

THAME TRAVEL PLAN – A DISCUSSION PAPER

*In association with the Green Living Plan for Thame
Prepared by the RSA THAME GROUP – June 2016*

Introduction

On 17 May 2016 the Thame Town Council Continuity Committee resolved to prepare a composite Thame Travel Plan to assist with an overall approach to travel in and affecting Thame. The Thame Travel Plan is intended to cover a wide range of issues related to travel, transport (in all forms, including walking, cycling and other modes of getting around) together with parking in and affecting the Thame area (as covered by the TNP.) This discussion paper has been prepared by the RSA THAME GROUP (acting as Honorary Consultants to TTC in relation to the Green Living Plan for Thame) to seek to collate the main relevant reports bearing on the subject and to highlight some key issues (including green living issues) to be considered in the creation of a Thame Travel Plan.

Terms and abbreviations used in these notes

OCC = Oxfordshire County Council

OCC Plan = Oxfordshire Local Transport Plan 2010

SODC = South Oxfordshire District Council

TNP = Thame Neighbourhood Plan 2013

TTCC = Thame Town Council Continuity Committee

Background

Thame – Thame is an attractive, historic market town facing the challenge of retaining its vibrancy whilst accommodating substantial additional housing.

Thame Neighbourhood Plan - The Thame Neighbourhood Plan 2013 was formulated and adopted on the basis of an original allocation of 775 new homes. This number has been increased by over [250] windfall units in respect of which planning permission has been given or deemed given [or anticipated.] The TNP is being implemented and reviewed by the TTCC, subject to the terms of the Localism Act. Meanwhile a further allocation is now being requested by the planning authority, SODC, to seek to comply with its own allocation of further new homes for the period to [2032].

Demographics - The 2011 census indicated a population of Thame of 11,561. Current estimates are in the region of [13,000]. Additional housing in the foreseeable future could be expected to bring this figure to some [15,000??], which would be a 30% increase in population over the 2011 figures, presumed to arise mainly due to people relocating to Thame from elsewhere in Britain. Whilst the town has an infrastructure that is broadly able to cope with the current levels (albeit with some strains¹), it is likely to come under increasing strain as population levels rise.

According to the website *ilivehere.co.uk*, and in comparison with the national average, Thame is overall a moderately affluent area, with higher managerial, administrative or professional households, a rather older average age² and residents who consider themselves healthier than the

¹ It might be helpful to indicate where it is felt that there are already strains not mentioned in this paper and which of these might impact the travel plan most.

² 18.1% of 65 or older from the 2011 Census.

norm. This suggests a mostly active and settled population with a substantial (and possibly increasing) older element whose travel and mobility needs should be carefully considered. Thame is at the same time very much an ‘events’ town with large crowds, especially families, regularly turning out for its various celebrations and the several festivals for which Thame is becoming noted.

OXFORDSHIRE LOCAL TRANSPORT PLAN 2010 (OCC Plan) (since renewed)

The key transport and travel issues and recommendations relating to Thame in the OCC Plan are summarised below. The OCC Plan predates the TNP but usefully contains outlines of OCC’s approach to transport, driving, parking, walking and cycling, although certain of the OCC proposals are qualified as being “when resources or opportunities allow”. The text is taken direct from the OCC Plan with RSA comments in italics. See also further notes at end of this section.

1. Roads and traffic

- 1.1 Traffic monitoring should be continued to ensure that the strategic road network, such as Thame bypass, does not develop severe congestion.
- 1.2 Signage could be improved to encourage use of the Thame bypass. (*Note: the changed priorities at Thame Park Rd/ Wenman Road seek to address part of this.*)
- 1.3 Consider (+ assess the costs and benefits of) one-way traffic northbound on Nelson Street with one-way southbound on Rooks Lane (*More urgent now with The Elms development?*)

2. Parking

(Note: The OCC Plan states that Thame has 400 parking spaces: the figure in the TNP is 586.)

- 2.1 Thame needs a ‘joined up car parking strategy’ for the pay and display car parks across the town, long and short stay, with uniform and clear charging regime and opening times.
- 2.2 Parking should be attractive and sufficient for shoppers and visitors and also for town centre employees.
- 2.3 There is need for on-street car parking for those with dwellings fronting the High Street and similar roads (such as North Street).
- 2.4 However, on-street parking itself can add to town centre traffic congestion.
- 2.5 The volume of car parking provision in High Street and Upper High Street also limits the amount of available public space for events. The OCC Plan suggests that the costs and benefits of reducing car parking within the High Street/Upper High Street be evaluated to provide a formal public space for events such as markets, parades and festivals.
- 2.6 Car parking should have better signage/ directions from radial routes.

3 Emissions

- 3.1 The OCC Plan says that low emission vehicle technologies and associated measures over the future will improve general air quality and quality of life across the town. “OCC will continue to support bus operators in further developing low emission fleets for all services in the County.” (*There is no timescale given or any further detail in the Thame section.³*)

4 Walking and footpaths

Thame is a good town for walking but there are drawbacks: -

- 4.1 It can be difficult to cross the road on foot in parts of High Street, Wellington Street, Bell Lane, and Thame Park Road and in some cases parked vehicles add to the problem. New

³ This is especially true given recent publicity on health concerns nationally – see e.g. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2016/apr/27/uk-air-pollution-public-health-emergency-crisis-diesel-cars>.

crossings may be required in these places. (*Similar issues arise elsewhere, such as Oxford Road. The problems can be much more acute at peak traffic periods.*)

- 4.2 Footways between residential areas are not always marked on local maps.
- 4.3 There is need for better walking routes and pedestrian crossings leading to some bus-stops.
- 4.4 There are no or few clear footpaths in N and E Thame around Tythrop Way (A4129) and poor pedestrian access to the rugby club site from either side. (*Or to the show/festival ground.*)
- 4.5 There is no formal footpath along the River Thame (to the north of Thame) or linking the Cuttlebrook [Reserve] to the River Thame.
- 4.6 Where public rights of way meet urban footways and highways, links need to be improved to encourage people to access the countryside and use alternatives to cars. This could include improved road management, road crossings and traffic-free links.

5 *Cycling – proposals*

- 5.1 ‘Audit’ existing cycleways and well-used routes in Thame to plan and develop a high quality cycle network, with a particular focus to improve accessibility to key destinations (Cycle infrastructure to be ‘route and destination based.’)
- 5.2 Proposals should include road cycle lanes, and advanced stop lines across Thame.
- 5.3 These cycleways should connect up safely with roads that are safe [for cyclists] to use.
- 5.4 Retain the existing well-used Phoenix Trail cycleway.
- 5.5 Develop a new all-weather [cycle] route from Thame town centre to Haddenham & Thame Parkway station – linked up to the Phoenix Trail.
- 5.6 Produce better publicity for walking and cycling tracks and routes, both in written and electronic format, linked to other features and routes.
- 5.7 Provide more safe and secure cycle parking at key destinations throughout the town, particularly in the town centre and at employment sites.

6 *Public Transport*

- 6.1 The main town centre bus stops are located in the High Street and Cornmarket, which may be too far or too complex for some to walk. There should be new stop locations.
- 6.2 NE Thame is not served by any bus service, neither are the employment areas to the S of Thame. The OCC Plan suggests working with ‘local bus companies, developers and other partners’ to improve the frequency and, attractiveness of bus routes to centres and employment sites in Oxford and Aylesbury and High Wycombe.
- 6.3 Increase the 280 bus service to the station to 4 buses per hour, in line with the Premium Route Strategy, ensuring all stops along the route are of a high standard and where appropriate real-time information provided. Evening services should be more frequent.
- 6.4 Improve bus access to Oxford with bus lanes, traffic lights, and clearways to reduce delays to bus services and improve reliability with the overall intent to make bus travel more attractive than travel by car.
- 6.5 Improve bus services to local villages in the area.

Comment

The OCC Plan contains some fairly extensive and specific proposals, many of which seem highly desirable and which will ideally be included in the Thame Travel Plan. The big question will however be whether OCC, given increasingly constrained budgets, has the funds for the schemes it has listed and is prepared to allocate them within the timescale of the Thame Travel Plan or, if funds are limited, what funds are available or schemes are to be supported. To the extent that OCC sees such funds as being derived from s106 or CILs revenue it needs to be checked that funds are there and there is no double-counting of funds already provisionally allocated elsewhere. It would seem sensible for early and thorough enquiry to be made of OCC on these issues, and of the attitude of its Highways Dept to expenditure in Thame generally, as this appears to have been very limited of late. Indeed recent years seem to have seen a reduction in transport expenditure and the withdrawal or cutting back of several bus services that the OCC Plan states should be improved.

THAME NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN 2013

The TNP is the core document setting out the strategy for a Thame Travel Plan. Much of the detailed implementation of the TNP remains to be carried out and meanwhile the town continues and will continue to face further challenges not expressly contemplated by the TNP. The following is a high level summary of the main factors mentioned in the TNP regarding travel and transport.

1 Thame to Haddenham station cycleway

- 1.1 The cycleway project is in many ways a separate project, although one seen as key to reducing car use for commuters to the station.
- 1.2 The TNP outlined three possible routes and favoured a route via Scotsgrave Mill. OCC resisted this route, primarily as it crosses a flood plain and is subject to strong legal and practical objections by key landowners.
- 1.3 OCC and Bucks CC then agreed to look at the feasibility of a separated cycle track running alongside the main roads between Thame and the Parkway station ('road route'). With OCC support Bucks CC commissioned Sustrans to prepare a feasibility study for the road route, including implications, surfacing, bridging, signage, maintenance and potential costs.
- 1.4 As at June 2016 the Sustrans report is due to be delivered to Oxon and Bucks imminently. Whilst it is not yet available, RSA Thame Group has attended discussions with its author to understand its likely findings; it is apparent that there is still further feasibility work to do.
- 1.5 Whilst Oxon and Bucks state that 'nothing is ruled in or out', it appears that it would take a great deal of persuasion and evidence to change OCC's view as to the preferred route away from the road route. The road route therefore probably represents the best chance of the cycleway project progressing in even the moderate future.
- 1.6 There are major costs and funding questions and other issues, especially regarding the A418/Tythrop Way roundabout, that affect other parts of the Travel Plan and would need to be resolved before the cycleway project could progress.

2 Overall Travel plan

Where this section picks up similar issues to the OCC Plan the same points are not repeated here.

- 2.1 The High Street forms the backbone of the town, forming a long, linear route running from NW to SE. The 'ring road' is perceived by local people as an 'edge' to the town. (*Note: this perception may now be challenged by new developments outside the ring road.*)
- 2.2 Car parking is a) High Street 170 spaces within the wider parts of the street at the Upper and Lower High Street parking areas b) Cattle Market 126 spaces c) Southern Road 68 spaces d) Waitrose 222 spaces and e) other supermarkets, giving a total of 586 spaces within the town centre. [Free] parking is seen by local people as vital to supporting Thame's shops.
- 2.3 Compared to other towns in South Oxfordshire, bus services and access to them is seen as relatively poor [*and may be about to get poorer.*]
- 2.4 Many of the connections could be better and most cyclists have to use streets to get around.
- 2.5 Public transport should be planned to better meet users' needs and linked through to the station and villages with the intention of improving timetabling and limiting waiting times.
- 2.6 These strategies must be coordinated with the Green Living Plan for Thame.

3 Traffic flows should be planned

- 3.1 through key approach roads and central areas and in and out of new estates
- 3.2 to include traffic calming and 20 mph zones (incl. high street flows)
- 3.3 with better road priorities and signage
- 3.4 with possible one-way and other systems
- 3.5 with possible car sharing encouraged.

4 Car parking

- 4.1 The overall objective is to reduce commuting, congestion and pollution.
- 4.2 Car parking within the town must support the viability of the town centre
- 4.3 A min number of public parking spaces must be preserved on the Cattle Market site.
- 4.4 A parking plan should include Waitrose, street parking, estate parking + parking elsewhere.
- 4.5 New developments should provide parking on site for occupants *and* visitors.

5 Relevant Planning Policies for walking and cycling in Thame

- 5.1 There should be a comprehensive approach to movement that:
 - 5.1.1 reflects the view that Thame is well suited to walking and cycling;
 - 5.1.2 increases support for shops, reduces traffic and makes the town more sustainable;
 - 5.1.3 encourages [safe] walking and cycling and reduces reliance on vehicles.
- 5.2 Specific policies state:
 - 5.2.1 New development (incl. employment sites and windfall housing sites) must provide good pedestrian + cycle connections to the town centre and local destinations;
 - 5.2.2 Existing pedestrian and cycle connections *within* Thame should be improved (e.g. with *internal cycleways and footpaths*) and well-connected to new development sites plus key destinations, for example, schools and other services.
 - 5.2.3 Connections should be improved to surrounding destinations (e.g. use of Phoenix trail and possible westerly extension to Rycote Lane) + new cycle routes to E and N of town.
- 5.3 Good pedestrian and cycle connections [should be]
 - 5.3.1 short and direct
 - 5.3.2 designed as pleasant places to be
 - 5.3.3 overlooked by adjacent building fronts [for sense of security.]

6 Walking and walkways

- 6.1 Perceived 20 minute walking zone (*but consider elderly, disabled, young, shopping etc*)
- 6.2 Footpaths (town) – interconnected through estates and around town
- 6.3 Footpaths (countryside) – ‘audit’ current trails + footpath quality (also cattle, horses etc.)
- 6.4 Riverside walks – sites C, D and F (+ new) – cont’d agricultural use? – linked to other paths
- 6.5 improved signage etc (esp. Lea Park)

7 Recreation areas

- 7.1 Whilst recreation areas themselves are outside the scope of the Travel Plan, access to them must be a key part of such a plan.⁴ .
- 7.2 Accordingly effective and sustainable access should be ensured to at least the following:
 - 7.2.1 The main recreation areas of the Cuttlebrook Nature Reserve, [Church Meadow], Elms Park , Southern Road recreation area, Lea Park – Moats and other green spaces, Lord Williams’s school and facilities
 - 7.2.2 Green spaces on new estates and possible other new green spaces (*Thame has previously been identified as below average in available open green space*)
 - 7.2.3 Agricultural buffer zones / urban ‘breathing spaces’
 - 7.2.4 Playgrounds and play spaces – new estates and generally
 - 7.2.5 Allotments – current and new - and burial spaces
 - 7.2.6 Other green spaces and biodiversity land.

8 Risks

Future works should be carried out so as to minimise (and ideally avoid) major maintenance and any environmental damage, including any increase in noise, air pollution or flooding risk.

⁴ Consideration should also be given to reducing the impact of the relief road, for example for planting more trees and shrubs on adjacent land.

VIBRANCY AND VITALITY STUDY 2016

This report by Miller/ Chris Jones was commissioned by TTC and is dated April 2016, although the final report was delivered slightly later. The authors reviewed many previous plans and reports relating to the town. It is assumed that the relevant parts of these reports are taken into account in the Study recommendations and duplications of previous comments will largely be avoided here.

Summary of some issues from review of existing studies of Thame Town Centre.

- Thame attractive as a 'real' and historic market town with strong independent businesses and a compact town centre.
- Importance of Waitrose (especially) food store in getting people into the town centre through linked trips, with concern over effect of out-of-centre supermarket proposal.
- Threats from Aylesbury's retail offer within the secondary catchment area
- Need to improve range of comparison goods stores - specifically clothing and footwear – and need for a wider range of cafes, restaurants and bars.
- Importance of weekly market (strong and loyal customer base estimated to attract around 1,000 visitors per day with many regulars) and farmers' market.
- Poor car park information and signage and parking issues on market days.
- Proposals for a town square or focal point in the centre of the town, upgrades to shop fronts, improving cycling facilities, coordinating marketing and promotion, investment in the market, and enhancing the town's on-line presence.

Arrival and Parking – key issues

- Car parking facilities are important in attracting visitors and shoppers to a town centre.
- [Visitors need to] have the confidence that they will be able to find conveniently located, available and low cost / good value for money parking. Otherwise they may choose to visit elsewhere [as] most *out-of-town* shopping centres provide free car parking within close proximity to the shopping attractions.
- Signage should be improved.
- Survey findings indicate that the need to ensure parking is available and accessible to all town centre users was the second highest priority for Thame Town Centre.
- Problems from [lack of] traffic wardens to enforce parking restrictions across the town.
- Shortage of daily parking spaces for individuals who commute to work in the town centre.

Other travel issues highlighted

- The potential traffic implications of an out-of-centre supermarket.
- Linkages to street crossings for pedestrians, such as a) on the High Street; whilst a light controlled crossing is provided, town centre users still cross the road at uncontrolled points; and b) the mini roundabout junction of North Street, Upper High Street, Cornmarket and Rooks Lane, where pedestrians meet cars manoeuvring around this junction.

SOME OVERALL CHALLENGES FOR A THAME TRAVEL PLAN

The Travel Plan is an ambitious project for many reasons, and many of the objectives set out in the various plans and reports mentioned above have other issues or choices to be made. Here are some.

1. *Town centre traffic versus congestion and air quality*

As the Vibrancy Report has evidenced, the core of the town is its High Street and fundamental to the town's future is maintaining the vibrancy and vitality of the central areas. This means that shoppers and consumers need to be continually encouraged to visit the central areas and spend time there. Many will walk and some will cycle there but others, especially from and outside the periphery of the town, will drive and expect to park close by. The town's future may depend on these people being able to spend time in the centre (and contribute to its revenue) without feeling unduly constrained by parking or similar limitations or expense.

However, more people driving to the town centre will create additional traffic and the need for more parking. This is in turn liable to cause greater congestion, more risk of accidents and to reduce air quality in the town centre, possibly to an unhealthy level, as has happened in other SODC area towns.⁵ Air quality is a key feature of sustainability, one of the fundamentals of the TNP and the Green Living Plan. A way therefore needs to be sought to balance these conflicting objectives.

2. *Traffic flows through the town centre and the relief road*

Traffic through the centre of Thame comes not just from those who wish to use the town centre facilities but also from those using the centre to get from one side of the town to another. Indeed one effect of the TNP site allocations is to have substantial new housing areas on each side of the town - from the Oxford Road at one end to the Wenman Road area at the other. Broadly traffic from these areas has the choice of using the relief road or the town centre.

The relief road is longer in length (being in a semi-circle) and navigation is affected by a number of increasingly busy roundabouts. The more built-up the area round the relief road, quite possibly the site of further developments in the future, the more drivers will seek cut-throughs, which will involve the town centre or roads close to it. Similarly, more crossings (as are needed and recommended in the OCC Plan) may – unless bridges or tunnels are used - cause delays which will further discourage drivers from using the relief road.

There will be even more of a tendency for drivers to pass through the town centre when heading from the new estates in the south of the town to the Oxford Road or Rycote Lane to the west. Here there is of course no relief road and use of the eastern loop would add considerably to the journey length. It is assumed⁶ that there are no plans (and will be no budget) in the foreseeable future (if at all) for the relief road to be extended to become a full ring road round the town (a project which would itself be likely to generate considerable debate and opposition).

⁵ See attached air quality notes. Note also that Aylesbury Road has recently exceeded 'safe' air quality levels, presumably because of backed-up traffic approaching the roundabout at peak times.

⁶ There is no indication in the OCC Local Transport Plan that any extension of the relief road is contemplated.

If so, the issue of the increased traffic flows through the town, especially from the new estates around Thame Park Road and Wenman Road, is a major consideration.

From the south the problem is accentuated by the narrow access to the centre through Park Street, which has a fuel station, on-street residential parking, a school (with crossing) and a new development planned for older people. If however motorists are to be encouraged to use the 'long' route round the relief road, efforts need to be made to keep traffic flowing without blocking exits from the other access points on to the three busy roundabouts on that section.

More controversially perhaps is the possibility of the central High Street area becoming pedestrianised – perhaps available to through traffic only at certain limited times a day. This might help with the problem of through traffic and could create space for the type of pavement café/ public events space recommended in the Vibrancy Report. This change would of course have other implications, including the need for effective traffic flows elsewhere (and increased need for crossings etc.) and adequate parking to be available from either side of the pedestrianised area.

3. *Parking*

Parking is probably the issue of most current concern to Thame residents after (and partly because of) increased housing allocations. It is highlighted in all reports and plans. The Vibrancy Report emphasises the fact that the ongoing vitality of the town centre will to some extent depend on the ready availability of car parking for those wishing to use it. Reports have also drawn attention to the need for better signage and directions to parking areas.

Recent council-led research⁷ has indicated that there is in fact sufficient parking at present in the town overall except on market days (Tuesdays) when the loss of the market place parking does create a shortage. However, it is expected that parking facilities will become insufficient as new estates are completed and occupied and more people use the town centre. In any case there are already some problem areas, such as:

- a. *Unauthorised parking* (exacerbated by lack of available wardens or other enforcement) – overstaying time limits and misuse of single and double yellow lines, congestion and etc.
- b. *Lack of residents' parking spaces* – e.g. for High Street properties and elsewhere
- c. *Priest End and other roads becoming additional car parks* – deterring casual visitors and creating problems for those using the church and churchyard.
- d. *Illegal parking by fast food outlets* – impact on neighbours, obstruction of pedestrian crossing, safety issues arising etc.

There are further complicating factors, including:

- The different ownerships and control of the central parking areas;
- Different rules and payment arrangements for different areas;
- The threat to the Cattle Market site if SODC goes ahead with its planned disposal (it being a major plank of the TNP that the number of parking spaces available there should not be reduced);
- The lack of adequate warden control (largely for financial reasons?)

⁷ Details?

What other options exists? The following may be some possibilities appropriate to consider:

- *Land* - What, if any, other land close to the town centre – in public or private ownership – might be available for car parking?
- *Multi-story parking* - Could multi-storey parking be considered – e.g. at the Cattle Market site or at the rear of the Co-operative? (Building costs would no doubt have to be passed on in parking charges.)
- *Park & Ride* - Is park and ride viable for Thame? What land might be available and how would a park and ride bus service operate?
- *Hopper buses/taxis* - Could alternative transport be used for those who live in or around Thame and currently drive in to the town? One possibility might be one or more small electric buses (or smart taxis) plying regularly between key areas and the town centre.
- *Shopping bags* - Many people who carry out a large shop are unable or unwilling to carry heavy bags home themselves. Could the central supermarkets and shops carry out more deliveries for their customers on a basis that would work? (But see 4 below.)
- *Car sharing and private taxis* – There are various schemes used elsewhere which might usefully be explored.
- *Parking swaps* – The AirBnB style approach to lettings has extended to the hire of private parking spaces. Might it be possible for those working away from home to hire out their home driveways to those commuting in to Thame to work?
- *Bike schemes* – Could the so-called Boris bikes be viable for Thame/South Oxon?
- *Phoenix Trail* - Could the Phoenix Trail be more effectively used whilst retaining its prime use as a footpath/ cycle route?
- *Electric bikes* - Do electric bikes have a future in this respect?

The cost of parking – Ideally of course shoppers and others using the centre would prefer to park for free, at least for a limited period, and can generally do so – for an hour, 2 hours or even 3 hours. This is seen as a great benefit that Thame offers and certainly is seen to encourage ‘linked shopping’ – as with the Waitrose car park. Other towns do charge; in some cases use of supermarket car parks can be offset by minimum spend levels there, as with Henley. It should be considered as to whether paid-for parking, possibly at modest levels, would have any effect on visitor numbers or spend in the centre, and no doubt there are studies elsewhere on this.

4. *Delivery traffic*

What is the impact of traffic delivering to households? The steady take-up off online shopping has produced a major increase in deliveries, many by private contractors additional to traditional Post Office rounds. How significant is this or is this likely to be in Thame? The idea has been proposed in some areas to have a delivery hub close to (but perhaps slightly outside the centre) where deliveries would go and people would pick up from (c.f. the Waitrose/ John Lewis ‘click and collect’ system.)

5. *Public and community transport options and funding*

Private cars are funded by those owning or hiring them whereas public or community transport involves a greater or lesser degree of investment, possibly supported by payment of fares and/or council tax derived revenue contribution. Fares are themselves variable to the extent that travel concessions such as student or older persons’ concessions are available. So if people are to reduce the use of their own cars they will look at what additional costs they may incur as well as the effect of any subsidies on their council tax or other payments. Investment will be required

to set up the infrastructure, including road or route improvements and purchase of transport vehicles themselves, as well as their running and maintenance. How are those costs to be balanced against likely usage and public acceptance?

6. *Thame and its outlying communities*

Thame is, for many living outside the town, whether from larger areas such as Haddenham and Chinnor or from one of the many smaller communities around, the centre to which they look for many of their services. The ongoing involvement and support of these out-of-town residents is seen as important for the economic health and vibrancy of Thame itself. This raises not just the direct costs of encouraging infrastructure to support regular visits to Thame but broader issues as to the financial contribution that such areas may or should make, through future CILS or other funding or direct contribution to, for example, bus services for those outlying communities.

At the same time these outlying areas face major challenges of their own in terms of suggested housing allocations which may directly and indirectly affect Thame. For example the addition of large numbers of new homes in Chinnor and Haddenham, as well as Long Crendon, will give both opportunities and threats to Thame to the extent that these new homes are not supported by additional infrastructure in those locations. There will be potential new customers for Thame shops and leisure facilities but also new demands on travel between locations and on social services such as schools, medical and dental. All this will come at a time when local bus service are being withdrawn or are under risk of major reduction. If the relevant planning authorities (SODC and AVDC) assume that Thame will ‘take up the slack’ in these areas this needs to be planned for well in advance, suitable plans made and contributions sought for the additional infrastructure required in Thame.

7. *Supporting local employment and the implications for housing and travel*

Theoretically ‘sustainable’ development in Thame assumes homes following jobs. Thame wishes to support and encourage its businesses to keep the town active at all levels. New and expanding businesses, however, need more employees and bigger premises (as has been recently seen). These new employees must either come from the existing population, for example by drawing in Thame residents who currently work elsewhere, or by attracting new residents to the town, or by encouraging those who live elsewhere to work in Thame.⁸

To the extent that those commuting into the town by car exceed the number of Thame residents working there, there will be a corresponding increased traffic and parking issues. The same may also apply if those who live and work in Thame use their vehicles to get to and from work or to travel from Thame on business. Likewise business growth may also drive greater housing demand – and possibly the justification for further housing allocation.

8. *Thame as a by-pass*

Many people use the Oxford-Aylesbury roads to bypass the town, which saves pressure on the town centre but adds to congestion on these roads. The key areas here are the two roundabouts at either end of the very fast by-pass between Oxford Road and Aylesbury Road. These can already be highly challenging for motorists at busy times, with long tailbacks at peak

⁸ At least one growing technology business in the town employs people who commute from London, for whom the planned Haddenham and Thame cycleway cannot come too soon.

periods. They are also extremely difficult for cyclists and pedestrians to cross safely. The intensity will be affected by the other factors listed and also by potential HS2 construction traffic which may be routed around the town and down the Princes Risborough road with likely material implications for all.⁹

The Aylesbury Road roundabout is a major issue to be overcome in relation to the proposed Thame- Haddenham Cycleway. The Sustrans report will highlight this and seems likely to suggest a major reconfiguration of the roundabout, which will add to costs but may also give opportunities to manage traffic flows better. (Alternatives for the cycleway might be a) a short diversion to cross close to the football ground and enter Thame through the rear roads running towards the Cattle Market or b) a route to the old Aylesbury Road and bridge and via Priestend up to the Oxford Road. This latter would potentially also link to the Phoenix Trail but would mean the need for either a crossing of the Aylesbury Road roundabout or crossing the Aylesbury Road itself and then the bypass itself.)

9. *Cycling and walking routes*

These are fundamental concerns of the TNP and the other plans referred to above. A separate work stream covers the proposed cycleway from Haddenham & Thame station, a key TNP objective (see above.) There exists also the aim to link this cycle route to the existing Phoenix trail and to develop cycling as a major leisure and commuter activity in and across the town. Both the OCC Plan and the TNP have many references to improvements that might be made in this respect, all of which fall to be considered and ideally implemented in the Travel Plan.

Likewise, although Thame has a number of footpaths, these are for the most part not linked so as to provide a longer recreational route through and around the town. An objective could be to create in the course of this plan a protected circular route through the countryside around but close to Thame with a series of linking paths. This would give health and vitality benefits for all ages as well as making Thame an even more attractive place to live and work. The proposed connected riverside and other walks through several of the developments currently planned or in course of construction are also key to achieving this overall objective.

10. *School travel*¹⁰

Travel to, from and between schools is nowadays a major factor in vehicle and people movement, which can generate intense levels of traffic and stand-by parking for brief periods of time. The area around Lord Williams's Upper School will be especially problematic once the Site F development is fully in use (with the possibility of extensions there in the future.) Obviously much will depend on whether the two parts of Lord Williams's school will come together. If so, the best vehicle approach should form part of the Travel Plan with suitable drop-off areas. If not, better ways of people moving between the two sites should be considered. The same consideration applies to school sports and other school-linked leisure facilities.

In any event it should be that school pupils above a certain age should be the most capable in the community of getting themselves to and from school without cars. Options here should be

⁹ It is understood in fact that West Wycombe was able to divert HS2 construction traffic away from its area. However HS2 funding may be available to improve sections affected by the construction works.

¹⁰ OCC refers to Thame schools each having a travel plan. It would be helpful to look at these as part of this project.

carefully considered. Likely factors here are a) walking distance (it does seem that many pupils do walk) b) suitability of walking routes – can these be improved? c) safety (especially keeping cyclists off busy roads) d) suitable bike storage at the schools; e) availability and timing of bus transport f) cycle events and workshops and g) other alternatives in adverse weather.

11. The disabled and impaired

With an ageing population, the need for wheelchair space and the increasing of mobility and other vehicles, roadways and walkways need to allow for multiple possible uses, needing a careful balance between the different users.

12. Road crossings (and the impact on traffic)

The OCC Plan suggests a number of additional crossings without much further detail. All plans emphasise the need for a good linkage between walking routes, including suitable crossings at intersections. The Travel Plan should indicate where these routes and crossings could run and possible priorities if their introduction needs to be phased. These routes should be planned strategically along with other elements of the Travel Plan. At the same time the impact on traffic flows should be taken into account and balanced against the Travel Plan objectives.

13. Air quality and potential reactions

The Travel Plan should take account the critical issue of air quality and the impact on health. Thame is currently marginally affected by the issue, but this seems likely to change, especially if traffic in and through the town centre continues to rise. There are steps being taken with regard to electric vehicles etc and the increase in stop-start technology in cars, but there are also some short-term actions available such as banning the running of engines in stationary vehicles in a defined area of the town centre. Another aspect is keeping traffic moving, but at a slower speed. Part of this is changing drivers' habits. The uptake of electric vehicles and increasingly popular electric bikes may benefit from provision of facilities such as charging points.

Some valuable research has already been done and is continuing on this issue in relation to other towns in South Oxfordshire. Thame is in a position to learn and benefit from this research. The issue is discussed in a little more detail in the paper - *Air quality and monitoring* – a note from the RSA Thame Group – Feb 2016. This is attached as an appendix to these discussion notes.

14. Publicity and awareness raising

Traffic and travel are subjects on which everyone is liable to have an opinion. What is important is that opinions are as well informed as possible *before* a thorough debate takes place, so that the debate is in turn informed by a realistic analysis of options available. There will be some tough choices to be made. Expectations (and fears) may run high, but we now have the opportunity to secure real long-term benefits for Thame, its people and the future!

Prepared by the RSA THAME GROUP (ChB) – June 2016