



**FORDINGBRIDGE  
TOWN COUNCIL**

# **STRATEGIC PLAN**

## **2022 – 2025 - 2027**

### **Introduction**

This Strategic Plan provides a framework for Fordingbridge Town Council to continue to work in the best interests of all who live and work in the parish, as well as the many visitors to the town. It sets out the Town Council focus and 'action plan' for the next three to five years.

The Strategic Plan helps to ensure that the Parish Council can take a planned approach on achieving its development priorities; maintaining its existing facilities and services; setting its budgets, prioritising its resources and achieving value for money.

It will be a live document which will be updated regularly, enabling the Council and parishioners to track and monitor its progress against its identified priorities.

The way that the Town Council spends its budget is transparent and available on the website but this Strategy is intended to give parishioners an understanding of what the Council is trying to achieve.

The New Forest District Council Local Plan adopted in 2020 allocates approximately 1500 new houses in Fordingbridge. Such an increase in housing and population means that we must envisage and plan for the impact of such growth and ensure that the necessary services and infrastructure are in place.

This Strategic Plan identifies some key actions and projects that the Council intends to pursue given the issues identified to date and the future planned developments.

### **What has informed the plan**

The Parish Council is here to represent the views of the Parish and to undertake local activities in the best interests of the residents of the Parish. This Strategy should therefore be based on knowledge of the views of residents.

Over the past five years there have been several surveys which give a good indication of the views of residents. In addition, residents frequently make enquiries of the Council, ask questions at meetings and post comments on social media. The following surveys and evidence have informed this Strategy.

- general representations direct to the Council, at meetings and local events

- public consultations
- Neighbourhood Plan evidence gathering

## **Overview of the Town Council**

Fordingbridge Town Council is politically independent and has 12 elected councillors who are accountable to the electors of the town.

They form committees, who are decision making bodies, which set the budget and decide how funds are spent. Council meetings are open to the public with a 15 minute public question time session at the start of each meeting, when the public can raise issues and ask questions. These meetings are usually held in the Town Hall.

During May each year at the Annual Council Meeting, a Council Chairman and Vice Chairman are elected, who also serve as the parish Mayor and Deputy Mayor. The Mayor is the town's First Citizen and its ambassador at public, civic and ceremonial events.

At the same meeting the Council decides on its decision making committee structure as well as the councillor membership and Chairmanship of these committees.

Currently the Council has 8 members of staff and the annual precept for 2022/23 is approximately £285,143. As a Town Council we are the first layer of local government. Our aim is to engage local people and respond to their needs, through representation as community advocates and by providing services such as parks and open spaces.

Fordingbridge Town Council is responsible for the provision and maintenance of our recreation ground, parks, children's play areas, playing fields, allotments and cemeteries at Stuckton and the closed cemetery of St Mary's Church. In addition to the management of these open spaces, we also maintain the Town Hall, Sports Pavilion, Riverside Café and toilets and the War Memorial.

We operate Fordingbridge Information Office which is your local face to face contact point for help and advice on all issues relating to our town. We administer a range of functions on behalf of the New Forest District Council including housing benefit, council tax reduction, waste/recycling, planning, sale of parking clocks and refuse sacks, payment of council tax, council rents and much more. We are a referring agent for Food Bank Vouchers and we also provide visitor information.

The activities the town council is involved in are varied and diverse. We have a range of functions including representative powers and must be notified by the District or County Council of all planning applications in our area, proposals to carry out works and surveys etc. We liaise with relevant authorities regarding infrastructure, policing, community issues and represent the views and needs of the community.

## **Fordingbridge Past Present and Future**

Known as the northern gateway to The New Forest, Fordingbridge, is a small riverside town.

Fordingbridge is recorded in the Domesday Book of 1086 under the name Forde. The River Avon runs through the town which lies 13 miles south of Salisbury. To the east is the New Forest and to the west are the Western Downlands and Cranborne Chase.

The first Great Bridge, from which the town received its present name, was built in mediaeval times prior to 1252. It is built of local stone and has a total of 7 arches spanning the river. Although it has been subject to various works over the years it remains a major feature of the town.

Once an industrial town and commercial centre, Fordingbridge was also noted for its smuggling - the infamous Captain Diamond, the 'Smuggler King' spent much of his time in a local hostelry. During the 16th century, the town was a centre for cloth making.

Since 1982 Fordingbridge has been twinned with Vimoutiers in Normandy. It is also home to Fordingbridge Turks FC, one of the 50 oldest football clubs in England, established circa 1868.

The town enjoys a beautiful park where visitors and locals can take advantage of the river, the children's play area, skate park, secluded memorial gardens and sports playing fields.

A bronze statue of the controversial painter, Augustus John, stands on the banks of the Avon near the Great Bridge. Not far from the High Street is the parish church of St. Mary the Virgin which has some typical Norman characteristics. The Fordingbridge Museum, which houses local history exhibits, and the Information Office are located in King's Yard.

Fordingbridge Hospital is a small community hospital on the site of a Victorian workhouse. Most of the old buildings remain but the inpatient ward is a more recent addition. The town's medical centre is on the same site in Bartons Road

The current population is approximately 6000 people but as already mentioned this has grown as a result of development and is due to substantially increase in the near future as a result of development of a number of strategic sites allocated under the NFDC Local Plan. These sites are identified as Site 16 (Land north of Station Road Site 17 (Land at Whitsbury Road and Site 18 (Land at Burgate)

## **Vision Statement**

*Fordingbridge an active, historic, vibrant market town where people want to live, work, shop, and visit, and enjoy themselves in an attractive natural and historic environment.*

## **Key Themes**

The challenges and issues facing the town are manifold and are reflected in both the responses to surveys and the direct views made known to the Council by residents, local groups and the community as a whole.

The issues and concerns expressed are wide ranging but can be broadly reflected in the following key themes.

- **Transport and Highways**
- **Leisure and Recreation**
- **Natural and Built Environment**

In addition as a responsible authority the Council needs to have due regard to matters concerning its

- **Finance and Governance**

Going forward the Council’s identified Objectives to delivery the Vision for the town will be developed and arranged under these themes along with the actions and projects it intends to take forward and implement.

In the immediate future the Council believes it appropriate to focus on the following key issues and projects especially in the light of the additional housing development envisaged for the town under the New Forest Local Plan.

## **Key Issues and Projects**

### Transport and Highways

Local issues related to traffic and highway matters feature very highly in survey responses and public comment and involve a wide range of concerns including speeding, road safety, traffic through the town, HGV’s, maintenance of roads and footways and parking.

The issues and concerns raised are principally matters for Hampshire County Council to address as Highway Authority, along with New Forest DC as planning authority, however the Town Council has a key role as the “grass roots” authority in influencing the priorities and actions of both these authorities.

The work carried out by the Town Council as part of the evidence gathering for a possible Neighbourhood Plan has demonstrated the need for a holistic approach to the traffic / highway issues facing the town however it is only recently that the higher tier authorities have agreed to allocate resources to enable an Access Strategy for the town to be progressed.

The Town Council intends to continue to use its influence and to work collaboratively with HCC and NFDC in order to work towards identifying and delivering a number of initiatives, actions and projects. Of particularly importance are the following:

- Introduction of a 20 mph speed limit for the main town and surrounding area
- Consideration of additional traffic calming measures
- Improved maintenance of roads and footways
- Improved upkeep and maintenance of public footpaths and bridleways
- Public realm improvements linked to possible extended pedestrian areas

## Leisure and Recreation

The importance of both informal and formal green spaces and recreational facilities is a major contributor to the quality of life for everyone living in the parish.

The importance and value of these areas is confirmed in survey responses and public comment to the Council.

## Recreation Ground

The town's recreation ground is an important open space and recreational asset and has been described as the "jewel in the crown". It is owned and managed by the Town Council and provides together with the adjacent playing fields a wide range of formal / informal leisure and recreational opportunities available to local residents, clubs and visitors alike.

Whilst it currently provides for a wide range of uses and activities the Council believes that there is considerable potential to enhance and expand the leisure and recreational uses and facilities available to the benefit of the community as a whole.

The Council intends to carry out an audit of the recreation ground area as a whole and to identify the potential for new, expanded and enhanced inclusive outdoor and indoor facilities.

Based on the findings a masterplan for the area will be produced and costed.

## Management of new Public Open Spaces and Play Areas

The Local Plan planning policy requirements for the strategic sites allocated for development at Fordingbridge include a common requirement to provide for a linked network of green infrastructure around the town.

The Plan confirms that there is a need for formal open space within the wider Fordingbridge area: two multi-use games areas (MUGA), and an adult and a youth football pitch and that site promoters will need to work together to achieve a suitable overall formal open space framework. Also, that all Fordingbridge area sites will need to contribute proportionately to address their combined formal open space needs. There are also requirements for provision and in-perpetuity maintenance of public open space and natural recreational greenspace for habitat mitigation.

Recent surveys have confirmed a public concern about the long term maintenance of areas of formal public open space and playgrounds provided by developers as part of new developments as well as the management of more natural areas of open space provided in mitigation (ARNG) with the suggestion that the Town Council should take on responsibility.

There are a number of issues to be assessed in considering whether the Council should take on long term management responsibility for all or some of these areas. The Council believes however that that the matter is worthy of further investigation and consideration in order to ensure that these areas are properly maintained in-perpetuity.

The Council intends therefore to carry out an evaluation and costing exercise in order to consider the matter further.

#### Proposed Burgate Hub

The Local Plan planning policy requirements for the strategic site<sup>18</sup> (Land at Burgate) comments that the development should provide a community focal point in a prominent location near the existing adjacent schools including ground floor premises suitable for community use.

Part of the listed main infrastructure requirements for the site are stated to include:

- a football pitch, and a multi-use games area,
- provision and in-perpetuity maintenance of public open space and
- provision of Natural recreational greenspace for habitat mitigation

The Local Plan also comments that this area is near to local schools and to a potential 'village' focal point but is also an area of transition between land interests requiring an integrated and cooperative design approach to create a successful village core area that is framed by surrounding development.

Such a holistic approach is welcomed by the Town Council who will champion collaborative working by the relevant authorities, agencies and landowners. The involvement of Burgate School is considered important to ensure that the potential for beneficially co-located recreational resources is explored along with consideration of dual public use of school facilities.

#### Natural and Built Environment

The wealth of natural and built environment assets existing in the town and wider parish is well documented. The Council believes these need to be both protected and enhanced for the benefit of the whole community and existing and future generations. Collaborative working with statutory agencies and local groups will be important to implement a range of national and local initiatives.

The Council has already agreed to work on and support a number of local environmental projects and provide enabling resources where possible.

In 2008 the Fordingbridge Town Design Statement was formally adopted as Supplementary Planning Guidance by NFDC. The Statement provides a helpful assessment of the town and parish context but is now over 12 years old and would benefit from a review and update. The Town Council will investigate this as a project in consultation with NFDC.

The Council has also agreed to produce a Nature Recovery Plan and a Public Realm Plan. Resources will be allocated to complete these actions.

## Finance and Governance

### Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)

The Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) is a charge on development to address the demands that growth places upon a community. Regulations require New Forest DC as the charging Authority to pass a proportion of CIL collected from developments within the parish to the Town Council. The proportion of the CIL to be forwarded is set at 15%. This would increase to 25% if the parish had adopted a Neighbourhood Development Plan.

CIL receipts can be used by the Town Council to fund the provision, improvement, replacement, operation or maintenance of infrastructure or anything else that is concerned with addressing the demands that development places on the area.

As CIL provides this degree of flexibility in such expenditure and is likely to increase in coming years as a source of funding the Council intends to utilise these funds over the course of the Strategic Plan period to ensure community infrastructure is delivered.

### Other funding sources

The Council will look to utilise a mix of funding sources to support the Strategic Plan priorities and projects and to supplement resources available from Council reserves and CIL. This will include applying for relevant grants, lottery funding and the use of Public Works Loans. The Council will seek to identify and utilise appropriate expertise in such funding sources to maximise opportunities.

## **Monitoring and Reviewing the Plan**

This is the first time the Council has sought to produce a Strategy Plan and this initial version has a concise format and content deliberately focusing on the key themes and areas of concern.

As already stated, it is intended to be a live document which will be updated regularly, keeping it up to date and relevant, and enabling the Council and parishioners to track and monitor progress against identified priorities.

It is envisaged that the Plan will be reviewed at the beginning of every new administrative year with progress on actions and projects reported to Council every 6 months.