

**Farnham Infrastructure Programme
Local Liaison Forum
Wednesday 10 March 2021, 12.30pm
Optimised Infrastructure Plan Consultation
Facebook Live**

Present

Cllr John Neale, Farnham Town Council
Cllr Andy MacLeod, Waverley Borough Council
Simon Duke, Surrey County Council (Chair)
Paula Gough, Arcadis
Peter Burch, Arcadis
Jonathan Foster-Clark, Atkins
Alex Pye, Atkins
Ben Funning, Surrey County Council
Rachel Fisher, Surrey County Council

In attendance

Iain Lynch, Town Clerk, Farnham Town Council
Clare Kennett, Farnham Town Council

A Zoom meeting of the programme team which was live streamed to Farnham Town Council's Facebook page and promoted as a joint event with Surrey County Council. While the meeting was live, there were 94 comments, it reached 660 people and there were 235 engagements and 8 shares. Within 24 hours it had reached 2,347 people, was shared nine times (including by the Farnham Herald) and had been viewed 893 times.

I. Welcome and opening remarks

Ben Funning introduced the meeting to present key proposals of the draft Optimised Infrastructure Plan (OIP) which was available for consultation until 14 March.

Paula Gough said that in March 2020, the leaders of Surrey County Council (SCC), Waverley Borough Council (WBC), Farnham Town Council (FTC) and Jeremy Hunt MP agreed to create the Farnham Infrastructure Programme. Arcadis then worked with key stakeholders to develop a vision for the programme to address ongoing issues for Farnham and surrounding areas. The first project was to identify short or medium-term interventions and town centre improvements ('quick wins' including improving the pedestrian experience and the walking and cycling network). They had also identified projects for Hickley's Corner junction and the Wrecclesham bypass. Six key principles were identified which were reflected in the vision statement which they consulted on in late 2020. The next step had been the creation of the OIP working with Atkins which was available for consultation until 14 March 2021.

Simon Duke explained the role of consultation in the development of the programme and showed a diagram which indicated the process that was being followed. He said that feedback received on the draft OIP would enable the development of schemes and the creation of a strategic business case which would be available for consultation later in the year.

2. Update from the programme

Jonathan Foster-Clark recommended that people visited the consultation website which provided more information on the presentation slides that would be shown at the meeting. He said that Farnham was a great place to live but it had a town centre that suffered from congestion and associated pollution, a congested dual carriageway splitting the community in two, and narrow roads and pavements in many areas that were unfit for modern use. All the councils had come together to develop the infrastructure programme and the OIP set out thoughts on how they could make transformational change. They had taken into account the vision that was developed in 2020 along with the national and regional policy context to identify four objectives, including rapidly reducing carbon emissions, creating well-connected communities, supporting Farnham's economy and improving quality of place.

2.1 The town centre

Jonathan Foster-Clark said an integrated approach had been applied to developing the OIP, including an integrated town centre strategy; integrated walking routes from new development areas; major improvements to walking and cycling; new public transport hubs; review of bus services; major changes to town centre road layouts; better management of car parking, off-street locations for deliveries; and new freight consolidation centres.

Simon Duke said comments had been submitted on the type of traffic data that was being used about moving in and around Farnham.

Jonathan Foster-Clark said they were using a traffic model based on a range of different data including data from 2019 prior to the pandemic. It provided comprehensive origin and destination data in terms of movements in and across the town and through the town centre. As the data was from before the pandemic, they were monitoring changes during 2020 through the different phases of lockdown. He said 2020 and 2021 had been exceptional and would be subject to ongoing monitoring to ensure the impact of the pandemic was understood.

Simon Duke said questions had been submitted about pedestrianisation and what would happen to all the traffic.

Jonathan Foster-Clark said they were exploring different options which could include reducing the road space available on different streets or introducing bus only streets. For example, for Downing Street one option could be complete pedestrianisation but the challenge was to identify how that would work with the east-west bus routes. As it could be a challenge, they could look at how bus access was maintained on The Borough on the east-west route. The Borough could be converted to allow two-way traffic so that people could connect from the north. Another option on Downing Street could be reducing the number of traffic lanes. Importantly, they would not be looking at completely closing off the town centre because they recognised how people got through the town centre was linked and access to the car parks was essential for supporting the vitality of the town centre. Pedestrianisation would be subject to further technical work, looking at the different options and the views expressed as part of the consultation. They would make sure that any impacts of measures in the town centre were properly addressed across the wider town (for example the relationship with the A287 and Upper Hale Road) to ensure that they did not create adverse and unwanted consequences.

Simon Duke said comments had been made on how Covid had impacted on use of the town, particularly for the future and development of the programme.

Jonathan Foster-Clark said they had been monitoring traffic flows over the last year, as well as looking at how local economies were recovering through national research. He said town centres in

the future needed to provide a wide range of options and facilities to attract people back, for example a high-quality retail, food and drink offer. He said Farnham was in a good place as it had the right ingredient of attractions to bring people back. In terms of future traffic patterns, it was a complex picture as people travelled for different reasons (work, shopping etc). There was no single blueprint for towns across the country and each town was unique, so they needed to look at the data to understand what was going on to develop an approach that was properly tailored to the conditions.

Simon Duke said questions had been submitted about the reliance on cars in Farnham. He said that there may have been some misinformation about the removal of car parking in Farnham. While there had been consideration of a review of car parks in Farnham, all they wanted to do was give people the ability to choose other transport modes if that worked for them.

Jonathan Foster-Clark said a large proportion of trips into the town centre were by car. People walked where they could, but few travelled by bus and cycling. They needed to ensure that good quality alternatives were in place before anything was done to significantly reduce the impact of cars in the town. The last thing they wanted to do was damage the economic viability of the town and so the review of car parking would take care to understand the sources of demand and ensuring effective choices were in place. Different car parks were attractive to different groups of people and they would look at how best to direct people into the town and car parks. A lot of traffic circulated around the one-way gyratory system to access a particular car park, and they would be looking at accessibility to car parks from other directions. They would also look at the best use of land and how to best support the town centre functions, including cycle parking, deliveries and creating a destination for events such as farmers markets.

Jonathan Foster-Clark said that shared space covered a range of different ways of treating road space. One option could be to reduce the dominance of traffic and reduce the amount of space available to vehicles. Many people lived in the town centre who needed places to park their cars, such as Castle Street, and this was important to consider.

Cllr John Neale said the programme was focused on improving the quality of place in the town centre, which was important to support the retail sector, along with some pedestrianisation and a bus service.

2.3. North Farnham

Jonathan Foster-Clark said that potential options for North Farnham included traffic management measures; improved walking and cycling routes; wider pavements and narrower roads; investigating and enhancing bus services and infrastructure; working closely with Hampshire County Council to ensure seamless travel; and initial assessment on potential benefits of a western bypass. An integrated approach would be carried out to ensure that any changes to the town centre did not create adverse consequences for North Farnham. 'Quick wins' would tackle the impacts of HGVs and speeding traffic were being progressed.

Simon Duke said comments had been submitted about the extent of new 20mph zones.

Jonathan Foster-Clark said that further work was taking place and they would develop a comprehensive speed management strategy looking at where 20mph zones could be implemented without physical measures on the road network. There were strict rules from the Department of Transport and SCC about how to do that.

Rachel Fisher said they had looked at the town centre, as well as the wider area including Upper Hale, Heath End and roads coming into the town centre.

Paula Gough said the aim was to roll it out a first phase which would be extended to certain areas based on successes. This was a crucial element and would allow them to analyse how traffic behaviour changed across the town to avoid creating unintended consequences.

Simon Duke said questions had been asked about rat runs and how the programme would deal with these issues.

Jonathan Foster-Clark said traffic modelling was a useful tool to understand where people were travelling to and from, and how different parts of the road network were used. They would look at current data to identify how changes to one part of the network impacted on other areas and how traffic flowed around that. They did not want to create rat runs in local communities.

Cllr John Neale said there was a huge problem in Farnham and roads were not intended for the amount of traffic. It made it difficult to find solutions which were workable for everybody and they would try to provide a better town centre, in terms of place, retail and it being community friendly. They would try to find a balance of solutions to do the things they wanted to achieve without compromising outer areas.

Simon Duke said comments had been submitted on traffic modelling data and people from outer areas using the local road network. Would data be made available and what did they understand about longer distance journeys?

Jonathan Foster-Clark said they had produced a series of diagrams that showed how traffic was moving and this could be made available to the public over the next few months. That data had been used to inform thinking and showed that a large proportion of the traffic was generated within Farnham itself – local people making journeys in their daily lives driven by schools and educational needs, local commuting and shopping trips. In terms of through traffic, there were heavy movements on the A31 which reflected its role as the major route that connected Winchester to Guildford. There were also significant amounts of traffic coming from Borden and Whitehill travelling through Wrecclesham, Hickley's Corner and the Shephard and Flock roundabout. There was traffic coming from the north-west heading towards Farnham as a major destination and beyond towards Guildford, so there was an element of through traffic on the A287 and through Upper Hale. They wanted to encourage more of that traffic to use the strategic network (the M3 and Blackwater Valley route) which was where it belonged.

2.4 South Farnham

Jonathan Foster-Clark said potential options for South Farnham included further studies for Wrecclesham, including investigation for a bypass; improved walking and cycling, further studies of the station area and ways to tackle severance from the town centre; options to reduce traffic using the level crossing; new bus routes and better infrastructure. Quick wins would also be progressed to reduce the impact of speeding traffic.

Simon Duke said questions had been asked about access for pedestrians, cyclists and those with disabilities between South Farnham and the town centre.

Jonathan Foster-Clark said that severance with the A31 was an issue and they had been looking at improved facilities at Hickley's Corner but they also needed to look at options for new crossing facilities. There were also problems on Weydon Lane with heavy traffic heading towards the industrial estate which caused concerns for parents and young children. All of this needed more detailed investigation.

Simon Duke said there were comments about speeding around Wrecclesham and HGV traffic.

Jonathan Foster-Clark said they were working on 'quick wins' to reduce speed in the area. There would be a corridor-wide approach in managing traffic across Wreclesham and reducing the effects of traffic in the village, with traffic chicanes and islands to create a better environment. In some cases, physical measures were required to inform drivers that they are entering an area where vehicles should be more subservient to people.

Rachael Fisher said an initial report had identified problem areas and they were looking at this with feedback from the consultation to develop proposals. They did not want to put in speed limits that were not going to work or put signs up that people continued to ignore. The right measure was needed which would be identified by a detailed approach.

Simon Duke said questions had been asked about access to and from the station and the issues caused by the level crossing.

Jonathan Foster-Clark said a lot was currently happening with the rail industry. Additional rail services to Guildford had created more barrier down time. Network Rail would need to consider how many trains would serve Farnham in the future and there were likely to be changes to journey patterns, including commuting to London, as a result of the pandemic. The programme was looking at developing a better interchange with buses to develop Farnham Station as a hub so that people could get to the station by other means than the car. This would be linked in with proposals for the A31 and Hickley's Corner. They were also investigating the future role of Station Approach as it could play an enhanced role in connecting to the A31 at Hickley's, as well as walking and cycling accessibility.

2.5 A31 Corridor

Jonathan Foster-Clark said more study work was required to assess and develop a programme of improvements including addressing the challenges at Hickley's Corner; full integration with the town centre and South Farnham; junction improvement packages for Coxbridge roundabout, Hickley's Corner, Shephard and Flock roundabout; and improvements at the level crossing. An integrated approach was required to not shift the problems to another area.

Simon Duke said comments had been submitted about what was likely to be developed at Hickley's Corner and was an underpass being considered.

Jonathan Foster-Clark said options for an underpass were still on the table, as well as other proposals. It could offer the best solution, but it needed to be set against the cost and the impact of construction and disruption that the town could face for a couple of years. A balance would need to be made and when the major scheme went ahead, everyone would need to be aware of the implications to the town both in the short and long-term.

2.6 Farnham-wide

Jonathan Foster-Clark said a range of town-wide measures were being proposed to help improve travel choices, including creating of a travel app and introducing car clubs; working with schools to increase walking and cycling; improved footpaths, priority streets and new crossing points; improved paths and cycle parking in the town centre and other key locations; hire or subsidised purchase of e-bikes and e-scooters; piloting and rolling out low traffic neighbourhoods; improved bus stops and services using electric and ultra-low emission buses; and review fares and routes.

Simon Duke said there had been many comments about electrification. He said that WBC were planning to install charging points in car parks as well as providing secure cycle shelters. SCC was working with WBC and FTC to ensure that joined up solutions were put in place. In terms of schools what was being provided for schools around cycling?

Jonathan Foster-Clark said they were working with SCCs School Travel team and schools across Farnham to carry out school travel surveys. It had been difficult to carry this out over the last year given the pandemic, but now that children had returned, they needed to ensure they had an accurate understanding of how children travelled to school. Understanding what the barriers were to walking and cycling was required, whether it was the distance, the practicalities with busy lifestyles, or if it was improvements to infrastructure. Through the Farnham programme, they were hoping to make a significant difference.

Paula Gough said they were committed to learning from communities, including younger people, to improve plans for Farnham and creating something that was fit for everyone. Local knowledge was crucial and could not be found from modelling and assessments.

5. Closing remarks

Jonathan Foster-Clark said that all the comments on the Facebook page would be recorded in the log of comments to be considered as part of the consultation process and the programme development.

Simon Duke thanked everyone for submitting questions and comments and said that interaction would not stop now, and he encouraged people to take part in the consultation. The results would be analysed and taken to the Farnham Board as recommendations later in the year.

Cllr John Neale thanked people for watching and for giving so many comments. He thanked the programme team for their contribution. He asked for people to keep send comments and they would try their best to bring them into the programme.

Meeting closed at 1.30pm