

# Our Faringdon, Our Future – a Review

## A. What does a town need for its residents?

1. Job opportunities
2. Housing
3. Statutory services – health, education, police, fire
4. Leisure facilities – sport, library, catering, religious
5. Business & financial services – banking, insurance, accountancy, legal
6. Retail offer – both food and non-food
7. Adequate communications – both through physical & electronic means

## B. How does Faringdon measure up?

1. Job opportunities – not nearly enough at present and certainly not for an increasing population; currently, insufficient land is identified as employment land thus restricting business opportunities
2. Housing – perceived to be insufficient for the town's need to be self-sustaining; however, it is expected that the housing stock will be enlarged by 40% by 2026
3. Statutory services – currently these are at least adequate but the proposed population increase would stretch them, especially education
4. Leisure facilities – these appear to be adequate at present with catering particularly well served
5. Business & financial services – most of these are present but choice is limited
6. Retail outlets – food offer due to improve with the arrival of the proposed Tesco store but this raises a question mark over the survival of the specialist food shops; non-food offer is diverse but has significant gaps
7. Adequate communications – physical communications are made by road with east/west travel by public transport generally satisfactory but north/south less so with a limited service to Wantage and no direct service at all to Witney.
  - electronic communications are mainly made using the BT landline network whose relatively slow broadband service is felt to be unsatisfactory (this is due to be significantly improved in 2012)
8. Other factors for consideration -
  - a. Tourism: although there is an excellent Tourist Information Centre there are few other facilities specifically aimed at tourists and little effort has been made to attract them to the town
  - b. Vehicle parking: currently there are two small car parks and restricted on-street parking for cars (which is not properly policed) but no facilities for coaches; there is also no specific provision for resident parking
  - c. Voluntary organisations: the town is well served with voluntary organisations and we can reasonably expect these to continue and expand as the population increases

### **C. What do we want the future to hold?**

1. Job opportunities – an influx of industrial and commercial businesses in order to provide substantially increased employment opportunities for the residents of Faringdon and the surrounding area
2. Housing – sufficient housing of all types from ‘affordable’ to ‘executive’ to support a market town of some 11,000 souls
3. Statutory services – enlarged educational and medical facilities with all other services similarly upgraded to match a rising population
4. Leisure facilities – present facilities to be expanded and improved as the population increases
5. Business & financial services – a wider choice of financial and other services
6. Retail offer – a diverse and attractive shopping experience providing sufficient choice to meet most everyday needs including a significant number of “destination” shops to attract and engage visitors
7. Adequate communications – improved bus services in all directions from Faringdon plus the reopening of the rail station at Challow
  - 21<sup>st</sup> century telecommunications to enable businesses to compete on equal terms with those in other parts of Oxfordshire
8. Other factors – the town to become an acknowledged stop on the tourist trail with adequate (free) parking for both cars and coaches, attractive catering outlets and appropriate hotel facilities

### **D. How can we achieve this?**

1. Job opportunities – an increase in these is crucial to the continued wellbeing of the town and serious effort is needed both to persuade the District Council to designate more suitable employment land and also to make prospective employers aware of the benefits of locating in Faringdon. A considerable amount of lobbying by various local organisations is going to be needed if the District Council is to be persuaded that its out-of-date provision of employment land has to be significantly increased to take into account
  - land that was previously so designated has been lost,
  - the recently increased number of residents and
  - expected future population increases.

At the same time positive steps must be taken by those same bodies to promote Faringdon as an attractive and convenient place for businesses to relocate
2. Housing – the expected increase here is being driven by government policy and needs little intervention at present as it is not unreasonable to expect developers to submit plans to develop the currently designated housing land with up to 500 houses. As well as this providing homes for the anticipated population increase, developer financial contributions under the Community Infrastructure Levy should be available to improve various basic services and leisure facilities
3. Statutory services – it is not unreasonable to assume that the statutory services provided by the senior councils, the police and the NHS will be increased proportionately to cope with the increased need created by the expected

population rise although at present it has not been confirmed how the need for additional school places will be met because the current three state schools are in the process of becoming an academy which will become responsible for all statutory education provision in Faringdon

4. Leisure facilities –the town is reasonably well served in this area having a leisure centre, various sports, health and fitness and general interest clubs and facilities for young people which include a youth centre, a skate park and several children’s playgrounds. It currently does not have a museum or a dedicated theatre and although there are several venues available for hire for meetings and functions none has the flexibility of a purpose-built community hall. Additionally, while there is a good selection of eating and drinking establishments there is a shortage of hotel accommodation which needs to be addressed. It may be assumed that those facilities run commercially will be enlarged as demand increases but those run as public facilities will require funding to be improved and enlarged as the need arises
5. Business & financial services – while restricted to only one or two outlets, most financial and other business services are catered for and the expectation is that there will be an increase in choice as other commercial activity increases
6. Retail offer – the retail offer in Faringdon is not as diverse as it could or should be because there are insufficient shop premises available which has led in turn to the limited footfall in the town. More and different shops are needed but building more retail premises will not, of itself, improve matters; it is an increase in people wanting to shop that will attract retail outlets to the town. Both increasing the population and attracting tourists to the town is essential as is providing parking facilities. The Tesco development may improve the current position or it may have the opposite effect but action needs to be taken no matter what the outcome
7. Communications – improving bus routes from the town so that not only is there an east/west public transport route between Oxford and Swindon but also ones to Abingdon and Witney (since the majority of public services the town’s citizens need can only be accessed in either place) plus Wantage and Letchlade. Regular bus services to some or all of those places would be of considerable benefit and the suggestion of re-creating a rail station at Challow (as well as at Wantage Road, Grove) with an attendant regular bus service would greatly benefit Faringdon
  - telecommunication services is another area where changes have been proposed and the outcome from them is difficult to predict. However, making the town centre wifi enabled will certainly help the town’s popularity when word spreads
8. Other factors – if Faringdon is to become an accepted centre for tourists to stay to explore the surrounding area (and take advantage of the improved shopping facilities) an increase in accommodation is needed. In addition there would be considerable benefit in providing a dedicated car and coach park for visitors to the Folly and, bearing in mind that more visitors means more traffic, some sort of enforced on-street parking controls

## **E. CONCLUSION**

With a couple of significant exceptions the improvements to Faringdon outlined above lie largely outside the direct control of the people of Faringdon and their representatives. The one thing that can be done is to promote the town to the right people in the right places. The help of District and County Councillors must be enlisted to

- make planning changes (more employment land, extended shopping areas),
- improve tourist facilities (additional brown tourist direction signs, improved parking for both cars and coaches),
- upgrade footpaths and cycleways in and around the town

after which landowners and local estate agents must be encouraged to market the town's advantages aggressively.

In addition various imminent changes both to Faringdon itself and the control we may have over local decisions will affect the way the town develops. The situation should be reviewed once everything settles down.