

# Cabinet Report

Report of Head of Planning

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To: CABINET

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## 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***

1. 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***

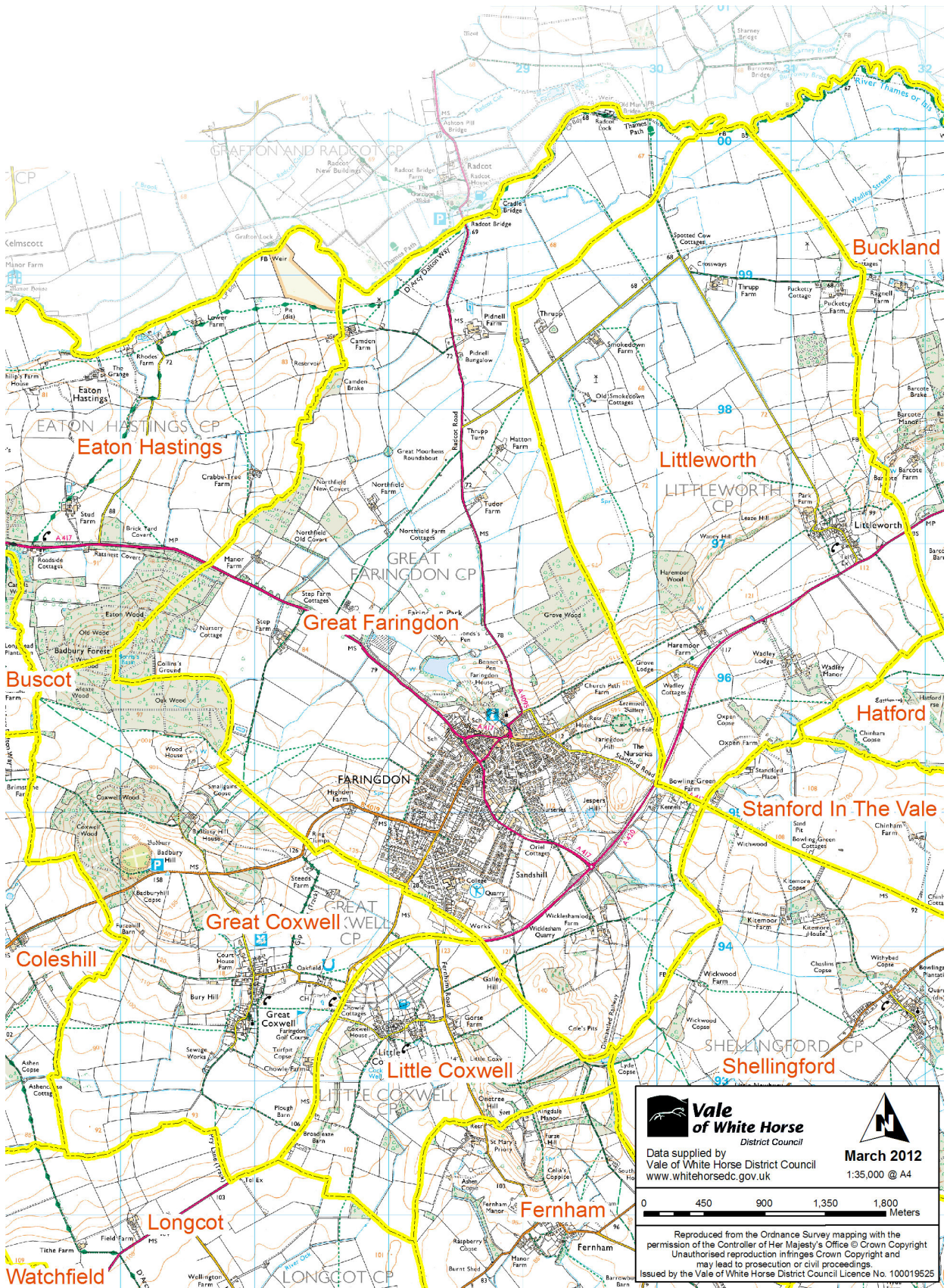
#### Scope of the Plan:

- 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***

<b>Stage</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Indicative Timetable</b>
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 council<sup>1</sup>. 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

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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.