22. Faringdon

22.1 Faringdon is a market town in the Vale of White Horse District in south west Oxfordshire. It is on the edge of the Thames Valley, between the River Thames and the Ridgeway. The town is situated 19 miles southwest of Oxford, 10 miles northwest of Wantage and 13 miles northeast of Swindon. The A420 (which is mainly single carriageway with limited stretches of dual carriageway) is situated to the south and east of Faringdon provides good links to other towns; there is no rail station. Faringdon is a compact yet hilly town which could affect movement across the town, especially for local trips. The surrounding countryside is dominated by farmland with managed woodland and a number of quarries.

22.2 The 2001 census recorded Faringdon's population at 6,187. The town has many local amenities such as 2 primary schools and a secondary school, health centre (with the nearest hospitals being in Oxford and Swindon – 17 and 12 miles respectively), bank, post office, police station, fire station, leisure centre, library and supermarket.

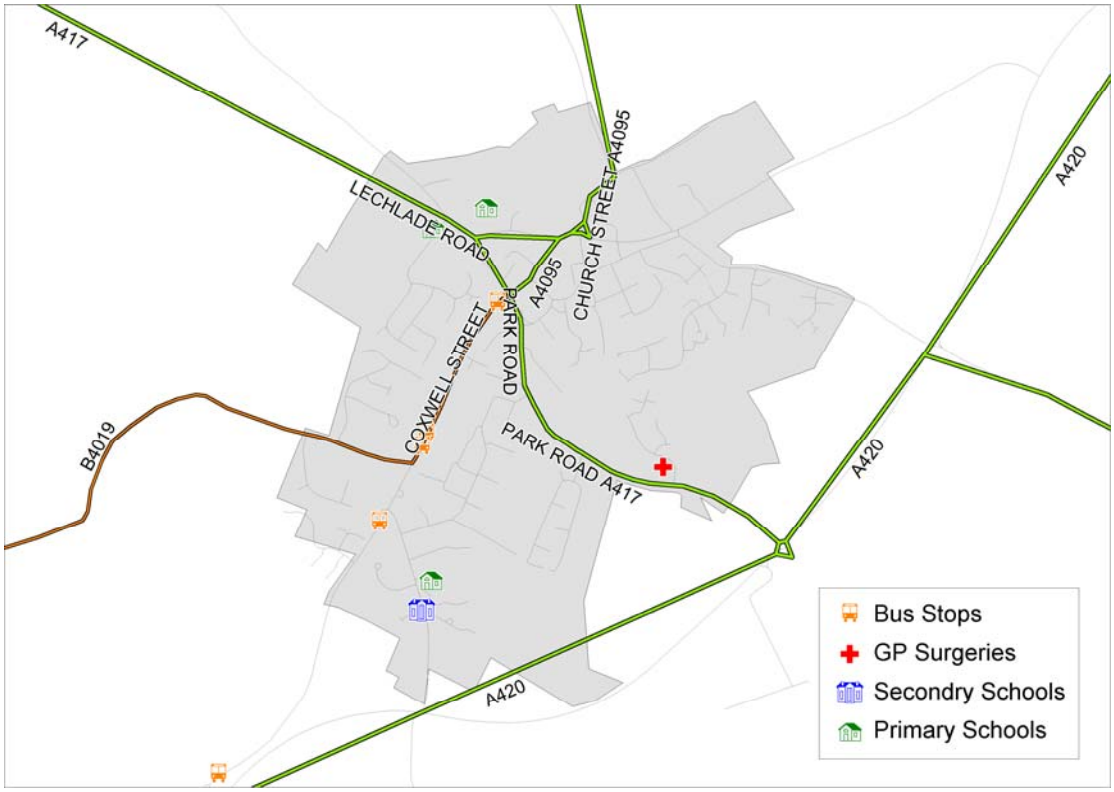

Figure 1 – Plan of Faringdon

22.3 According to the Market Town Healthcheck undertaken in 2002 by the town and district councils, compared with the rest of the country, Faringdon may have appeared affluent (ranked 6173/8414

on the indices of deprivation) however it was the fifth worst score within the Vale of White Horse. Unemployment was low, as were the average monthly earnings, which at the time were well below the national average. The Healthcheck also identified that a lack of visitor/community focal points and facilities for young people are issues that affect the town's vitality.

Transport in Faringdon

22.4 The main commercial bus service running through Faringdon is the Stagecoach Swindon Service 65/66 which runs between Oxford and Swindon. Even though the service is not classed as a 'Premium Route Service' it is an important route.

22.5 RH Transport Service 67A/B also runs Monday – Saturday throughout the day every hour to two hours between Wantage and Faringdon. There are also some minor services that run within the town to Wantage, Buckland and Highworth; however these are mainly Monday to Friday services that run in the mornings only.

22.6 The A420 runs around the south and east of Faringdon with the A417 and A4095 running through the town to both the north and south. According to the 2001 census, of the resident population travelling to work 47.5% people drove. This could be attributed to the main employment bases being located outside of Faringdon in Oxford and Swindon which are easily accessible by car via the A420.

22.7 The main bus stops are located in Faringdon town centre, Park Road and Coxwell Road; for many residents (especially those living in the northeast of the town and on the outskirts) the distance to the bus stops combined with the hilly topography of the town may be a contributing factor to high car usage. Local amenities such as the supermarket, post office and most of the schools are concentrated in the town centre (in the north of the town) and again for those living on the southern, western and eastern peripheries driving may be a more attractive option.

22.8 There is a good range of public rights of way that connect Faringdon to the surrounding countryside. However, the network is disjointed in many places where paths meet the road network. Selected improved management, road crossings and traffic-free links could help enable more people to access the countryside on foot, cycle or horseback.

Problems and Challenges

Walking

22.9 Clear, readable signage directing people to key destinations is one of the issues for pedestrians, particularly within the residential areas of Faringdon. There is also a lack of joined up footways linking the residential areas to key facilities, amenities and the surrounding countryside via urban footways and rights of way. Housing in Faringdon is mainly to the south, west and east of the town centre. This means that some residential areas are a greater distance from the town centre than others, which can discourage residents from walking. Travel to the local schools is usually via walking however there is still a large percentage of pupils that travel to the schools by private vehicles.

22.10 Publicity of pedestrian routes from residential areas to local services, schools, employment areas and the town centre is limited. There are concerns that some footways are uneven, dropped kerbs are not in the right places and visibility at junctions is limited.

22.11 There are a number of footways in Faringdon that are considered to be narrow and would benefit from upgrading. Maintaining and improving links where public rights of way meet urban footways and highways could help to enable more people to feel confident in using alternatives to the private car for local journeys and recreation.

Cycling

22.12 Any positive contributions towards accessibility across Faringdon are hindered due to the relatively poor cycling connections within the residential areas. A Healthcheck carried out in 2002 reports that there is inadequate provision for cyclists within the town and links between Faringdon and its hinterland are poor or non-existent. The lack of adequate cycle infrastructure particularly within the town centre and access to key local facilities from residential areas are also hindered by the hilly topography of parts of Faringdon and services being mainly located in the centre; therefore some residents can see these as a barrier to cycling.

22.13 The publicity of cycling routes from residential areas, to local services, schools, employment areas and the town centre is limited. Cycle parking (especially within the town centre) is inadequate and in some cases not fit for purpose.

22.14 There are unclassified tracks and paths surrounding Faringdon

which are available for walking and cycling however these are not publicised within the town. The Regional Cycle Route no 40 runs through the southern section of the town; this is not well publisised. Although cyclists can use bridleways, restricted byways and byways (along with horseriders) these often do no connect up safely with roads.

22.15 According to the local cycle group Farcycles (Faringdon Cycle Network) Faringdon is poorly served by dedicated cycle routes and cycling in the town can be dangerous; despite this a growing number of people in Faringdon choose to use their bicycle as their primary means of transport; however coupled with the topography of Faringdon, a significant amount of people still use private transport to travel within and around the town.

Public Transport

22.16 Faringdon does not have direct access to rail services; the nearest commercial rail stations are in Swindon, Oxford and Didcot. There are no plans or commitments for any form of rail to extend to Faringdon.

22.17 Apart from the 65/66 bus routes providing access to Oxford and Swindon and to towns to the east and west of Faringdon, the public transport links to other nearby towns could be improved, as well as increasing the frequency of the 65/66.

22.18 Even though there are bus stops within walking distance of Faringdon Community College it is only served by services 61, 65 and 66; therefore unless students travelling to the school have access to those services public transport links to the College from areas outside of Faringdon are limited. As parents are encouraged to be more selective about the school they choose to send their children to, more parents are prepared to travel greater distances hence an increasing number of students travel in from outlying villages by car.

Roads and Traffic

22.19 Faringdon does not suffer with a town wide congestion problem; however during the morning weekday peak periods an increase in volume of traffic causes vehicles to move more slowly especially within the narrow roads of the town centre and accessing the A420.

22.20 The lack of wide spread congestion within Faringdon does not deter people from driving, even for short journeys; this can exacerbate problems with health and the environment. Roads within Faringdon and around the town are classified in the priority 1 and 2 lists for gritting in ice and snowy weather conditions as they

are vital links and the only access for the community.

22.21 The road network, within the town centre in particular, is narrow and can easily become congested with on-street parking and/or the presence of large vehicles.

22.22 There are 3 road accesses to Faringdon from the A420, however only Park Road (A417) has a roundabout; the roundabout attracts drivers wishing to exit on to the A420 as it is easier to exit than at the priority junctions. The majority of employment sites, existing and proposed new housing are off Park Road. There are concerns that all this development will have an impact on congestion in the area as well cause potential safety issues with right turning vehicles from the sites onto Park Road.

Transport Strategy

Walking and the Pedestrian Environment

To improve facilities for all pedestrians in Faringdon through developing good clear routes from residential areas to the town centre and other key services and facilities around the town.

22.23 When resources or opportunities allow this is to be achieved by:

* Conducting an audit of current footways. The audit will identify measures to improve way finding by creating formal walking routes to key facilities from residential areas and between certain key facilities by providing new and improved signage, widening, dropped kerbs, and improved crossing points.
* Publicise and promote walking routes by producing information on walking maps, literature and route planners which can made available in print or electronically.
* Improve connections to the rights of way network particularly where urban footways meet rural rights of way.

Cycling and Behavioural Change

To develop new cycle routes and ensure that the best cycle links from residential areas to local services, schools, employment areas the town centre and access to Regional Cycle Route no 40 are publicised. To provide a suitable number of good quality cycle stands at the key destinations and appropriate infrastructure where required along the routes.

22.24 When resources or opportunities allow this is to be achieved by:

* Improving facilities for cyclists by conducting an audit of existing cycle ways, well used routes and locations of cycle parking across Faringdon in order to develop a high quality cycle network. Provision of additional cycle infrastructure such as cycle lanes/paths (particularly in central Faringdon), advance stops lines and cycle parking where appropriate, improved signage and crossing points with a particular focus to improve accessibility to key destinations and Regional Route number 40.
* Publicise and promote cycling routes by producing, in conjunction with local cycle groups and cycle organisations, information on cycling, maps, literature and route planners which can made available in print or electronically.
* Joining up the cycling network across the wider area using public rights of way so that routes for commuting and recreation are improved.

Public Transport

To work with local bus companies, developers and other partners to improve the frequency and attractiveness of the bus services in Faringdon, thus increasing patronage.

Work with local bus companies, developers and other partners to improve and develop bus services on certain other routes to increase the accessibility of Faringdon to/from other key locations particularly the surrounding villages. Retainment of the existing local bus services in the area is also important.

22.25 When resources or opportunities allow this is to be achieved by:

* Continue to work with bus operators to upgrade the existing 66 bus service to 4 buses per hour, in line with the Premium Route Strategy
* Investigate what improvements could be made to the town centre to improve manoeuvrability for buses around the town centre.
* Aspire to premium route standard stops with Real Time Information accessible by good walking routes, in particular Park Road.
* Improve the marketing of all bus services to encourage travel by public transport.

Traffic Management

To make best use of existing road space through careful planning, working with partners and utilisation of technology.

22.26 When resources or opportunities allow this is to be achieved by:

* Reviewing road safety incidents and conduct speed surveys and junction reviews at sites of concern. Consider measures such as installing vehicle activated signage, lining, traffic calming measures and junction improvements to address any problems.
* Consider traffic calming measures along the Highworth Road (B4019) to reduce speeds.
* Investigate if improvements to the Park Road roundabout are achievable.
* Review parking arrangements within the town to enable better management of spaces and improve pedestrian safety.
* Review the signage within Cornmarket to aid movement for all modes
* Consider traffic calming measures near schools and cycle routes to enable safer integration of all modes.
* Consider implementing traffic calming measures on Canada Lane, Gravel Walk and Lechlade Road.