

PLANNING & HIGHWAYS COMMITTEE REPORT FOR 2015/16

The Planning and Highways Committee of Faringdon Town Council is the committee set up to discharge the Council's role as a statutory consultee both on applications for planning permission within the parish of Great Faringdon and on county-wide general planning matters which affect the parish. The Committee examines all applications it received from both Vale of White Horse District and Oxfordshire County Councils and while unable to either accept or reject them, makes recommendations as to their suitability or otherwise, based on experience and local knowledge. Its further responsibilities include the maintenance of bus shelters and ensuring that the salt/grit bins placed around the town are full, and it has pursued a successful policy of recommending that the names given to new streets be taken from those remembered on the War Memorial. The other major matter with which it continues to be concerned is managing the progress of the Faringdon Neighbourhood Plan towards adoption and this aspect of its work will be reported under a separate agenda item.

During the 2015/16 year, the Committee has met 18 times and considered 66 planning applications, most of which were for changes to existing dwellings and to which in the majority of cases it was not found necessary to raise any objection. However, in considering the new developments put before it, the Committee, while accepting the application to build an Aldi supermarket, a Costa Coffee outlet and a small Waitrose store on the land at the top of Park Road, commented negatively on two proposed non-strategic housing developments both of which were to have been built on land currently in Great Coxwell parish but would have been, for all practical purposes, in Faringdon.

Specific matters in addition to planning applications which have been considered by the Committee over the past year include the proposal by the National Trust to improve and expand the cycle tracks at Badbury Clump and the plan to create a sensory garden on the Town Council owned land to the rear of Willes Close. It has also been successful in arranging for the footpath between Park Road and Southampton Street to be named "The Hobble" and is in the process of persuading the County Council of the need for an additional bus stop at the top of Gloucester Street.

Finally, it should be noted that possibly the most important matter to have come before the Committee in the past few months is the District Council's Local Plan. This is the document that will direct the planning activities of that Council for the next fifteen years and to which the Faringdon Neighbourhood Plan will become a part, so it has major importance for the future of the town. The Town Council has concerns about one very important, and it believes inadequate, provision that the Plan makes for the town – the provision of land identified specifically for employment which is considerably less than that identified in the Neighbourhood Plan. Despite giving (or proposing to give) permission for several hundred new homes, the District Council has not seen a need to increase the designated employment land by an appropriate amount despite being fully aware of the increased provision identified in the Neighbourhood Plan. Because this oversight will have a negative effect on the town's vitality, increasing traffic movements and forcing it further down the road to becoming a dormitory town, the Committee has challenged the lack at the recent Public Examination of the Local Plan, both by written submission and by personal appearance. Although there is no way of knowing how effective the representations have been until the Inspector publishes his findings, those representations appear to have had a sympathetic reception.

Andrew Marsden
Chairman, Planning and Highways Committee