

Committee: Cabinet

Agenda Item

Date: 17 February 2015

22

Title: Farnham Parish Plan 2014 - 2024

Portfolio holder: Cllr Barker

Key decision: **No**

Summary

1. Farnham Parish Council has approved a Parish Plan and has sent it to the District Council. This report considers its findings and action plan.

Recommendations

2. That Cabinet adopt the Parish Plan as Council Approved Guidance in determining planning applications in the Parish and as background evidence in the preparation of the Local Plan.

Financial Implications

3. None

Background Papers

4. The following papers were referred to by the author in the preparation of this report and are available for inspection from the author of the report.

Farnham Parish Plan 2014 – 2024 (October 2014)

Impact

- 5.

Communication/Consultation	The plan has undergone significant community involvement in its preparation
Community Safety	The plan deals with community safety
Equalities	The plan consulted with every resident
Health and Safety	None
Human Rights/Legal Implications	None
Sustainability	The plan deals with sustainability of village

Ward-specific impacts	Stort Valley
Workforce/Workplace	None

Situation

6. The value of the Parish Plan is that it reflects a consensus of the community's views and means that the Parish Council can respond to planning consultations and other decision making process, reflecting the genuine views of the parish, making informed comments and recommendations, as well as improving the quality of life and the local environment.
7. The views of the residents were obtained through hand delivering questionnaires to every household and business in the parish. 67% of forms were completed and returned. After approval from the Parish Council, the full results and the draft action plan were presented at a special open meeting at the Annual Meeting of the Parish in March 2014.
8. Key points arising from the Parish Plan are:-
 - a. Housing Supply: Almost two-thirds of respondents to the questionnaire would like to see no change to the parish's housing stock over the next ten years, and nearly a quarter would like to see an increase of up to only ten houses. Those wishing to see more than twenty new houses built over the next ten years comprised just over 10% of respondents, split equally by respondents who would like to see more than twenty and thirty houses built, especially for local and young people. Among the minority of respondents who perceived a need for more housing, a clear preference was expressed that this should comprise individual houses within the existing developed area. That said, however, it was very clear that an overall majority of residents feel that no additional housing is needed or desirable.
 - b. Employment: Commercial premises in the parish are limited to a handful of barns at various farms. Farming and equestrian activities are the dominant commercial activity in the parish. 29% of households who responded said they worked from home part of the time. There was strong support for faster broadband. The Parish Plan has actioned the need to continue to lobby the county councils and potential, ISPs on the need to upgrade the connection to the local exchanges.
 - c. Transport and roads: Villagers are heavily dependent on cars with over 95% of households having at least one car. The once-weekly community bus is essential for those without cars. The Parish Plan lists a number of actions relating to highway safety.
 - d. The Environment: The tranquil setting of the village is valued by residents. The Parish Plan lists a number of actions relating to improving the appearance at entry points to the village, footpath

maintenance, dog fouling and publishing details about how to report airport noise issues.

- e. The School: Residents recently fought closure of the village school. However the plan notes that only 4 families responded to say that they currently send their children to the school. Most children attend schools in Bishop's Stortford.
- f. Crime: Residents considered that the village is a safe place to live. The Plan lists an action to request a greater police presence to deter illicit activity and improve road safety.
- g. Social and Community: Residents consider that the village has a strong community spirit. Focal points are the village Hall, church and school. The recreation ground has good facilities. 70% of respondents said they visited the pub at Hazel end is supported.
- h. Young People (aged 11-18): 95% of the young respondents liked growing up in Farnham. Advantages were living in the countryside yet close to Bishop's Stortford but the lack of public transport was a disadvantage. The Plan lists actions relating to the provision of additional clubs.

Risk Analysis

9.

Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigating actions
That the Parish Plan is not taken into account as a material consideration	1. Little - Officers will be aware of the plan and will include reference to it in any relevant reports	2. Some - The views of the community are not taken into account, devaluing community-led planning	The Parish Plan is included in a check list of items to consider in preparation of Local Plan and when determining applications within Farnham Parish.

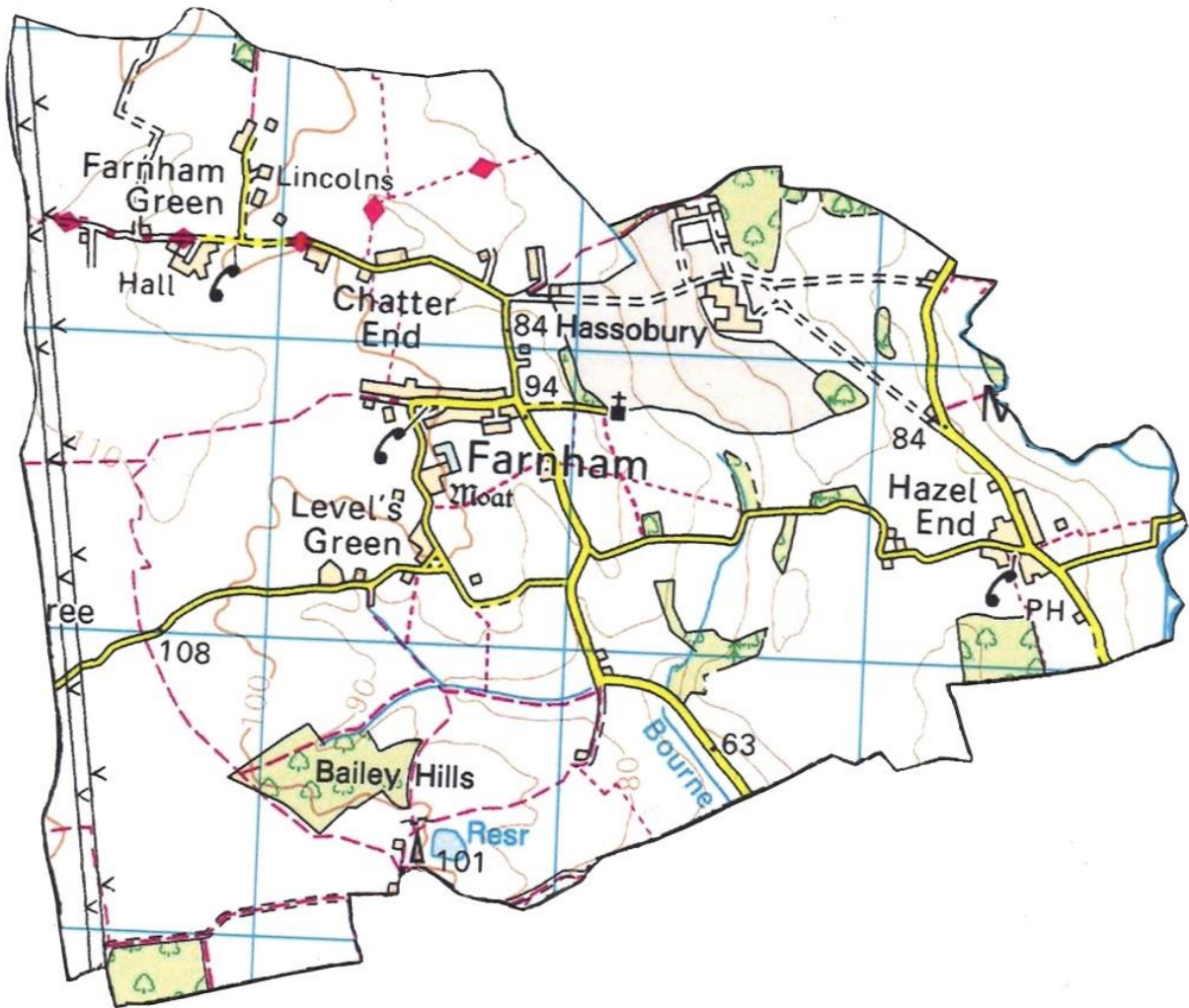
1 = Little or no risk or impact

2 = Some risk or impact – action may be necessary.

3 = Significant risk or impact – action required

4 = Near certainty of risk occurring, catastrophic effect or failure of project.

FARNHAM PARISH PLAN



2014 – 2024

October 2014

Contents

The Parish of Farnham – An Introduction	Page 3
History	Page 3
Farnham Today	Page 4
Farnham’s People	Page 5
What is a Parish Plan and What is it For?	Page 6
The Action Plan 2014–2024	
Housing & Development	
Housing Supply	Page 7
Agricultural & Commercial Stock	Page 8
Transport & Roads	Page 9
The Environment	Page 10
Local Government & Services	
The School	Page 11
Crime	Page 11
The Parish Magazine	Page 12
Social & Community	Page 13
Young People	Page 14



The Parish of Farnham – an Introduction

Farnham is a small rural village in west Essex, close to the border with Hertfordshire. The nearest town, Bishop's Stortford, lies about two miles to the south, and Stansted Airport is situated roughly six miles to the east.

The Parish of Farnham comprises several smaller hamlets – Hazel End, Farnham Green, Chatter End and Levels Green – as well as the village of Farnham itself.

History

Although Farnham is thought to have been first inhabited in the Neolithic period, there is little evidence of settlement until the 1086 Domesday Survey which recorded four manors: Farnham (later known as Earlsbury), Hassobury, Walkfares (later known as Walkers) and an unknown manor that no longer survives.

The name 'Farnham' was anciently spelt *Ferneham* and was probably derived from the ferns that grew in large quantities there, and a clearing (or 'ham') made by dwellers. Evidence of a settlement here can be traced back as far as the Iron Age, before the Roman occupation of Britain.

There has been a church in Farnham for over a thousand years on the current site; the present Church of St Mary the Virgin was re-built in 1859. A Baptist chapel (now Mission Hall Cottage) was located in Chatter End from around 1896 to 1974.

Informal schooling in Farnham started in the first half of the nineteenth century, primarily through the church. The Church of England built a school on the present site in 1855; this was renovated and extended in 1959.



Farnham Today

Farnham retains many of its old dwellings, including the three listed manor houses. Hazel End has long been designated a conservation area on account of the concentration of ancient buildings in this part of the parish and their contribution to the high quality and diversity of the environment. The main house at Hassobury has been used in various guises since the Second World War and is now sub-divided into individual residences. The current housing stock is an eclectic mix of the older houses, farm cottages that have been extended, and developments since the 1930s by the private and public sectors.

The village no longer has any shops, and the post office at 38 Rectory Lane closed in 1989. One of the pubs, The Globe, closed in 1971, although the Three Horseshoes in Hazel End has remained and the Social Club at the Village Hall services the central part of the village.

The Church shares a rector with the neighbouring parishes of Stansted and Birchanger, providing services every Sunday, although attendance has diminished in line with national trends.



Farnham's People

The population of the Parish is currently around 380 people, living in some 190 households. The most populous area is around Rectory Lane, close to the school, church, village hall and recreation ground. The village's population is surprisingly stable, most residents having lived here for at least 6 years, and a sizeable proportion having spent more than 25 years in the village; indeed, some families have lived here for generations.

Once a village based very much on farming and local employment, Farnham is today largely a dormitory village with residents travelling to work mainly in Bishop's Stortford or London. Despite the continuing lack of high-speed broadband in the village, an increasing number of people are spending more time working from home. A significant proportion of villagers are retired.

Farnham's residents are almost unanimous in describing this as a very friendly village with a strong community spirit, evidenced by the many village activities and clubs. These are centred primarily on the three main hubs of the community: the primary school, the village hall and the church.

The village still has a small Church of England primary school with capacity for 56 children. A proposal put forward by the LEA in 2014 to move the entire school to nearby Stansted Mountfitchet was rejected after vocal opposition from within Farnham and from those families from elsewhere with children at the school; however, most of the children in the village attend schools, both primary and secondary, in Bishop's Stortford.

The Village Hall (with its licensed bar) is well-used for regular weekly activities and clubs, for a monthly village coffee morning, and for annual events such as the Harvest Supper and the Safari Supper, as well as quizzes and other events organised by the active social committee. The hall is also regularly hired out for private events.



What is a Parish Plan and what is it for?

Many villages draw up a Village Plan to help their Parish Council make decisions regarding areas such as housing, the environment, public services, roads and transport, and recreational amenities. Having a plan in place that reflects a consensus of the community's views is particularly valuable in terms of housing requirements as the Parish Council is often given only a short time by the District Council (which is ultimately responsible for planning) to respond to planning consultations; having a Village Plan in place means the Parish Council can respond in a timely way, reflecting the genuine views of the parish rather than what the Parish Council assumes those views to be.

The scope of the Village Plan is somewhat limited by the fact that the Parish Council itself has only limited responsibilities; however, the Parish Council does play a vital role in representing the interests of the local community to the District and County Councils and can influence the decision-making process by making informed comments and recommendations, as well as improving the quality of life and the local environment.

How Farnham's plan was drawn up

A voluntary committee of five people was formed after a request from the Parish Council to draw up a new Parish Plan. The last one was done 20 years ago.



We created a wide-ranging questionnaire covering all aspects of life in Farnham. So that we could explain the purpose and encourage residents to participate, the forms were hand-delivered to every household and business in the parish and then collected after completion some three weeks later. The overall response rate was encouragingly high, with 67% of forms completed and returned. The data from the questionnaire responses were then collated and analysed so that we could identify the action points that form the basis of the 2014–2024 plan. We continued to keep residents updated via the parish magazine.

After approval from the Parish Council, the full results and the draft action plan were presented at a special open meeting at the Annual Meeting of the Parish in March 2014; we also made sure that a copy of the results and plan was passed on to all the relevant organisations and interested parties. Generally speaking everyone seemed happy with our process, the results and our proposed Action Points.

The Parish Plan which this document comprises is the outcome of this process and will help guide policy and development for Farnham and its Council over the next ten years.

Note: in the discussion below all data, including percentages, relate to the number of questionnaires (117) that were completed and returned, not to the total number of households within the parish.

Absolute figures (for example, regarding number of households) reflect the status in October 2013.

THE ACTION PLAN 2014-2024

Housing and Development

The results from the questionnaire provide a clear statement from the parishioners of Farnham that they wish the parish to retain its rural character and a similar stock of housing to that which currently exists. At least 80% of respondents to the questionnaire would like to see the preservation of the countryside, agriculture and its commercial premises, views of the church and other recreational facilities and the settings of listed buildings.

Housing supply

Farnham's housing stock comprises 186 dwellings and provides a diverse range of homes in terms of sizes and price bands within the context of the regional market, including good provision for the elderly at Globe Crescent. The tenure split is weighted in favour of freehold ownership, although the rented proportion is relatively high and provided by both the private sector and the local authority.

The questionnaire results revealed that almost nobody who lives in Farnham is seeking other accommodation within the village, separate from their existing household. Nearly five percent of households had family members seeking accommodation outside Farnham.

Almost two-thirds of respondents to the questionnaire would like to see no change to the parish's housing stock over the next ten years, and nearly a quarter would like to see an increase of up to only ten houses. Those wishing to see more than twenty new houses built over the next ten years comprised just over 10% of respondents, split equally by respondents who would like to see more than twenty and thirty houses built, especially for local and young people.

Among the minority of respondents who perceived a need for more housing, a clear preference was expressed that this should comprise individual houses within the existing developed area. That said, however, it was very clear that an overall majority of residents feel that no additional housing is needed or desirable.



Agricultural and commercial stock

Farnham's provision of commercial premises is limited to a handful of barns at the various farms. Arable farming is the dominant commercial activity in Farnham, with three farming premises having diversified to provide equestrian facilities.

Home working is reasonably popular in the parish, with people in 29% of households that responded to the questionnaire working from home at least part of the time. The support for faster broadband from respondents was almost unanimous.

Because the expressed wish of a substantial majority of the community was for no significant change in the village's housing stock over the next ten years, there are no action points in this specific area. However, there is clear demand from most residents, and especially from those who work from home, for a faster broadband service, so the Parish Council will continue to work with the county councils to try and bring this about.

What is the issue?	What can we do?	When ?	Who?
Need for faster broadband	Continue to lobby the county councils and, potentially, ISPs on the need to upgrade the connections to the local exchanges	2-3 years	Parish Council, Herts County Council, Essex County Council, members of the community



Transport and Roads

Our isolated location, lack of amenities and minimal public transport mean that villagers are heavily dependent on cars. Over 95% of households have at least one car and over half have at least two. Nevertheless, for those without cars, and particularly for the elderly, the once-weekly community bus service is essential and often runs at capacity.

Regarding roads in the parish there were a number of concerns that attracted support. A lack of consideration by road users was a theme running through responses. This included speeding through the parish, driving while using a mobile phone and parking issues around the school and church. It is vital that these issues are addressed to prevent an incident happening in the parish.

There were concerns with the maintenance and upkeep of the highways. The state of the road surfaces and potholes was mentioned on numerous questionnaires. Safety issues around poorly maintained verges were also a concern, particularly around the Rye Street junction.

A reduction in speed limits around the parish, especially in Rectory Lane, gained significant support, along with a desire for the introduction of traffic calming measures. It is hoped that such measures will maintain the tranquillity and sense of safety that appeal to residents.

What are the issues?	What can we do?	When?	Who?
Speeding	Traffic calming measures and changes to maximum speed	1 year	Highways, Parish Council
Driving using a mobile	Notices reminding villagers about the law on using mobile phones, in village magazine and on notice boards	1 year	Police, Highways and Parish Council
Out of hours parking at the church	Investigate what, if anything can be done to restrict access to this area out of hours. Also have further discussions with Police around reporting incidents.	6 months	Church, Police and Parish Council
School parking	Speak to school about people disregarding the parking restrictions. Signs to display the restrictions clearly. Investigate other parking options.	6 months	School, Highways and Parish Council
Improvements to Rye Street junction	Speak to Herts Highways to ensure the junction is kept clear and possible improvements. Changes will inevitably be made once the new Bishop's Stortford North development happens, this will be some years off.	6 months	Herts Highways and Parish Council
Maintaining verges	Ensure people are aware of how to report issues	Rolling	Parish Council and Highways
Potholes and road maintenance	Ensure people are aware of how to report issues	Rolling	Highways and Parish Council

The Environment

Farnham is a beautiful village and its tranquil setting is the reason many people come to live in the village and remain here. A strong theme that emerged from the questionnaire and the open evening was the wish to keep the village as it is. A desire was also expressed at the open meeting to improve the appearance of areas on entry to the village to maintain a positive village image.



The use of local footpaths and bridleways is seen as very important to villagers, with over 60% using them regularly. Although most people were generally happy with the maintenance of the footpaths there were specific areas that required attention and there was some support for a small expansion of the footpath network.

One area of concern was dog fouling at various areas in the parish and there were a number of recommendations to help reduce this. The areas that require particular attention are on Church Walk and the Thrimley Lane – Chatter End footpath. There was a feeling that improved notices to remind owners of their responsibilities would be beneficial, together with an increase in the number of dog fouling bins all around the parish.

Responses regarding Stansted Airport were generally positive with most people seeing it as a benefit to the local area. There was some concern about noise from off-course planes and there was no demand for further expansion.

What are the issues?	What can we do?	When?	Who?
Improve appearance at entry points to the village (e.g. triangles in Rectory Lane, Saven End, Levels Green)	Volunteers to organise planting of bulbs etc and maintenance of planted areas	Ongoing	Parish Council, volunteers
Footpath/Bridleway maintenance	Monitor and report when maintenance is required	Ongoing	Parish Council
Dog Fouling	Dog fouling notices and bins around the parish	1 year	Parish Council
Stansted Noise	Ensure the details on how to report noise issues are published	3 Months	Parish Council

Local Government and Services



The School

This is a small rural Church of England school, which now operates in a federation with a similar primary school in the nearby village of Rickling. Farnham school is much valued by the wider community: over one-third of respondents had sent their children to the school in the past, the majority over 10 years ago. Only four families responded to say that they currently send their children to the school.

It was agreed that the school is an essential part of the community. There were almost equal numbers supporting, or not, the benefits of a small local school. However, its smallness is one of the attractions for families outside the village.

What is the issue?	What can we do?	When?	Who?
School parking	<p>Speak to school about people disregarding the parking restrictions</p> <p>Signs to display the restrictions clearly</p> <p>Investigate other parking options</p>	6 months	School, Highways and Parish Council

Crime

It is generally agreed that Farnham is a safe place to live. However, half of respondents would like to see a bigger police presence, particularly by the church during the evening to monitor use of the church car park and deter illicit activity. It was also felt that a greater police presence would help to improve road safety.

There is a Neighbourhood Watch scheme, but this needs to be better advertised.

What are the issues?	What can we do?	When?	Who?
----------------------	-----------------	-------	------

Illicit activities by the church	Request regular police patrols especially down to the church	1 year	Police, PCC
Neighbourhood Watch	Advertise in the magazine and by word of mouth	ASAP	Neighbourhood Watch team

The Parish Magazine

This general magazine serves the whole parish and is an essential communication forum for bodies such as the Church, the School, the Village Hall and all our social activities. The majority of households subscribe to the magazine.

The general articles and the village diary are the most widely read. There was a plea for some articles on the history and lives of local heroes.

There was very little interest in an on-line version, either from subscribers or from advertisers.

What is the issue?	What can we do?	When?	Who?
Keeping the information in the magazine up-to-date	Insert information concerning: The Oil Club Phone number for reporting off-course aircraft Information on Neighbourhood Watch	3 Months	Jo Wilson/Parish Council



Social and Community

Farnham retains a strong community spirit with almost all respondents stating that Farnham is a friendly village in which to live and that they feel part of the community. Responses highlighted the importance of the Village Hall, the Church and the School, and cited the Hall in particular as a major asset and focal point in the centre of the village.

The Recreation Ground has seen increased use recently and 95% agreed that, after the complete remake in 2013, the ground now has good facilities. Residents support a wide range of clubs and activities. They are happy with the range on offer and the village grapevine, magazine and posters make it easy to find out about them.

The cricket club at Hazel End still has one team that competes in the Herts & Essex League, although attendance at matches is low.

70% of respondents said they visit the Three Horseshoes Pub at Hazel End.



Young People (30 respondents aged 11–18)

93% of the young respondents think that Farnham is a good place in which to grow up. They highlighted living in the country and Farnham's close proximity to Bishop's Stortford as key factors. The fact that there is no daily public transport is what young people like least about living in the village. The majority of journeys in and out of the village are in relatives' cars.

Two-thirds of respondents would like to have sport/fitness training while one-third would like a youth / social club provided in the village. These suggestions were discussed by the adults at the meeting for the presentation of the questionnaire results in March 2014 and form the action points below.

What are the issues?	What can we do?	When?	Who?
Explore the possibility of starting a youth group or sports/fitness training for young people	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Article in Farnham Monthly News 2. Meeting in Hall of interested parties 3. Choose main contact to proceed with plans if viable 	Autumn 2014 onwards	Volunteers, Parish Council
Explore possibility of holding monthly Family Night at Social Club earlier, from 6–8pm	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Check hall availability, social club approval and numbers of families interested 2. Choose main contact to proceed with plans if viable 	Autumn 2014 onwards	Emma Smith, Village Hall Social Club, Parish Council

