon is fortunate to have a leisure centre and swimming pool of good size and quality. It will be necessary to ensure that the facilities are maintained and updated to accommodate the extra users that will be available. It should be noted that the current cost of these facilities has been a disincentive for organised sport, such as the indoor training of young football teams.

VII. Recreational facilities.

Faringdon currently has three main municipal halls, six public houses and one youth club on the edge of the Town. There are other venues available at the infant school, the Catholic Church, the United Church, the junior school, community college, bowling club and (soon) the cricket/rugby pavilion.

Considerable expenditure will be needed in order to expand the municipal halls' facilities in order to satisfy the anticipated extra demand.

a) The Corn Exchange.

The Corn Exchange is the traditional centre for celebrations, concerts and parties. It is in the Town centre and close to houses. Its use has, in recent years, been severely restricted by noise constraints imposed by public health legislation. It will either need to be comprehensively sound proofed or a new performance centre will be needed. In addition, the Corn Exchange will need cosmetic refurbishment.

b) The Old Town Hall.

Located in the Town Centre the Old Town Hall was refurbished in the year 2000. Its primary function is as the Town war memorial, but it has a useful function as a meeting and exhibition room. Apart from cosmetic upkeep it is unlikely that any major works will be needed however, as it is a listed building, upkeep is expensive.

c) The Pump Rooms.

Located in the Market Place, the Pump Rooms were comprehensively re-furbished in the early years of this century. Currently disabled access is restricted to the ground floor, but it is anticipated that this will be corrected following a section 106 agreement with Bloor Homes.

In order to cope with additional demand from the anticipated population growth, it will be necessary to:

- I. Use the existing theatre area as a community space. This will have to include soundproofing and air conditioning.
- II. Improve the catering facilities.

Vi) **Roads.**

The road system in central Faringdon still reflects the era of stage and post coaches. There is a severe parking problem for residents and visitors.

Entrance to Faringdon from the A420 is via Park Road, London Street and the Little Coxwell junction via Coxwell Street/Road.

London Street is unlikely to be affected by a growth in population, although the current parking restrictions will need to be applied more vigorously to keep the Town centre end of the road open to two way traffic.

The entrance via Coxwell Street/Road is made difficult by the need for residents in the Town end of the road finding parking spaces. This leads to congestion and delay for traffic moving to and from the Town. Both the cause (residents' car parking problems) and the effect will need to be addressed.

Park Road will carry a large increase in traffic. Most of the population and employment growth will be concentrated on Park Road. Before any major additional traffic is generated a comprehensive plan for Park Road will be necessary. This may include dualling part of it or the provision of an

additional entrance route. The opening of the Stanford Road/Wantage roundabout on the A420 would help to ease anticipated congestion but will not present the whole solution.

Vii) **Parking.**

In common with many Towns of its size and age, Faringdon suffers from a severe parking problem. This diminishes its value as a Town for both residents and visitors. As part of a section 106 agreement with Bloor Homes, a comprehensive parking survey and review will be completed within the next 3-4 years. This review will need to be considered when the population growth is in its early stages. Solutions to this problem should become clear when the survey is complete and will no doubt form part of future section 106 agreements.

Consideration could be given to providing an Oxford/Swindon park and ride facility at the A420 end of Stanford Road or at the end of London Street with bus access off the A420. Bus and pedestrian access from the Town will also be necessary.

Viii) **Water and sewage.**

Some parts of Faringdon suffer from low water pressure. A comprehensive review of water supply and sewage disposal will be necessary before any further significant housing and employment developments are agreed.

The sewage disposal system is old and leaking. It will need comprehensive refurbishment before any major developments occur.

ix) **Other services**

The library and fire service will need to be expanded.