Cabinet Agenda

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Date: 4 July 2012

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A meeting of the

Cabinet

will be held on Thursday 12 July 2012 at 2.00pm The Abbey House, Abingdon, OX14 3JE

Cabinet Members:

Councillors

Matthew Barber (Chairman) Roger Cox (Vice-Chairman) Yvonne Constance Reg Waite Elaine Ware

A large print version of this agenda is available. In addition any background papers referred to may be inspected by prior arrangement.

Please note that this meeting will be held in a wheelchair accessible venue. If you would like to attend and have any special access requirements, please let the Democratic Services Officers know beforehand and they will do their very best to meet your requirements.

Margaret Reed

MSReed

Head of Legal and Democratic Services

Agenda

Open to the Public including the Press

Map and vision

(Page 3)

A map showing the location of the venue for this meeting is attached. A link to information about nearby car parking is http://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/transport/car parking/default.asp

The council's vision is to take care of your interests across the Vale with enterprise, energy and efficiency.

1. Apologies for absence

To receive apologies for absence.

2. Minutes

To adopt and sign as a correct record the public minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 15 June 2012 (previously published).

3. Declarations of interest

To receive any declarations of personal or personal and prejudicial interests in respect of items on the agenda for this meeting.

4. Urgent business and chairman's announcements

To receive notification of any matters which the chairman determines should be considered as urgent business and the special circumstances which have made the matters urgent, and to receive any announcements from the chairman.

5. Statements, petitions, and questions relating to matters affecting the Cabinet

Any statements, petitions, and questions from the public under standing order 32 will be made or presented at the meeting.

6. Resourcing of planning policy team to deliver the core strategy (Pages 4 - 9)

To consider the head of planning's report.

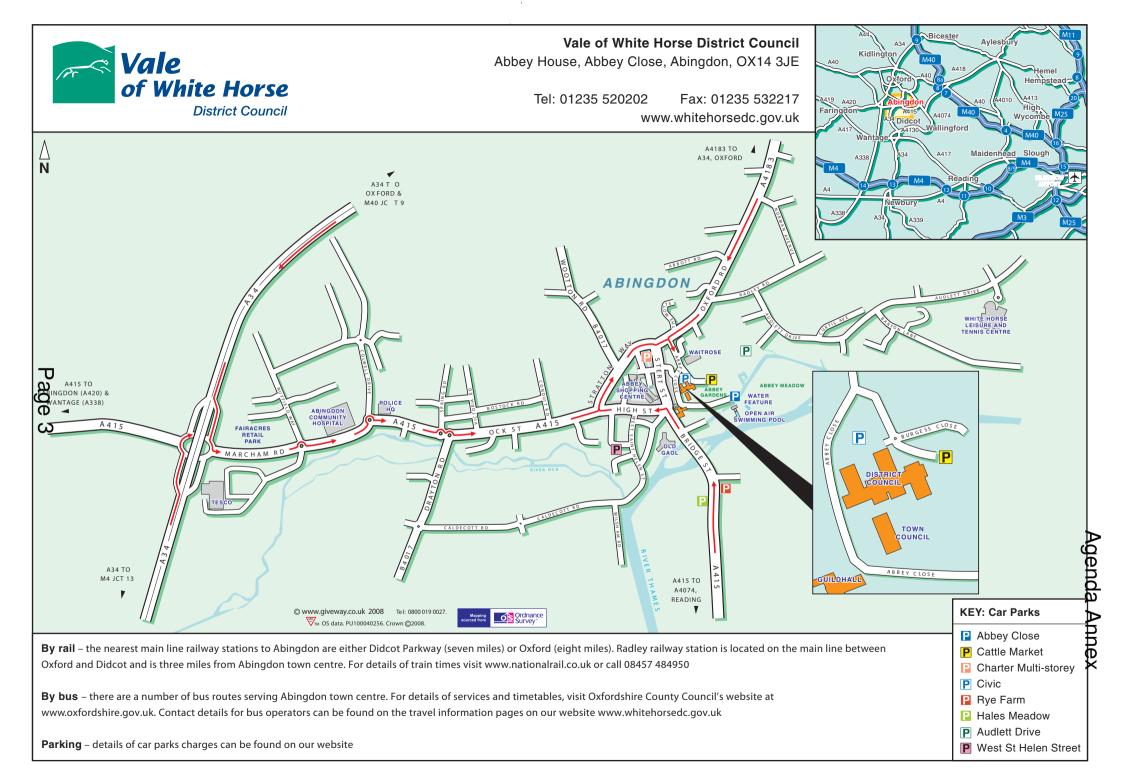
7. Neighbourhood Planning - Faringdon (Pages 10 - 18)

To consider the head of planning's report.

Exempt information under section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972

None

Vale of White Horse District Council Cabinet agenda - Thursday, 12TH July, 2012



Cabinet Report



Report of Planning Policy Manager

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Wards affected: All

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DATE: 12 July 2012

Resourcing of planning policy team to expedite delivery of Vale local plan - core strategy

Recommendations

- (a) To recruit a part time project manager for up to eighteen months and an additional full time senior planner for eighteen months, and to secure additional consultancy support, and
- (b) To recommend Council to approve a one-off supplementary budget increase of £145,000.

Purpose of Report

 To secure approval for the deployment of resources additional to those allocated this year to the Planning Service budget, to help expedite the delivery of the Vale Local Plan - Core Strategy.

Strategic Objectives

2. The Vale Local Plan - Core Strategy will guide investment and development decisions across the Vale for a fifteen year period. Through the process of producing the document and in its implementation it will be a major contributor to achieving the strategic objectives of:

- (a) a strong economy
- (b) positive and constructive work with community groups
- (c) housing for people who need it, and
- (d) communities involved in decisions about development affecting their local area

Background

- 3. Completion of the Core Strategy internal review at cabinet on 9 March 2012 provided a clear basis to progress the more detailed work for the next draft of the replacement Vale Local Plan Core Strategy. That report included an indicative timetable for progress on the local plan, setting out alternative timelines, with the difference between them relating to the scope of further work required if new strategic housing sites were added.
- 4. Having regard to the significance of the Vale Local Plan Core Strategy to the achievement of the Council's strategic objectives, there are benefits to securing the earliest possible adoption of the document, and conversely, the longer it takes then there is more exposure to risks. The sooner it can be progressed to the submission stage with a robust plan, the sooner we will give the emerging plan added weight for decision making on planning applications.
- 5. However, speed of progress should not be at the expense of producing an unsound document, whether by reason of process or content. Many of the tasks have limited potential to be completed more quickly, particularly as some are subject to statutory requirements.
- 6. To drive forward the preparation of the Vale Local Plan, to achieve either an earlier completion date or at least to minimise any additional time required to bring it to adoption, a step-change in the resourcing of the project is required. We need to consider a combination of targeted use of consultants, project management support to free up team time for preparing the plan and associated documents, and the recruitment of additional, experienced planners to help with preparation of the plan, up to and including the Examination stage.

Use of consultants

7. The project already allows for the use of consultants to assist in the preparation of evidence base documents and other specialist tasks, by the provision of a budget for 2012/13 (£100,000). The majority of this budget is committed. We can expand the use of consultants to bring forward other evidence we would otherwise prepare in house. For example to manage the preparation of policies for strategic sites, including masterplanning work and the preparation of technical site studies. This will free up time to allow the policy team to make progress on other tasks in the project.

Appointment of a Project Manager

8. Project management is usually undertaken in-house, led by the team leader and overseen by the Shared Planning Policy Manager. In this context it is one of a number

- of tasks that require attention at any one time. The appointment of a designated project manager, who would have no other specified responsibilities, would not only release time for the team leader to use on other tasks, but in itself can help to create a more robust structure for the identification, co-ordination and completion of tasks.
- 9. The project would not require the services of a project manager full time. It is estimated that 0.5 full time equivalent (FTE) would be appropriate. We should seek someone with good experience, given the significance of the project, to work up to the examination for approximately 18 months.

Planning Policy team temporary restructure

- 10. The Planning Policy Team comprises a Team Leader, Senior Planning Policy Officer and three Planning Policy Officer posts on progressively more junior grades; all posts are full time.
- 11. The two most junior posts are vacant, following an internal promotion and a transfer to another team within the service. Steps had already been taken to recruit to these vacancies, but this work has been put on hold pending this consideration of a temporary restructure of the team.
- 12. The current experience profile of the team structure would be capable of delivering the local plan, but would require more time. This is because it includes junior officers, one is 'entry grade', who would require more supervision from senior officers and who will work more slowly due to their lesser knowledge and experience. Officers with more experience and knowledge, able to act with more initiative and independence, will be more likely to deliver successfully to a more demanding timetable.
- 13. There are two stages in the plan preparation where that experience will be of particular benefit:
 - (a) the writing of the document itself, a draft of which we wish to have completed before the end of this calendar year. This is the greatest demand on time
 - (b) the examination hearings, when the council's position is challenged in open hearing sessions by aggrieved parties and the Planning Inspector appointed to examine the document
- 14. It is, therefore, proposed to temporarily restructure the team. By holding vacant the two most junior posts, sufficient savings would be generated in-year to fund the appointment of another, senior planner for six months, to help with the production of the draft plan. Recruitment to the more junior posts would be timed to allow appointment as that six month period ends. However, while exchanging two more junior posts for one more senior would be beneficial, it would not alone be enough to create a big enough change. It is, therefore, proposed to also recruit another senior planner for eighteen months; with the option of extending this if the hearing sessions are not completed before the end of 2013. This post would deliver significant additional capacity to help with the production of the draft plan this year, and would then assist with the assessment of consultation responses and the defence of the document through the examination phase, including the preparation of additional documents for and attendance as an expert witness at the hearing sessions.

Options

- 15. The possible options include continuing with current team structure, but with temporary exchange of more junior posts with a senior for six months. A formal decision on the latter part is not required because it can be funded in-year from within the Service budget.
- 16. There are various resource options to consider, which can either be combined into a package or considered individually. The recruitment of additional staff or additional resources that will help expedite the delivery of the local plan are
 - (a) recruit a part-time project manager for eighteen months
 - (b) recruit an additional senior planner for eighteen months
 - (c) provide additional funding for consultancy support
- 17. The most progress could be made through the appointment of the project manager and the additional senior planner, and the provision of additional funds for consultancy work. Any of the other options would also deliver some benefit but obviously not as great. Having just an additional senior planner would be likely to deliver the greatest benefit, compared to having just a project manager or just additional funding for consultancy or both.

Financial Implications

- 18. The Service budget for this financial year currently allows for £100,000 for external costs in relation to the progression of the local plan. Of this £75,000 is already spent, committed or is estimated to be required this financial year. It is prudent to allow a contingency because not all work has been costed yet and 20% is a reasonable margin (£15,000). This margin is based on experience. That leaves £10,000 to fund additional consultancy work. However, and using the example above as a bench mark, it is assessed that it is more realistic to allow £30,000 for additional consultancy work, including a contingency. Therefore, an additional resource of £20,000 is sought.
- 19. As stated already, a senior planner for six months can be funded in-year from the Service budget. But neither the Project Manager post nor the additional senior planner for eighteen months can be. For these posts additional funds from outside the Service budget are required. Their costs for eighteen months are calculated using current rates of pay. The cost of employing a project manager, part time, for eighteen months could be up to £36,500, and for a senior planner, full time, for eighteen months could be up to £73,000; plus recruitment agency fees of £15,500.
- 20. No underspend in 2012/13 has yet been identified from which this could be funded and there are insufficient funds in the contingency budget. Therefore this additional expenditure will need to be funded from the council's general reserve (£4.03m as at 31 March 2012) and consequently a supplementary estimate (budget increase) of £145,000 is requested. As this request is over £100,000, this will need the Council's approval.

Legal Implications

21. Under the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 the council is required to prepare a Local Development Framework (LDF) for its area. The Act does not prescribe the timeframe within which local development documents should be produced. Nonetheless, the Core Strategy is the principal Development Plan Document in the LDF and the risks of not having an up to date Core Strategy in place are spelt out elsewhere in the report.

Risks

- 22. The current local plan is becoming increasingly 'out of date'. The Vale Local Plan to 2011, adopted in 2006, set out the council's vision for spatial development to 2011. Parts of this plan are now out of date, although the housing allocations still stand and a number of policies are saved and continue to carry weight except where superseded by the National Planning Policy Framework. However, it does not provide a vision for ongoing and future strategic spatial planning. The Vale Local Plan Core Strategy will provide this but until adopted there is an on-going risk of development not occurring in the locations or in the form the council thinks best satisfies the needs and aspirations of the Vale. It may also weaken confidence in the Vale amongst those making decisions about where to make investments. The sooner the local plan can be brought to adoption the less exposure there will be to these risks.
- 23. After April 2014 there will be restrictions on the scope of planning obligations i.e. 'S106 agreements'. This will occur because the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) is designed to be the lead vehicle for securing planning gain from new development, to fund strategic infrastructure requirements. A CIL can only be introduced in an area with an up to date local plan (core strategy). Therefore, if we do not adopt the Vale Local Plan Core Strategy before April 2014 then we will face a period when we may be unable to secure the level of funding for strategic infrastructure that we would normally expect. This risk can be minimised if not avoided by working to expedite the delivery of the local plan.
- 24. There have been significant changes to the planning system under the Coalition government. No further significant planning changes are currently proposed, but how we implement and operate the new system will still be subject to change which may possibly delay the progress of the local plan. Such further changes and delay may follow as elements of the new system are tested through the examination of other local plans, through the determination of appeals on refusals of planning applications and through the outcome of legal challenges in the courts, or as a result of additional government advice. We can expect to be in a more robust position to deal with these unforeseeable changes, if we strengthen the planning policy team and are able to drive forward towards adoption in a more determined fashion.
- 25. We may be unable to appoint suitably skilled and experienced staff, or as quickly as we would like. This would weaken our ability to improve the progress of the local plan.

Other Implications

26. Helping to expedite the delivery of the local plan will establish an overarching spatial vision for the district that will allow other more detailed planning documents to be produced. These include the Managing Development DPD that we intend to produce

that would deal with non-strategic land use allocations and update our development management policies. Adoption of the local plan will also establish the strategic context which neighbourhood development plans (NDP) must conform with, thereby releasing those communities who wish to have a NDP to progress one to adoption.

Conclusion

- 27. Additional temporary funding and resources are required to achieve the delivery of an updated local plan. The resources include:
 - (a) the recruitment of a part-time project manager for eighteen months
 - (b) the recruitment of an additional full-time senior planner for eighteen months
 - (c) additional consultancy support.

Background Papers

n/a

Cabinet Report



Report of Head of Planning

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To: CABINET

DATE: 12th July 2012

Faringdon Neighbourhood Plan

Recommendation

Cabinet is asked to designate the whole of the Great Faringdon parish as a neighbourhood area under Section 61G of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 for the purpose of producing a neighbourhood plan for Faringdon.

Purpose of Report

1. This report seeks Cabinet approval to the designation of Great Faringdon Parish as a neighbourhood area for the purpose of the production of a neighbourhood plan within the remit of the Localism Act 2011.

Strategic Objectives

The council's corporate plan has a specific objective, under the theme of 'Support for Communities', that seeks to encourage communities to develop Neighbourhood Plans as a means of shaping their local environment. The Faringdon plan will help meet this objective.

Background

- 2. The Localism Act gained Royal Assent in November 2011. This gives new powers to communities, principally town and parish councils, to prepare neighbourhood plans.
- 3. Neighbourhood plans must be prepared in general conformity with the adopted Local Plan (or Core Strategy). Neighbourhood plans cannot reduce the level of growth

- outlined in the strategic policies of an adopted Local Plan, but they will take precedence over non-strategic policies.
- 4. The main drive of the Localism Act is to encourage a more collaborative approach to plan making, with the council and the community working more closely together.
- 5. The district council has responded positively to the localism agenda and has been proactive in embracing the new approach to plan making. The Vale of White Horse (VOWH), working with Faringdon Town Council, applied to government in November 2011 for front runner status to produce a Neighbourhood Plan for Faringdon. This proposal was approved by CLG in March 2012 and a grant of £20,000 was awarded to assist with the administration of the neighbourhood planning process.
- 6. The Neighbourhood Plan for Faringdon is proposed to cover a number of issues of interest to the town council and the community, which are summarised below:
 - housing numbers, mix, and if appropriate, small-scale housing growth to enable the towns population to grow. Strategic growth will be addressed through the Local Plan (Core Strategy),
 - protecting and enhancing the architectural and social structure of the town,
 - reducing the need for residents to travel for work, shopping and other services,
 - improve employment provision in the town and allocate land for business growth (strategic employment allocations will be set out in the Local Plan (Core Strategy), but can be influenced by and complemented by the Faringdon Neighbourhood Plan,
 - encourage growth and diversity of the retail offer,
 - encourage and expand tourism, and
 - seek improved infrastructure, including transport (infrastructure delivery will be partly addressed through the Local Plan (Core Strategy), which can be influenced by and possibly complemented by the Faringdon NDP).
- 7. The exact content of the plan will of course be influenced by the process, which will include appropriate research, evidence gathering and consultation. Selected extracts from the brief for consultants for the Faringdon NP work are shown in **Appendix 1**.
- 8. Faringdon Town Council has re-constituted its working group 'Our Faringdon Our Future' to take the lead in managing the preparation of the Neighbourhood Plan. The council is also supporting the town council by providing technical, planning and consultation guidance.
- 9. The preparation of a Neighbourhood Plan for Faringdon provides a number of advantages to both the town council and the district. These include:
 - providing an excellent learning opportunity which may help inform how neighbourhood planning could be pursued more widely across the district;
 - demonstrate a clear commitment to localism and the more collaborative approach to plan making supported by the new planning system;
 - helping to inform the emerging Vale Local Plan (Core Strategy).

Neighbourhood areas and relevant bodies

- 10. The Neighbourhood Planning Regulations came into force on 6 April 2012. These regulations indicate that applications for neighbourhood areas should be published and that the application should specify the organisation of relevant body for the neighbourhood area.
- 11. Faringdon Town Council has defined its neighbourhood area as the whole of the Great Faringdon Parish administrative area (**Appendix 2**).
- 12. The regulations require councils to publicise any applications received for the designation of a neighbourhood area. Paragraph 6 of the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012 sets out these requirements, which have been followed. This included advertisements in newspapers, publishing articles in local newsletters, putting information on the council website and writing to any stakeholders on our consultation database relevant to Faringdon, including the neighbouring parishes.
- 13. There was a modest response to the publication with five formal responses and three queries to the publication. The responses included one formal objection to the proposed neighbourhood planning area and the procedural arrangements for the associated publication process. These matters have been addressed and the officers do not consider that any further action is required. The objection to the plan area related to the exclusion of an alternative strategic housing site considered at an earlier stage of preparing the Vale Local Plan (Core Strategy). Although this site adjoins Faringdon it is located within the neighbouring parish of Great Coxwell and so is not appropriate to include it within the neighbourhood plan area. The allocation of strategic housing growth will be addressed by the Vale Local Plan (Core Strategy), and so such housing sites may be considered for potential future growth outside the neighbourhood planning process. A summary of the publication process and the responses is set out within Appendix 3.

Funding for Front Runner plans

- 14. The cost associated with preparing the Faringdon Neighbourhood Plan is expected to be in the region of £14,000 to £21,000. The bulk of this cost comes from three formal stages in the process towards adoption of the plan examination, referendum and publication. Our estimates for each stage are,
 - Examination £6,000 £12,000 (cost depends on how light touch the process is)
 - Referendum £5000 £7000
 - Publication £3,000 £4000
- 15. The costs of each neighbourhood plan will vary, depending on what the plan seeks to address. The Faringdon Neighbourhood Plan does not seek to allocate any strategic housing or employment land and is intended to be focused on local, Faringdon matters, such as strengthening retailing in the town centre or improving opportunities for tourism. For this reason, we believe the costs associated with the examination should be at the lower end of the range. Referendum costs will vary depending on whether the referendum is linked to an election or held as a stand alone exercise. Publication costs are based on experience and have a higher level of confidence.

Options

16. There are no alternative options for consideration in this case.

Financial Implications

17. The government has provided a grant of £20,000 to the council to support a 'front runner' neighbourhood planning process for Faringdon. The grant is intended to cover administration costs, in particular, examination stage, referendum and publication expenses. As front-runners are essentially pilot projects, the costs that emergence from the Faringdon process will inform budget setting for any future neighbourhood plans. Should the cost exceed £20,000, the balance will be funded from the contingency budget.

Legal Implications

18. There are no legal implications of significance

Risks

19. There is a risk that the cost of preparing a Neighbourhood Plan for Faringdon will be greater than estimated, resulting in the need for an increase to the budget from contingencies.

Conclusion

20. Faringdon is keen to produce a Neighbourhood Plan, which accords with council and government aspirations for community involvement in plan making. It is recommended that the neighbourhood plan area is agreed as described above.

Background Papers

- Appendix 1: selected extracts from Faringdon NDP brief for consultants
- Appendix 2: map of Great Faringdon Parish
- Appendix 3: summary of publication of Faringdon neighbourhood plan area

Appendix 1: Selected extracts from Faringdon Neighbourhood Plan brief for consultants

Study Objectives

- To undertake a review of existing and emerging studies which relate to the area and identify where they are deficient, out of date, or where gaps exist. The review should also include wider national and local policies (where appropriate) and any other existing relevant evidence;
- 2. To undertake community engagement (where appropriate) to ensure any current issues, aspirations and opportunities are comprehensively understood and captured. This consultation should also test local appetite for any additional non-strategic housing growth over and above that identified in the emerging Vale of White Horse Local Plan (Core Strategy);
- 3. To outline a clear set of key issues and opportunities (informed by Objectives 1 and 2) which will need to be addressed if the area is to fulfil its potential and meet its aspirations;
- 4. To identify any potential development sites within the area which may be appropriate for non-strategic development using appropriate methodology to be agreed by the steering group (it is anticipated that only a small number of sites will need to be considered);
- 5. To assess any sites identified (Objective 4) for their suitability for development using robust methodology and make clear recommendations for whether any sites should be considered for inclusion in the Plan:
- 6. To prepare suitable draft policies for inclusion in the Plan to address those matters identified in relation to Objectives 1 and 2;
- 7. To prepare a Draft Neighbourhood Development Plan including any proposals, sites and policies identified through the proceeding objectives;
- 8. To identify any requirement for Sustainability Appraisal, Strategic Environmental Assessment, Habitats Regulations Assessment, or other regulatory requirements, and ensure these are conducted to a satisfactory level to support the development of a Neighbourhood Development Plan.

Tasks

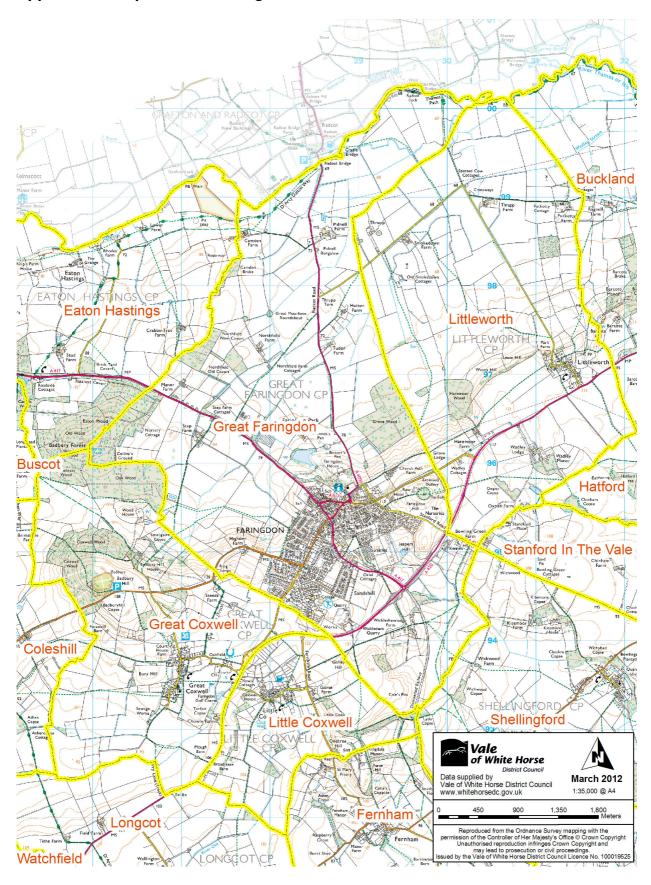
Scope of the Plan:

- Housing numbers and mix to enable the towns population to grow (NB: strategic growth will be addressed through the Local Plan (Core Strategy); the Plan may wish to allocate non-strategic sites if this is found to be appropriate);
- Protecting and enhancing the architectural and social structure of the town;
- Reducing the need for residents to travel for work, shopping and other services;
- Improve employment provision in the town and allocate land for business growth (NB: strategic employment allocations will be set out in the Local Plan (Core Strategy), but can be influenced by the Faringdon Plan);
- Encourage growth and diversity of the retail offer;
- Encourage and expand tourism; and
- Seek improved infrastructure, including transport (NB: infrastructure delivery will be partly addressed through the Local Plan (Core Strategy), which can be influenced by, and possibly complemented by the Faringdon Plan).

Future Stages

Stage	Description	Indicative Timetable
Stage 1 – Scoping/ Drafting	as described above (this study)	June – Dec 2012
Stage 2 – Consultation	Conduct appropriate consultation on the Draft Plan	Jan – Feb 2013
	Prepare final document Update regulatory requirements as appropriate	Mar – April 2013
Stage 3 – Adoption	Examination and Referendum processes to be conducted in accordance with regulations (to be managed by VOWHDC)	April 2013 onwards

Appendix 2: Map of Great Faringdon Parish



Appendix 3: Summary of publication of Faringdon neighbourhood plan area

- 1. The publication on the Faringdon Neighbourhood Plan Proposed Area took place for a period of six weeks from 19 April to 31 May 2012. As this method was a publication process rather than a wider consultation process a low response rate was expected.
- 2. The publication process received 5 formal responses and three queries relating to the launch of the publication. The queries came from some of the adjoining parish councils that wanted clarification that the proposed neighbourhood planning area was not looking to encompass some of their respective parishes. The assurance provided was that the proposed boundary followed the parish boundary of Great Faringdon and no proposals had been put forward by Faringdon Town Council to alter this.

Specific comments

- 3. Natural England raised the fact that Winkelsham and Coxwell Pit Site of Special Scientific Interest fell within Great Faringdon's Parish Boundary and that consideration of this in the context of the National Planning Policy Framework should be given to future neighbourhood planning developments. These comments have been noted and will be passed onto Faringdon Town Council as part of the neighbourhood planning process.
- 4. Network Rail raised some general concerns regarding the neighbourhood planning process as a whole, rather than the proposed neighbourhood plan area. These related to things such as ensuring appropriate consultation stakeholders are involved and infrastructure costing measures are taken if any development is proposed as part of the neighbourhood planning process. As with the comments raised by Natural England these comments have been noted and will be passed on to the town council as part of the neighbourhood planning process.
- 5. RPS for SGR (Faringdon Ltd) submitted comments objecting to the proposed neighbourhood planning area and questioning the procedural arrangements for the associated publication process. SGR (Faringdon Ltd) questioned the lack of transparency in identifying Faringdon Town Council as the qualified neighbourhood planning body. SGR (Faringdon Ltd) also questioned the publication process and lack of information identifying the proposed neighbourhood planning area. SGR (Faringdon Ltd) final issue related to their belief that proper consideration had not been given to their site as part of the neighbourhood planning area, which lies within the adjoining parish of Great Coxwell. The district council has sent a formal response to SGR (Faringdon Ltd). However, in summary the clarification to the procedural arrangements is considered unnecessary. This is because the formal notice that accompanied the map of the proposed area states that Faringdon Town Council is the proposed neighbourhood planning body and that the proposed neighbourhood planning area follows the parish boundary of Great Faringdon. Section 61G (2) of the relevant regulations also clearly states that a 'relevant body', can apply for the process to designate a neighbourhood area. The regulations also go on to state that a 'relevant body' can mean a parish council¹. Therefore negate the further need to qualify Faringdon Town Council as the appropriate body. In relation to the final points regarding the appropriateness of the proposed neighbourhood plan area not including Great Coxwell parish, this matter was discussed with town council and district council

Localism Act 2011, 61G Meaning of "neighbourhood area"

before formal publication. It was concluded that as the town council were not wishing to look at dealing with strategic allocations in their neighbourhood plan. The Vale's core strategy document would be the most suitable mechanism for dealing with this matter. The core strategy as the forthcoming strategic planning policy document in the district is best placed to handle this subject and currently deals with a strategic allocation for Faringdon.

Conclusions

6. In conclusion from the responses received to the publication period there are no serious issues, which would prevent the district council approving the proposed neighbourhood planning area of Great Faringdon for Faringdon's Neighbourhood Plan.