



The Farnborough Society

Response to the Draft Rushmoor Local Plan

The members of The Farnborough Society were all invited to contribute to this report and their responses incorporated, so that it reflects the view of the society overall. Unless otherwise stated, our comments relate exclusively to Farnborough

While there is much to recommend the draft Plan, and it may well be ‘sound’, we feel that the vision presented lacks aspiration, and fails to provide the impetus necessary to create a thriving and energetic town over the lifetime of the Plan. Particularly with regard to Farnborough town centre, it fails to generate the kind of excitement and ambition necessary to drive a successful, and much needed, revitalisation programme.

Spatial Portrait: The Built Environment

Sustainability Appraisal Objective 10 speaks of maintaining and strengthening local distinctiveness and sense of place. However, Farnborough town centre has neither, the result of unfortunate post-war development. The aim must therefore be to build a new sense of identity, which we can define for ourselves and achieve with innovative design. Consequently, it is not enough to ‘promote and encourage high-quality design...’ as expressed in Objective 11; we need a clear vision of who we are as a town and how we wish to project ourselves.

An important part of our identity rests on our heritage—the Army in Aldershot and aviation and French imperial heritage in Farnborough. We believe the Plan should specifically promote the idea of Rushmoor as a destination, and actively encourage business, artistic and educational activity linked to our heritage. Thus Key Challenge 5, finding long-term uses for the Borough’s historical assets, ought to be just one component in an overarching strategy to make maximum use of our remarkable local heritage.

Policy SP2: Shaping Places

Of primary concern to The Farnborough Society is the development of an evening economy in Farnborough town centre. The cinema and some new restaurants have brought limited entertainment but the Plan needs to specifically encourage the provision of performance space/music venue/exhibition space, to make clear the potential for investors within the regeneration scheme.

Policy SP2.1: Primary Frontages

One problem within the town centre is that Princes Mead closes at 6.00pm, which means that evening visitors need to circumnavigate the mall to reach entertainment venues. This is antithetical to the notion of those primary frontages providing interest, at least outside of trading times.

Although both Aldershot and Farnborough have disabled toilets, neither has ‘changing places’ facilities, and five established restaurants in the Borough have no wheelchair access or accessible toilets. The Plan should encourage design that consciously caters to the disabled wherever possible.

Policy SP2.3: Farnborough Civic Quarter

The Plan should state clearly that, aside from the new cinema, there are currently no cultural facilities at all in Farnborough town centre, and stress the need for such things as performance and exhibition space on the grounds of health, particularly mental health, and wellbeing. The Civic Quarter’s accessibility by foot or bicycle from Farnborough’s most deprived areas would make entertainment readily available to some of our most vulnerable and socially isolated residents. Indeed, centrally located cultural facilities, with convenient bicycle parking, would encourage many more people to walk or cycle to access entertainment, improving their physical and mental health. They would also encourage more residents to feel ‘ownership’ of their town centre

Given the dearth of cultural facilities in the town centre, the ‘enhanced green space’ needs to be particularly striking if it is to become the ‘heart’ of a town that desperately needs one. The Farnborough Society would like it to take the form of an amphitheatre, for aesthetic as well as practical purposes. It would provide relaxed attractive outdoor seating for picnic lunches, as well as a practical venue for ceremonies, concerts and a range of other activities. Such a dramatic feature would substantially boost civic pride.

The Plan contains nothing to attract youngsters into the town centre, so we would like to see a proposal to support the creation of a ‘youth hub’, to provide activities for young people in the town centre once the popular skate park is relocated.

Policy SP4: Farnborough Airport

With a possible increase in ATMs to 50,000 per annum, plus the inevitable increase in road traffic, The Farnborough Society has concerns about air pollution. Climate scientists conclude that improvements to aircraft and engine design technology, and in air traffic management, will not offset the projected growth in aircraft emissions. We would therefore like a commitment that monitoring equipment will be regularly replaced to ensure that recorded data is accurate, so that action can be taken immediately should air pollution become a concern.

Policy IN1: Infrastructure and Community Facilities

IN1 (4) refers to new community facilities which are compatible with the character and needs of the local community, but offers no evidence of the needs of the community, notably the crisis in medical care provision and the need for a central medical ‘hub’.

While connectivity is addressed with regard to walking and cycling, The Farnborough Society suggests that a town centre jogging track should be considered, an idea successfully adopted by many towns and cities to encourage exercise.

Policy IN2: Transport

We believe that the Plan should make a clear commitment at the start of this section that pedestrians should come first, cyclists second, public transport third and private cars last.

The aim to reduce carbon emissions and minimise the impacts of transport on the environment would appear to be at odds with proposals in the new Car and Cycle Parking Standards to increase the size of parking spaces and turning circles to accommodate larger cars.

Traffic and congestion have been increasing dramatically in recent years, with heavy reliance on private cars. Therefore, all new development should not only privilege pedestrians (including wheelchair and mobility scooter users) over cyclists, and cyclists over motorists within the development, but also take account of the impact on existing road networks. This requires a much closer collaboration between RBC and HCC.

Policy HE3: Development within or adjoining a Conservation Area

It should be noted that no Conservation Area Character Appraisals have yet been completed.

Policy D1: Design in the Built Environment

In considering the public realm, the Plan should acknowledge the importance of viewpoints and vista within schemes, and of public art.

More emphasis should be placed on the importance of orientation, both for environmental reasons and for fire safety. Energy costs can be significantly reduced and dwellings made more comfortable by careful orientation. In addition, poorly oriented high-rise buildings can result in excessive heat build-up in corridors, which tempts residents to wedge open fire doors.

Policy DE4: Sustainable Water Use

The Spatial Portrait section giving the context for Flooding and Water Issues (page 25) states 'residents across the area use ten litres per person per day more than the national average.' However, the Plan does not explain why this should be or what measures will be taken to reduce usage.

Policy DE6: Open Space, Sport and Recreation

9.55 states that some areas in Farnborough are deficient in parks and gardens and/or natural and semi-natural green space. Moreover, 9.56 states that 'the policy approach is to protect against the loss of existing open space and to focus on its enhancement'. However, these statements directly contradict the Council's policy of selling amenity space to residents so that they can increase the size of the private gardens. The Farnborough Society is fundamentally opposed to this policy. Trees, shrubs and other planting are very therapeutic and therefore contribute to good mental health.

Policy LN1: Housing Mix

10.7 states that the Council maintains a register of individuals and associations of individuals who have expressed an interest in self- and custom-build homes. The Farnborough Society would like the Plan to contain a commitment to actively encourage this form of development in order to increase the range of housing options.

Policy LN2: Meeting Affordable Housing Needs

The SHMA identifies a need for 160 affordable subsidised rented homes per annum, which means that 2,880 new affordable homes need to be built. This represents 36% of the total and substantially more than the Plan will deliver. How will this additional housing be delivered?

The Farnborough Society has grave concerns about the feasibility of the Plan delivering its affordable housing targets because so many developers have successfully avoided their obligation using the 'viability' argument. We therefore question whether these targets are realistic and ask whether any measures can be taken to increase the likelihood of delivery.

Policy PC8: Skills, Training and Employment

The measures cited tend to support those who left school without qualifications, which certainly benefits the local economy as well as improving health and wellbeing, but does nothing to close the 'skills gap'. The Plan needs to be more robust in its aim to raise aspiration, ambition and achievement in the young.

Appendix 15 Housing Trajectory

The plan states that 436 homes are required throughout the Borough over the life of the Plan although 'only' 472 have been built in the last 2/3 years. We question whether the chart is realistic since the current delivery rate appears to be 400+ behind target.