

Executive Report



Report of Head of Economy, Leisure and Property

Author: Trudy Godfrey

Telephone: 01235 540346

Textphone: 18001 01235 540346

E-mail: trudy.godfrey@whitehorsedc.gov.uk

Wards affected: Faringdon and the Coxwells, Wantage

Segsbury, Wantage Charlton

Executive member responsible: Cllr Richard Gibson

Tel: 01235 534001

E-mail: richard.gibson@whitehorsedc.gov.uk

To: EXECUTIVE

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REPORT NO
41/10

Faringdon and Wantage strategy and action plan

Recommendations

That the executive:

- (a) approves the Faringdon and Wantage strategy and action plan included as an appendix to this report
- (b) authorises the head of economy, leisure and property in consultation with the strategic director and portfolio-holder to review and amend the strategy annually, and approve the annual action plan.

Purpose of report

1. This report sets out how a strategy and action plan for the Vale's market towns will help to sustain vibrant market towns and requests that the executive approves the strategy and action plan (included as an appendix to this report). In addition, the executive is asked to approve the processes for reviewing and amending the strategy annually and approving the annual action plan.

Strategic objectives

2. A market towns strategy and action plan will contribute to the council's strategic objective to "**support a vibrant local economy**" and to the corporate priority to

'work in partnership to sustain vibrant market towns' and also supports the Vale sustainable community strategy 2008/16 priority: **'maintaining and enhancing the health and vitality of the Vale's market town centres'**.

Background

3. Nationally, market towns have suffered in the last few decades from the growth of out-of-town retailers, internet shopping and increased car ownership, which allows people to travel further for shopping and leisure facilities. In addition to these longer-term structural trends, market towns have also been particularly affected during the 2008-10 recession, which was the worst downturn in the last fifty years with significant consequences for the retail sector.
4. Officers have developed the council's strategy and action plan ('the strategy') to improve town centre vitality in the market towns of Faringdon and Wantage. The vitality of the Vale's market towns is important because they provide both local shopping and employment opportunities and a range of services including libraries, post offices and health facilities for the majority of Vale residents. A separate strategy and action plan will be prepared for Abingdon.
5. Whilst the council has developed the strategy, its success is dependent on strong partnership working with a wide range of organisations, including the town councils, joint economic forums (JEFs), community organisations, chambers of commerce and various action groups.
6. The strategy proposes the following strategic aims:
 - building for the future
 - enhance the retail offering in the town centres
 - improve the 'offer' and accessibility of the market places
 - provision of high quality services
 - Improving the accessibility of town centres
 - attractive and clean environments
 - enhancing the distinctiveness of our towns
 - improving safety and security.
7. The overall responsibility for the delivery of the strategy will rest with the council. However, the strategy proposes that the JEFs will play a key role in the delivery of the action plan.
8. The shared economic development team will work with the JEFs to co-ordinate partnership activity, liaise with public sector colleagues and businesses, consult with residents, secure external funding, monitor progress and make recommendations to improve project delivery.
9. The action plan details specific projects for Faringdon and Wantage and identifies projects that have a Vale-wide focus but also impact upon the market towns.

10. There has been a period of consultation. A draft strategy and action plan was published on the council's website and a press release was issued. The council received over 60 responses in a six week period ending on 30 July 2010. Two thirds of these responses were from Wantage, just under a third from Faringdon and a small number from elsewhere in the Vale and Oxfordshire. Over 70 per cent of the respondents believed the strategy presented an accurate picture of the economic vitality/prosperity of the market towns. Where appropriate, the strategy and action plan has been amended to take account of consultation responses.
11. The council's Scrutiny committee commented on the strategy and action plan at its meeting on 19 August and where appropriate the strategy and action plan has been amended to take account of the committee's comments.
12. The consultation responses and the comments of the Scrutiny committee suggest that there is no need to make significant changes to the strategy and action plan. On this basis, officers recommend the executive to approve the Faringdon and Wantage strategy and action plan, which is included as an appendix to this report.
13. It is important that the strategy and action plan is monitored and reviewed on an annual basis to take account of any changes in economic circumstances and resources. In order to achieve this, officers recommend the executive to authorise the head of economy, leisure and property, in consultation with the strategic director and portfolio-holder, to review and amend the strategy annually, and approve the annual action plan.

Options

14. The council could decide not to have a strategy and action plan. However, it would then not be clear how it was using its resources to achieve a corporate priority.

Financial implications

15. There are no financial implications arising from this report, as any expenditure can be met from the existing economic development revenue budgets.

Legal implications

16. There are no legal implications arising from this report.

Risks

17. The main risk is that projects are not delivered in the timescales envisaged. However the action plan identifies projects where funding is secure or security is imminent and also identifies partners who are willing to manage the projects within the timescales and from existing budgets.

Other implications

18. The draft strategy recognises the diversity of our communities in terms of age, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, disability, religion and spoken language.
19. Since the publication of the draft strategy the new government has announced the abolition of regional development agencies like the South East England Development Agency (SEEDA). The government has invited council and business leaders to submit proposals for local enterprise partnerships (LEPs). LEPs will be able to take over many of the regional development agencies' responsibilities but they will cover smaller geographical areas and will not have dedicated central government funding. The council is supporting a proposal for an Oxfordshire LEP but the government's response to this proposal is not yet known.
20. SEEDA will cease to operate some time during the financial year 2011/12 but contracts have been entered into for the SEEDA funding for Faringdon and Wantage.

Conclusion

21. The strategy and action plan shows how the council will use its economic development resources to support the vitality of Faringdon and Wantage. During a time of change it is important that the council demonstrates its community leadership role and does all it can to make sure that projects which are important for Faringdon and Wantage are successfully delivered. Officers recommend that the executive approves the strategy and action plan and the process for review.

Background Papers

Analysis of consultation responses

Appendix

Faringdon and Wantage strategy and action plan

Faringdon and Wantage Strategy and Action Plan 2010/11 to 2012/13

Introduction

This strategy and action plan for Faringdon and Wantage ('the strategy') has been developed to improve town centre vitality in the market towns of Faringdon and Wantage. This is an economic development strategy and should be read in conjunction with the council's Local Plan, draft core strategy, and preferred options for Faringdon and Wantage. The vitality of the Vale's market towns is important because they provide both local shopping and employment opportunities and a range of services including libraries, post offices and health facilities for the majority of Vale residents. A separate strategy and action plan will be prepared for Abingdon.

The strategy supports the council's strategic objective 'supporting a vibrant economy' and the corporate priority to 'work in partnership to sustain vibrant market towns'. The strategy and action plan also supports the Vale sustainable community strategy 2008/16 priority: 'maintaining and enhancing the health and vitality of the Vale's market town centres'. More details of supporting strategies and plans are included in the appendix.

The council recognises that action needs to be taken quickly to address some of the issues faced by the town centres of Faringdon and Wantage but short term actions need to be supported by a longer term strategy to make sure that these actions provide permanent rather than temporary improvements.

The strategy has been developed by the council but its success is dependent on strong partnership working with a wide range of organisations. Many problems cannot be tackled effectively by any single organisation and co-ordinated action is required.

The strategy focuses on new economic development actions as the driver of town centre vitality but it is important to note that the council already provides a number of services that influence town centre vitality including: development policy and management, community safety, street cleansing, public conveniences and car parking. The council understands that there is a strong relationship between economic development, physical development and social development and the strategy supports the vision of the Vale sustainable community strategy 2008/16:

A sustainable Vale;

- **with prosperous, inclusive and thriving communities that have good access to a range of housing, jobs and services**

- **where everyone can feel safe and enjoy life**
- **where our needs can be met without compromising the natural and built heritage or the ability of future generations to meet their needs**

Background

The national context

Government recognises the importance of vibrant town centres:

‘Town centres that are attractive, well-designed, and well-managed, with a range of shops, arts and cultural uses, entertainment, good amenities, and good transport connections, are engines for economic growth, providing a focal point for business and social interactions. Vibrant town centres are good for business: they create jobs, attract investment and generate income. At their best, they create a local buzz and define the wider area, attracting people from near and far.’ (‘Looking after our town centres’, Department of Communities and Local Government, 2009)

However a Commission for Rural Communities briefing note on market towns published in June 2009 included the following points:

- almost 11 million people live in approximately 1600 market towns and larger villages across rural England – over 20 per cent of the total population
- to May 2009, market towns have seen steeper rises in unemployment than the national average – 120 per cent compared to 90 per cent for England as a whole
- amongst the hardest hit are middle class and professional groups with greater links to urban economies, and towns with high levels of young families and those working in the administrative sector in middle England
- in the majority of market towns recently surveyed, the number of vacant shop units has increased over the last six months; around 60 per cent of existing vacant retail premises have remained empty during that time - this damages both the look and economic vitality of town centres.

The regional view

The new coalition government has announced that the regional development agencies like the South East England Development Agency (SEEDA) will shortly be abolished. It is likely that SEEDA will cease operating during the 2011/12 financial and it should be noted that contracts have been entered into for the projects in the action plan that require SEEDA funding.

In place of regional development agencies the government has invited council and business leaders to submit proposals for local enterprise partnerships (LEPs). LEPs will be able to take over many of the regional development agencies’ responsibilities but they will cover smaller geographical areas and will not have dedicated central government funding. The council is supporting a proposal for an Oxfordshire LEP but the government’s response to this proposal is not yet known.

The local view

‘Throughout the country the development of large retail centres and the increasing number of people buying goods through the internet is threatening the vitality of market towns and their traditional role as service centres. The challenge is to create attractive local shopping environments in the towns and secure new shops of a sufficient scale and quality that attract key retailers and retain expenditure in the area. In addition there are opportunities for the Vale's historic town centres with their small shops, to attract independent, specialist businesses that provide a distinctive and contrasting experience to shopping in the multiple chains in large modern centres.’(Draft Core Strategy, Vale of White Horse District Council, 2009)

Market towns have therefore suffered in the last few decades from the growth of out-of-town retailers, internet shopping and increased car ownership which allows people to travel further for shopping and leisure facilities. In addition to these longer-term structural trends, market towns have also been particularly affected by the 2008-10 recession which was the worst downturn in forty years with significant consequences for the retail sector.

Faringdon

Faringdon is the Vale's smallest market town. The population was 6,187 at the time of the 2001 Census and recent population estimates released by the Office of National Statistics (ONS) for Faringdon and the Coxwells are 7,252 in 2007. Its attractive landscape setting on the limestone ridge overlooking the Thames Valley, its period market hall and town houses give it the ambience of a quintessential English market town. From afar the town is dominated by Folly Hill and its iconic tower. The A420 bypasses the town.

Although it acts as the local service centre and has a reasonable range of local shops and services, many people look to Oxford and Swindon for work and their higher order goods and services. It has one infant and one junior school, a private prep school (Ferndale), a secondary school, a health centre, a swimming pool, a leisure centre, a library and three hotels. Faringdon town centre accommodates a range of mostly independent shops and enjoys low levels of retail vacancy. According to the council's retail vacancy survey, only three per cent of commercial units in Faringdon town centre were vacant in September 2009. However since the survey was completed two further shops have closed for various reasons and the vacancy rate has doubled to 6 per cent. This is still significantly below the national average (12 – 15 per cent).

The existing Local Plan has allocated land for some 400 houses and a new business centre between the town and the bypass. The housing development is now underway and outdoor leisure facilities at Jaspers Hill are soon to follow. As part of the draft core strategy there are proposals for an additional 400 homes, 4 ha of employment land and a primary school south of Park Road. A key challenge will be to continue to maintain the vitality and historic character of the town and its centre, and ensure that future development supports the social and economic well-being of the town and its residents. In drawing up its draft core strategy the council is

considering alternative proposals for improving the shopping offer in the town. The options include extending Budgens supermarket with additional spaces in Southampton Street car park and / or identifying land for an additional supermarket north west of Gloucester Street car park or east of Park Road. There are also opportunities to redevelop the shopping area in Faringdon that would provide shop units that more closely match what retailers want and an environment that shoppers expect. The intention is that Faringdon will continue as a small but important centre serving the western part of the Vale.

Wantage

Wantage is an historic market town, thought to be the birth place of King Alfred. It is the second largest settlement in the district and a shopping and service centre for the central part of the Vale. The population was 9,767 at the time of the 2001 Census and recent population estimates released by the Office of National Statistics (ONS) estimated the population of Wantage as 10,498¹ in 2007. Its attractive market place and downland setting are essential components of its character. Just to the north of the town is Grove, the Vale's third largest settlement with a population of 7,224 in 2007².

Wantage has three primary schools, the Fitzwaryn special school, King Alfred's Community and Sports College (a secondary school), a community hospital, a residential home, a library, the Wantage Civic Hall, the Wantage Leisure Centre and the Vale and Downland Museum. There are plans to rationalise King Alfred's school onto two sites (currently on three sites), which will provide an opportunity to consider the future of the land no longer needed by the school. A challenge will be to upgrade the town's leisure offer to meet the growing recreational requirements of Wantage and nearby Grove.

The former industrial area around Limborough Road has recently been redeveloped to provide a new Sainsbury supermarket and other retail and residential units, and the site of St Mary's School is being redeveloped for housing. One issue is the vacant and under used premises around the Waitrose supermarket in Wallingford Street, which offer an opportunity to improve the retail offer and appearance of the town. A key challenge will be to maintain the vibrancy of the whole town centre, and serious thought will need to be given to how to retain and improve the character of the historic Market Place. The council is also conscious that parts of Wantage town centre have been affected by the recession and by the expansion in retail floorspace that has occurred in Wantage over the last two or three years. According to the council's retail vacancy survey, there were 25 vacant business premises in September 2009 which is equivalent to a vacancy rate of 15 per cent (measured in terms of business units). However since then three of the larger empty premises on the Market Place have secured tenants, bringing the vacancy rate down to 12 per cent which is below the national average.

¹ Source ONS Mid Year Population Estimates for 2007

² Source ONS Mid Year Population Estimates for 2007

The existing Local Plan has allocated land for 2,500 new houses on Grove airfield near Wantage. Developers have consulted on plans that include 40% affordable housing, a mixed use local centre, primary school, a secondary school, open spaces play areas and playing fields.

Health-checks

Faringdon and Wantage (together with Grove) have recently undertaken market town 'health-checks' - an action planning approach for communities originally designed by the Countryside Agency to assess the strengths and weaknesses of market towns. As a result of this, there are community action plans in place in these towns. These plans tend to be focused on specific activities which result in events and/or promotion of the town centres in order to attract more visitors.

Joined-up council services

The council's shared economic development team works closely with colleagues in the car parks, commercial services, community safety, environmental health, planning and development policy teams to maximise the social and economic prosperity of the Vale's market towns. Many council teams also work in partnership with other organisations to make best use of limited resources. For example, the community safety team works in partnership with Thames Valley Police, Oxfordshire County Council, Oxfordshire Primary Care Trust and other agencies to reduce crime, disorder and the fear of crime.

Car parking

The council provides two car parks in Faringdon, on Southampton Street and Gloucester Street. In Wantage it provides three car parks, on Portway, Limborough Road and Mill Street. All these car parks give easy access to town centre shops and services. The council's car parking charges are designed to meet the council's objectives of covering the cost of the service, influencing usage patterns, and supporting town centre vitality.

A report on car parking in market towns, commissioned by Yorkshire Forward notes: 'It is the town's broader retail, commercial, leisure and/or tourism offer which is the primary factor affecting a town's competitiveness, not the provision of parking. So, if a town has a good retail offer, it will continue to attract customers, despite having poor parking facilities; in contrast, a town with very good parking facilities, but a limited retail offer, will struggle to attract customers. However, all other things being equal, parking will clearly have an effect.' (A detailed report on how parking can be managed in the region's market towns, Yorkshire Forward, 2007)

The council recognises that car parking charges do have an effect, along with a number of other factors, on town centre vitality. It welcomes evidence based proposals that meet the council's objectives for its car parking service and help to improve town centre vitality. For example, the council supports the Faringdon Retailers' Group's 'Buyback' scheme which allows shoppers to claim back the cost of car parking.

Public Transport

Public transport is very important in terms of improving access to jobs and services (particularly for those without a car); in breaking the cycle of deprivation and in combating climate change. Whilst transport is the responsibility of the county council partnership working is important and there have been significant improvements to public transport within the Vale in recent times including:-

- a new enhanced bus service serving Oxford-Faringdon-Swindon
- Faringdon – Wantage along the A417, serving rural communities between the two towns e.g. Stanford-in-the-Vale.
- Wantage local bus services

Public toilets

The council provides public toilets at the Southampton Street car park in Faringdon and the Portway car park in Wantage. These permanent toilet blocks are all cleaned regularly and have disabled access. They are closed overnight to reduce the risk of vandalism.

Joint economic forums (JEFs)

The Faringdon Joint Economic Forum is working to improve the vitality of the town centre. The forum is made up of representatives of the Vale of White Horse District Council, Faringdon Town Council, Faringdon Chamber of Commerce and a number of other community groups. Recent projects supported by the Joint Economic Forum include the establishment of the Faringdon Craft Fair, Faringdon in Bloom, a re-enactment of a Civil War battle in 2008 and an eco-week in 2010. Plans for a Heritage Day in 2011 are currently being developed.

The Wantage Joint Economic Forum is working to improve the vitality of the town centre. The forum is made up of representatives of the Vale of White Horse District Council, Wantage Town Council and Wantage Chamber of Commerce, Grove Parish Council has 'observer' status. The Joint Economic Forum sponsored the market town healthcheck for Wantage, Grove and the surrounding area.

The JEFs have also identified the projects underpinning the action plan and by working in partnership they create an opportunity to engage local stakeholders in discussion and collaboration; influencing organisational agendas to develop a shared strategic approach to town centre economic development and thus facilitating access to funding and resource opportunities.

Oxfordshire-wide economic partnerships

The council's shared economic development team is involved in a number of economic partnerships that operate across Oxfordshire. This partnership approach to economic development helps to maximise benefits for businesses and residents in

the Vale. Two partnerships are very relevant to the success of this strategy and action plan:

- the Oxfordshire Market Towns Network (OMTN) which works with small market towns to help them remain vibrant and sustainable communities that serve both their town and the communities in the neighbouring area. OMTN has been successful in setting up business networks, linking schools with local businesses and has information about other funding that is currently available. OMTN also has information and contact details for various other agencies that can offer help or specialist advice to market towns.
- the Oxfordshire Rural Community Council has been supporting local village life across the county since 1920. It provides advice and guidance for community transport schemes, village shops, village hall management committees, rural housing and support for community-led planning. The council works in partnership with ORCC to ensure that our smaller market towns and villages benefit from this wide range of support, funding and initiatives.

Other important initiatives include the Oxfordshire Tourism Group and the Digital Inclusion Group.

Strategy

The Joint Economic Forums already have aims related to the economic vitality of town centres and bring together a number of partners including the district council, town councils and chambers of commerce. Therefore, this strategy proposes that the role of the Joint Economic Forums should be strengthened. The forums should play a key role in preparing, co-ordinating, monitoring and reviewing economic development plans for Faringdon and Wantage.

In order to make a significant difference these plans need to take account of all the factors that influence the long term vitality of town centres. The plans should cover the following strategic aims:

- **SA1: Building for the future**: Support and help drive progress on key physical developments in the town centres. This will include historic assets, community facilities, visitor attractions and environmental improvements which are designed to be accessible to all.
- **SA2: Great shops**: Encourage town centre and edge of town retailers, and other businesses to work together to promote their towns and to help meet the needs of all customers. Make shoppers, visitors and potential investors more aware of what the towns offer. Explore opportunities available including loyalty cards, late night opening, Sunday trading and develop the towns' evening economies and tourism/leisure offers.
- **SA3: Market place hub**: To improve the 'offer' and accessibility of the towns' market places to make them a real focal point for residents, visitors and businesses and meet the needs of all customers.
- **SA4: High quality services**: Give residents and visitors the opportunity to enjoy high quality, accessible services and facilities within the towns; achieve continual improvement and enhancement of those facilities and services in accordance with the wishes of the electors, taxpayers and visitors.
- **SA5: Easy to get to**: Ensure everyone has good information about how to get to, and get around the towns (including a focus on signage; information about traffic, buses, car parks, cycle ways and accessible pedestrian routes).
- **SA6: Attractive and clean**: Ensure that there is good quality street furniture (bins, benches etc) and public toilets, minimal litter and graffiti, clean toilets, welcoming staff in shops, pubs cafes and restaurants.
- **SA7: To enhance the distinctiveness of our towns**: To add to and improve the quality of attractions in our towns, to promote what's on in the towns, and to make sure that there is good and widely accessible information about attractions, events, activities and eating out.
- **SA8: Safe and secure**: To ensure that everyone who lives, works and visits feels safe both by day and in the evenings.

Key principles

Consultation

Working in partnership with other agencies, statutory bodies, voluntary groups and individuals to ensure that changes and improvements to services and facilities meet the needs and wishes of residents and others; working with elected members to consult the people of Faringdon and Wantage about partnership services and levels of performance.

Breaking the cycle of deprivation

Recognising that many residents of Faringdon and Wantage are economically and socially disadvantaged and fully supporting priorities in the Oxfordshire and Vale sustainable community strategies that tackle economic and social disadvantage; using best endeavours to make sure that projects are inclusive and encourage community cohesion.

Action plan

The action plan that follows draws together actions arising from market town health checks, through ongoing consultation with the towns and from the work of the JEFs. Overall responsibility for the delivery of the action plan will rest with the council's economic development officer. It is anticipated that projects will be delivered by community organisations (such as the Folly Tower Trust and the skateboard group SK8 in Faringdon). In Wantage, the shared economic development team will administer the shop-front improvement scheme. The economic development team will also co-ordinate partnership activity, liaise with public sector colleagues and businesses, consult with residents, monitor progress and make recommendations to improve project delivery in both towns.

Funding

The JEFs in Wantage and Faringdon have a small amount of grant funding available to them and, at the discretion of the members, can offer grants to assist with new projects that will help to maintain or improve the vitality of the town centre. However, public and private sector funding to maintain or improve the vitality of town centres is very limited. Partnership working and the support of the community can strengthen the case for access to limited funding.

The council also believe that by working in partnership and sharing information there is an opportunity to make better use of existing resources. For example, new highways signage could be designed within an existing budget to make a town more attractive; businesses that become aware of forthcoming events may be willing to sponsor an event using an existing advertising budget.

There are opportunities to unlock funding arising from new developments that may have a direct impact on the provision of existing community facilities. There maybe a requirement for the enhancement of existing facilities or the provision of entirely new facilities, funded by the developer (sometimes known as 'developers' contributions' or 's106 contributions').

It is not always possible to provide specific detail about the projects that are to be taken forward because this is dependent, to a large extent, on the external funding that becomes available. However, the council will continue to work with partners in Wantage and Faringdon to ensure that projects with the greatest public support are taken forward as and when funding becomes available.

SEEDA Small Rural Towns Programme

In October 2009, Faringdon's JEF discussed and approved a short-list of seven projects derived from the health-check, and submitted a bid for SEEDA Small Rural Towns Programme funding. Three projects were allocated £61,000 SEEDA funding: the Folly Tower, the Skate Park and Communications Infrastructure. These projects will provide important community facilities, create new jobs, and significantly improve the quality of the towns' visitor attractions while contributing to the historical integrity of the town. The council will continue to work with Faringdon JEF to deliver these

important projects, and to identify future projects as and when funding opportunities become available.

In November 2009, Wantage JEF discussed and approved a short-list of eight projects derived from the health-check, and submitted a bid for SEEDA Small Rural Towns Programme funding. Four projects were allocated £98,000 SEEDA funding including: a shop front improvement scheme, the Market Place and Gateway Improvement Scheme, Letcombe Brooke improvements and walking and cycling cards. These projects will significantly improve town centre vitality in Wantage, result in environmental improvements along Letcombe Brook, and contribute to the attractiveness of the area as a visitor / tourism destination. The council will continue to work with Wantage JEF to deliver these important projects, and to identify alternative funding opportunities for other projects that are deemed to be important for the social and economic well-being of Wantage and Grove.

The new coalition government has announced that the regional development agencies like the South East England Development Agency (SEEDA) will shortly be abolished. It is likely that SEEDA will cease operating during the 2011/12 financial and it should be noted that contracts have been entered into for the projects in the action plan that require SEEDA funding.

LEADER

In addition to the Small Rural Towns funding, South Oxfordshire District Council and the Vale of White Horse District Council have successfully secured £1.89 million of European Union 'LEADER' funding to help support rural communities in southern Oxfordshire. The funding will help to revitalise and support rural businesses and communities in southern Oxfordshire between now and 2013. The council will continue to work with rural businesses and communities to make sure that the Vale benefits from this funding. Faringdon is eligible for this funding and to date a number of businesses have benefited from LEADER funding. In Faringdon the Folly Tower Trust and Faringdon Community Bus have made successful applications for LEADER funding. Wantage and Grove, because of their size are not eligible for LEADER funding. However, as surrounding villages are eligible, both can benefit indirectly.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Appropriate measures will be developed for each action in order to measure the success of the strategy. Baseline information will be collected for each action and targets for improvement will be agreed in consultation with the JEFs. The progress in achieving the targets will be reported to the JEFs. If any of the actions are not progressing the JEFs will be told what is being done to improve performance.

The strategy and action plan will be reviewed annually to take account of any changes in resources, policy and economic circumstances. Any recommendations for amendments will be agreed in consultation with the JEFs.

ACTION PLAN³

1. FARINGDON ACTIONS

STRATEGIC AIMS	ACTIONS TO SUPPORT STRATEGIC AIMS	PARTNER ORGANISATIONS	ESTIMATE OF TOTAL INVESTMENT & KEY FUNDING SOURCES	TIMESCALE	INTENDED OUTCOMES
SA1 and SA7	Folly Tower renovation.	Folly Tower Trust / Focus on Faringdon / economic development team	£25,000 SEEDA £25,000 Leader £30,000 Country House Foundation £20,000 local fund-raising efforts	April 2010 – March 2012	To enable essential repairs to the roof and electrics and improvements to the outside space, taking into account access-for-all needs. This will improve its capability as a venue and allow it to continue to operate as a visitor attraction
SA1, SA4, SA7 and SA8)	Skate park build	economic development team/ SK8/ Focus on Faringdon/ County Youth Service	£21,000 (SEEDA) £35,000 Bloor Homes £8,000 Faringdon Town Council £7,500 SK8 £15,000 Lord Faringdon Trust	April 2010 – March 2012	To enable the provision of a youth and community resource by installing a Skate and BMX facility.
SA3 and SA7	Faringdon Arts Festival with a tint of Berners	Focus on Faringdon/ Faringdon Town Council	£5,000 (Oxon Thriving Economies Fund/ £2,000 Faringdon Town Council £3,000 Focus on Faringdon	July 2010 (and then annually)	To obtain funding to enable the development of a Festival programme. To work with partners to improve the promotion of this event to residents in Oxford and other areas.

³ Contracts have been entered into for the projects in the action plan that require SEEDA funding

2. WANTAGE ACTIONS

STRATEGIC AIMS	ACTIONS TO SUPPORT STRATEGIC AIMS	PARTNER ORGANISATIONS	ESTIMATE OF TOTAL INVESTMENT & KEY FUNDING SOURCES	TIMESCALE	INTENDED OUTCOMES
SA1, 2, 3, 6 7, and 8	Shop front improvement initiative	Wantage Rejuvenated/ economic development team	£37,500 SEEDA £37,500 retailers	April 2010 – March 2012	To support at least ten prospective new tenants and existing occupiers and encourage take-up of this scheme. This should reduce the number of vacant retail units in Wantage and deliver environmental improvements.
SA1, SA3, SA4, SA5 and SA6	Market Place improvement scheme and gateway treatments	Wantage Town Council/ economic development team	£38,000 SEEDA £38,000 Wantage Town Council	April 2010 – March 2012	To improve the functionality, accessibility and attractiveness of Market Place by investment in street furniture, notice boards and improvements to the central iconic space surrounding the statue of King Alfred.
SA2, SA4, SA5 and SA7	Letcombe Brooke trail and improvements	Letcombe Brook project officer	£15,000 SEEDA £15,000 Wantage Town Council	April 2010 – March 2012	To enable the introduction of a designated Letcombe Brooke trail with associated biodiversity and landscaping works.
SA4, SA5 and SA7	Walking and cycling route cards	HarBUG/ Grove Parish Council/ economic development team	£5,000 SEEDA £5,000 Thriving Economies Fund	April 2010 – March 2012	To enable the creation of walking, wheelchair-accessible and cycling cards that support local residents and business communities in Wantage and Grove. The information will support the visitor economy and raise awareness of the proximity of Wantage and Grove to the Ridgeway National Trail
SA1, SA3, SA4, SA5 and SA6	To provide support to the Wantage Betjeman Festival 2010 and 2011	economic development team	Time cost and external funding (where available)	End 2011	To support the Wantage Betjeman Festival through securing external funding and assistance with promotion.

3. VALE-WIDE ACTIONS THAT WILL BENEFIT FARINGDON AND WANTAGE

(All contributes towards the Vale council's corporate priorities 'work in partnership to sustain vibrant market towns and 'support rural business and communities')

STRATEGIC AIMS	ACTIONS TO SUPPORT STRATEGIC AIMS	PARTNER ORGANISATIONS	ESTIMATE OF TOTAL INVESTMENT & KEY FUNDING SOURCES	TIMESCALE	INTENDED OUTCOMES
SA2, SA3, SA4 and SA7	Write a Tourism Statement to promote tourism within the Vale	Choose Abingdon Partnership / Focus on Faringdon / Wantage Rejuvenated	Choose Abingdon Partnership (£2,500), Faringdon Chamber (£1,000), Wantage Chamber (£1,000)	March 2011	Production of a Tourism Statement for the Vale by December 2010. Production of a Tourism Publication that promotes the Vale as a destination for a week-long stay by June 2011.
SA2, SA4, SA5 and SA7	Manage and improve the Vale's tourism website: www.VisitVale.com	economic development team/ Tourism SE	£4,500 p.a. (Vale of White Horse District Council)	April 2010 – March 2013	To increase the number of website 'hits' by 5% p.a.
SA2, SA4, SA5 and SA7	Promote the Vale's tourism offering through events and exhibitions	economic development team/ Tourism SE/Oxfordshire County and District Councils	£5,500 p.a. (Oxfordshire County Council, Tourism SE)	April 2010 – March 2013	To promote the Vale as a visitor destination and help to increase the spend by visitors
SA2, SA4, SA5 and SA7	Support museums and attractions	economic development team	£32,000 p.a. (Vale of White Horse District Council)	April 2010 – March 2013	Enabling the provision of good quality visitor information and attractions.
SA1, 2, 3, 6 7, and 8	Work with Oxfordshire agencies to tackle skills and worklessness issues	economic development team/Oxfordshire County Council/Abingdon and Witney College/ Oxford Brookes University	To be identified	April 2010 – March 2013	Encourage businesses to offer placements to young people who are willing but lack the formal qualifications that help in securing employment .
SA2, SA3, SA4 and SA7	Support and develop the rural economy	EU LEADER manager/ economic development team	£100,000 p.a. (EU LEADER)	April 2010 – March 2013	To help at least 3 businesses develop Leader applications

STRATEGIC AIMS	ACTIONS TO SUPPORT STRATEGIC AIMS	PARTNER ORGANISATIONS	ESTIMATE OF TOTAL INVESTMENT & KEY FUNDING SOURCES	TIMESCALE	INTENDED OUTCOMES
SA4 and SA7	Undertake economic research to inform policy making and meet Funding Agency needs.	economic development team/chambers of commerce	Officer time only	April 2010 – March 2013	To undertake a retail vacancy survey, footfall survey & car park users' survey. To input to the Oxfordshire Skills Survey.
SA2, 3, 4 and 7	Support the Embrace partnership's engagement with ethnic minority business people in Faringdon and Wantage provide relevant articles for the newsletter.	equalities officer/economic development team/Embrace partnership	Officer time only	April 2010 – March 2013	To make sure that ethnic minority business people in Faringdon and Wantage have equal access to local government services so that they can compete successfully and provide good quality products and services
SA2, 3, 4, 5 and 7	Support a disabled access survey and 'shopability' awards scheme in Faringdon and Wantage	equalities officer/economic development team/Vale disability access group	Officer time only	April 2011 – March 2013	To encourage town centre businesses to provide good quality access and service to customers with disabilities
SA1, 2, 3, 6, 7, and 8	To provide ongoing technical economic support to the Science Vale UK (SVUK) Project Director	SVUK Project Director/ Oxfordshire County Council/economic development team	Officer time only	April 2010 – March 2011	To undertake economic analysis to define and quantify the economic significance of the SVUK area and encourage new investment and jobs

Other relevant strategies and plans

The Vale of White Horse District Council corporate plan 2009/12

In the introduction to the corporate plan Councillor Tony de Vere, the Leader of the Council, refers to the importance of the Vale's market towns:

'One of the key challenges we face is the current economic climate and addressing the many ways it will impact on residents. The plan strives to ensure that the Vale remains a sustainable and vibrant place to live and work during this period, by supporting people and the local economy where possible, and ensuring that we are ready to take advantage of the upturn when it occurs.

For the coming year we want to continue to tackle head-on some of the issues that people in the Vale feel are important, such as market town vitality and the problems of flooding and other issues associated with climate change. We want to make sure that there are more affordable homes, and that our towns and villages are cleaner, greener and safer communities.

One of the key challenges we face is delivering high quality and good value services with increasingly limited resources. We will continue to search for new ways of getting the best value for our Council Tax payers.

We are lucky that we live in a beautiful area with vibrant towns and villages and an economy that is relatively resilient in the face of economic stress. We want to continue to do what we can to improve the quality of life for everyone living and working in the Vale.'

Relevant corporate strategic objective and priorities are:

Supporting a vibrant local economy:

- work in partnership to sustain vibrant market towns
- support rural business and communities
- promote "Science Vale UK " as a world leading area for science and technology

The Vale sustainable community strategy 2008/16

This strategy was prepared by the Vale Partnership. The Vale Partnership is a Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) which was set up by the Council to help it prepare the community strategy for the Vale. A Local Strategic Partnership is a way of bringing together the public, private and voluntary sectors of a local authority district to work jointly to tackle issues and plan for the future. The community strategy recognises the importance of the Vale's market towns and has the following priority:

Maintaining and enhancing the health and vitality of the Vale's market town centres:

The Vale Partnership is working to make sure that Abingdon, Faringdon and Wantage town centres share in the economic prosperity of the rest of the Vale and provide residents with a good choice of shops and a wide range of cultural and leisure facilities.

What the Partnership will do:

- create better local awareness of the variety and quality of the shops and services that are available in the Vale's town centres
- prepare action plans designed to promote the retail offer in the town centres and consider the establishment of Business Improvement Districts for the Vale's main market town centres to help with the achievement of action plans, and
- continue to improve the character of the town centres through investment in environmental improvement works and by maintaining control over fly-posting, advertisement display and street cleanliness.

What the local development framework will do:

- resist retail and other commercial development where this would damage town centre health and vitality, and
- encourage retail and other commercial development in town centres that will support town centre health and vitality.

Oxfordshire 2030

Oxfordshire 2030 is the community strategy for Oxfordshire and it identifies how public, private and voluntary sector partners will respond to the challenges facing Oxfordshire over the next 20 plus years. The strategy includes the following pledge:

We pledge to:

- collaborate across public, business and voluntary sectors to build on Oxfordshire's economic success.
- create the conditions for everyone to have access to jobs.
- ensure that educational attainment and skill levels are amongst the very best in the country so we provide a well qualified, motivated workforce to meet the needs of business.
- grow the economy whilst achieving a sustainable balance between jobs, housing and the environment.
- tackle traffic congestion across Oxfordshire, particularly on trunk roads and around market towns, Oxford city and other hot spots.
- reduce the gap between the best and the worst off by targeting our work appropriately.

The draft Vale core strategy

The first policy document that the council is preparing as part of the local development framework is the core strategy. This will replace the local plan, and will set out the spatial vision, spatial objectives, policies and a monitoring and implementation framework for the Vale. The core strategy will be used to help determine future planning applications. A draft core strategy has been prepared and has been consulted on.

The draft core strategy refers to the sequential approach to locating shops and town centre uses, and makes provision for additional floorspace in the town and district centres. Without this it is unlikely that the council would be able to resist new shopping floorspace elsewhere, including on the edges of the towns. This would undermine the vitality of the existing centres and potentially lead to their decline.

The draft core strategy also notes that there are opportunities to redevelop the shopping areas built in the late 1960s/early 1970s in Wantage, and also achieve more limited improvements in Faringdon. This would provide shop units that more closely match what retailers want and an environment that shoppers expect. The council proposes that the core strategy should reinforce the roles of the town and district centres and identify areas for redevelopment.

The draft core strategy proposes that Wantage will continue as the second largest shopping area serving the town, Grove and the villages in the southern central part of the district.

The options for Faringdon include extending Budgens supermarket with additional spaces in Southampton Street car park and / or identifying land for an additional supermarket north west of Gloucester Street car park or east of Park Road. There are also opportunities to redevelop the shopping area in Faringdon that would provide shop units that more closely match what retailers want and an environment that shoppers expect. The intention is that Faringdon will continue as a small but important centre serving the western part of the Vale.

More information about these other strategies and plans can be found on the council's website www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk

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