

District Council Report for Faringdon Town Council

Bethia Thomas and David Grant

11 August 2020

With lockdown eased we are urging all residents to continue following social distancing guidelines and look out for one another. It is as important as ever to minimise the risk of a resurgence of the disease here and the reintroduction of more restrictive measures that has been seen in many towns and cities across the country.

The work of the district council is returning to a new normal. Meetings continue online and the Community Support Hub remains fully staffed and ready for whatever comes, but we also have plenty of non-COVID work and plans for the future that we are eager to tell you about.

District Update

- **Corporate Plan:** Residents are being encouraged to give their feedback on councillors' priorities for the district over the next few years as set out in the corporate plan. A survey will run until Thursday 13 August and help councillors finalise their plan, for the district and all those who live and work in it. Councillors have identified six areas to focus on:
 - Theme 1: Providing the homes people need
 - Theme 2: Tackling the climate emergency
 - Theme 3: Building healthy communities
 - Theme 4: Building stable council finances
 - Theme 5: Working in partnership with other organisations
 - Theme 6: Working in an open and inclusive way

<https://survey.southandvale.gov.uk/s/Valecorporateplanfeedback/>
- **Local Government Reorganisation:** There is lots of talk about reorganisation and possible unitary councils ahead of the government's Recovery and Devolution White Paper due in September. A recent Newsletter from the Oxfordshire Association of Local Councillors included a rather misleading article saying that the District and City Councils had accepted a one Oxfordshire Unitary and we were all working towards this at pace. This is not the case. The six Council leaders concerned are meeting ministers on 7th September to find out more about the options available for Oxfordshire when the White Paper is published. There are discussions happening at all six councils about the best way forward – if government allows us a choice about an Oxfordshire structure. The Vale passed a motion in July stating our opposition to a Mayor or combined authority for Oxfordshire. We left the options of a one Oxfordshire unitary, two or more unitary councils or no changes on the table. Oxfordshire district, city and county council leaders are meeting to discuss how similar their preferences are and whether we would like to suggest to government a structure change. We will keep you up to date with developments and welcome the thoughts of the town council.
- **Government Planning Changes:** The government recently announced its plans to overhaul the planning system. These are obviously significant changes and the council will be considering the impacts fully. The government white paper is available here:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/907647/MHCLG-Planning-Consultation.pdf
- **Community Hub Support:** Since shielding was paused on 1st August, the team has called everyone who was happy to remain in contact during lockdown and found that the majority are now happy to leave the home or have made alternative arrangements with family or friends. However, it's early days and the hub remains open. We are using this quiet period to streamline services in preparation for any potential spike in demand later in the year, or in the event of any local outbreaks.

- **Full Council Meeting 15th July 2020:**
 - **Active Travel:** Following a motion, the Leader of the district council has written to Oxfordshire County Council asking for bold and ambitious measures to be fast tracked in support of more space for active travel.
 - **Care Homes:** Oxfordshire is ranked as the 6th worst local authority in England for the percentage of care homes that have experienced an outbreak of COVID-19. Following a motion passed at full council, the Leader of the district council has written to Oxfordshire County Council asking for this to be investigated by the Joint Health & Scrutiny Committee as a matter of urgency, so that lessons can be learned before any resurgence of the disease.
- **Reopening Leisure Centres:** We're pleased to say Faringdon Leisure Centre is now reopen for the gym and exercise classes. The pool will take a little longer. There will be strict social distancing rules in force to keep everyone safe and customers will need to book in advance via the app. <http://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/news/2020/2020-07/leisure-centres-prepare-re-open-southern-oxfordshire-weekend>
- **Parking Charges:** Following a request for comments from the public, the Vale Cabinet considered fees for our car parks, which currently run at an average loss to the taxpayer of £300k. It was agreed to maintain the 2-hours free parking for another year to minimise the strain on local businesses at this time. There will be a small increase in charges beyond 2-hours and a phased removal of the residential permits.
- **Yellow Letters** are coming again and residents are being urged to check the details on it. The yellow 'Canvass Communication Form' requires residents to confirm the details of everyone over the age of 16 that lives in their property. This is something many local authorities need to do by law each year in order to ensure the electoral register is up to date.
- **New housing grants policy:** We have made it easier for people with disabilities or who are vulnerable to receive housing assistance grants and loans to help make their homes safer and more comfortable. We want to support more residents to live independently by improving access and movement around their homes and to reduce hospital admissions. The maximum grant available has increased from £30,000 to £50,000 and a grant is also now available for people living with dementia. In addition, the system is to be streamlined with new technology aiming to improve the service and reduce the waiting times.

Local Issues to Faringdon

- **Folly Park View Estate:** We have been working with the legal and property teams to investigate the adoption of the land surrounding the Folly Park View Estate after several communications by residents reported that public spaces in that area are overgrown with vegetation and weeds and debris have built up in places. We are working to resolve this situation and are happy that it is now an ongoing project that has been brought to our attention.
- **Southampton St Car Park:** The previous repair to the potholes in Southampton St car park did not last very long, but we are pleased to say they have now been given a more permanent potholes have been given a more permanent repair within days of the issue being reported to us.
- **Ferndale St Underpass:** We've had really positive meetings between all three councils regarding refreshing the mural on the side of the underpass on Ferndale Street and an offer from our county councillor to provide funding for the project. All three councils are keen to get the community involved in deciding what should be done and our arts department is looking forward to kicking off the process in partnership with the town council.
- **Councillor Surgeries:** We are still suspending face to face councillor surgeries for the time being but are, of course, happy to take phone calls and emails from residents and town councillors at any time.

Major Planning Developments

The planning department currently has a high workload due to the inspection of South Oxfordshire District Council's local plan. There is therefore less progress to update on the major planning applications than usual, but we would like to reassure you that we are actively following up each of these applications – which would have a significant impact on Faringdon – with officers in line with the registered objections and concerns of Faringdon Town Council.

- Development South of Highworth Road (P20/V0775/RM):
We are continuing to work with officers to positively address some of the concerns raised by Faringdon Town Council and residents with the applicants for this site. These include environmental measures and the possibility of creating a link to Gypsy Lane byway, thereby creating a safe route from Great Coxwell to Faringdon.
- Development at Roger's Concrete (P20/V0855/O):
A written request has been made to call this into the planning committee if it was due to be accepted because of concerns including the potential loss of employment land. We are aware that there has been further interest in this as commercial land which may be taken into account in the decision-making process.
- Land South of Steeds Farm (P18/V0259/O):
This application for 125 new dwellings was made in 2018, but a new viability assessment has been filed. Although the area is allocated as a strategic site in the Vale of White Horse Local Plan Part 1, separate approval for the envisaged 200 dwellings has, of course, already been reached on the site and construction on these has commenced. We note that Faringdon Town Council strongly objected to this development due to concerns that we share, and it would therefore go to planning committee if the officers were minded to accept it.
- 3-7 Marlborough St (old Budgens site) P20/V0013/FUL:
A planning amendment has been made to this application to provide details of the proposed cycle storage for both resident and visitor parking. We do not feel that the cycle storage proposed is sufficiently secure as it is communal, transparent and partially open to the elements. We have therefore asked officers to consult with the developers to try to achieve an improved design that encourages cycle use.

Contact Us

We hope that the regular reports from the council have been keeping you informed of developments as they happen as we haven't been able to report directly to you in person and encourage you to contact us directly with questions and comments you may have.

We hope this report finds you safe and well.

Bethia Thomas, Bethia.Thomas@whitehorsedc.gov.uk

David Grant, David.grant@whitehorsedc.gov.uk