



**THAME NEIGHBOURHOOD
PLAN REVIEW
CHARACTER AREA STUDY**

July 2021





PREPARED ON BEHALF OF:

Thame Town Council

Neighbourhood Plan Review – Character Area Study

July 2021



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Introduction

This Character Area Study has been undertaken to support the development of the Thame Neighbourhood Plan.

The study begins by plotting the growth and development of Thame over time. By comparing historical maps of the area it allows us to understand the scale and intensity of development in Thame over time. It also helps form the context for which the Character Area Study is situated within.

This study then identifies the distinctive areas of character within Thame and draws out the characteristic features of each of them. The study forms part of the evidence base to the Neighbourhood Plan, informing policies which seek to shape development in such a way that it positively responds to and enhances local character.

The study looks in detail at eight character areas within Thame. The character areas identified are listed below and mapped on Figure 1:

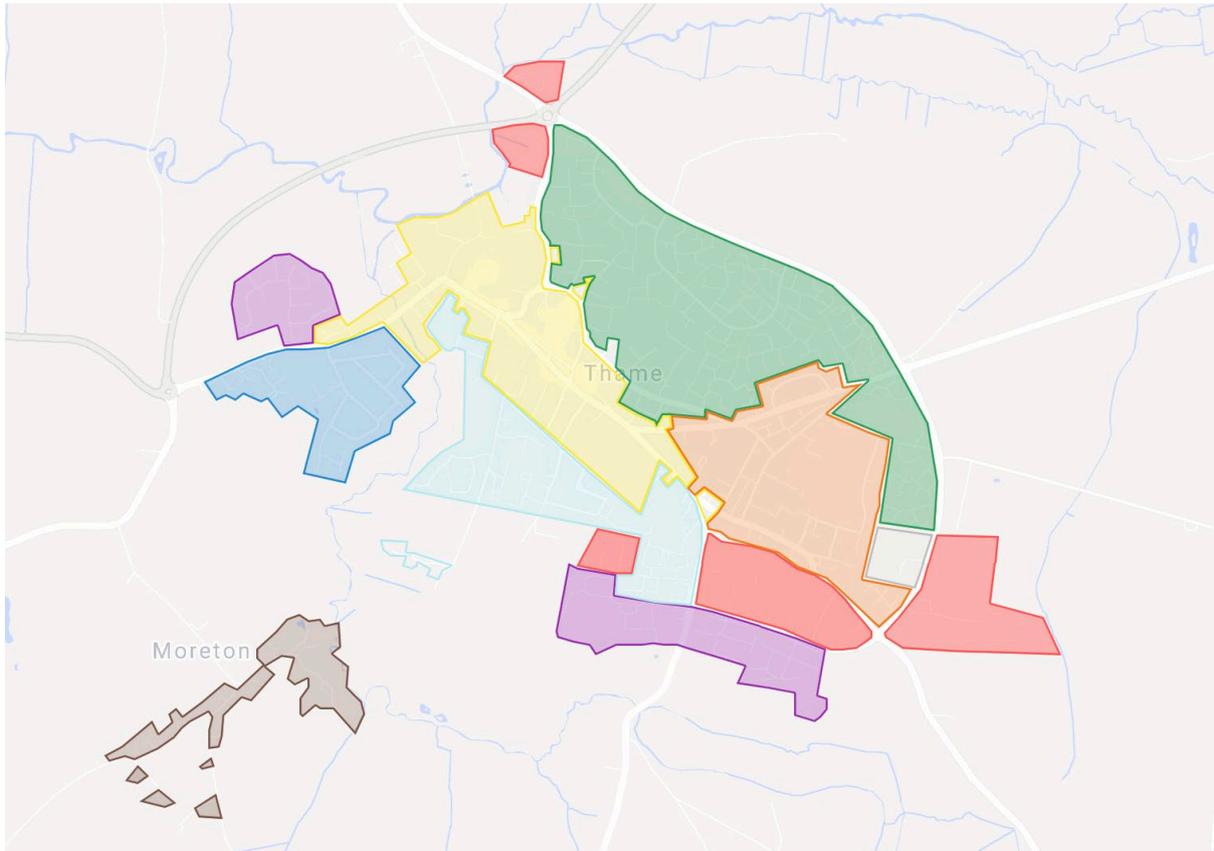
- 1. Historic Core**
- 2. Lea Park**
- 3. Southern Thame**
- 4. Chiltern Vale**
- 5. Moreton Village**
- 6. East Thame**
- 7. Post 2013**
- 8. Employment Area**

The identification of the character areas reflects those presented in the made Thame Neighbourhood Plan, with some minor amendments to reflect development that has taken place since the Neighbourhood Plan was made (2013). These include new areas of housing to the south and north west of Thame and changes to areas of employment in the south east of Thame. The East Road character area has also been subdivided to more accurately reflect different forms of development present that area.

For each character area a summary table of defining features has been presented, as well as a set of 'positive character features' for each area. These are the features which should inform and guide development so as to enhance these attributes.

The study also identifies the risks to character in each of the areas as well as opportunities to enhance the character. Development should respond to risks and opportunities in order to improve general character within its immediate context.

Furthermore, the report presents the ten characteristics of well-designed places as established in Planning Practice Guidance and how these might be responded to in Thame.



-  Chiltern Vale
-  Lea Park
-  Post 2013
-  East Thame
-  Southern Thame
-  Moreton
-  Historic Core
-  Site subject to development
-  Employment

Figure 1 – Thame Character Areas – Source: Map data © 2021 Google

Growth and development of Thame

The original focus of development in Thame was around St. Mary's Church. In the early thirteenth century, the then Bishop of Lincoln, as lord of the manor, decided to grow and expand Thame. The Bishop's plans resulted in development occurring eastwards of St. Mary's Church, and eventually produced what is now recognised as the historic core of Thame. This area is characterised by Thame's famous wide High Street. The original open space, with its angled sides, was deliberately constructed to accommodate the market.

Further development was minimal until the nineteenth century, when Thame witnessed the construction of East Street, with terraced houses used to accommodate agricultural workers moving to the town from the countryside. Grand buildings were erected along the high street, including the iconic Town Hall. When the railway came to Thame in the 1860s, a station was built in the expanding eastern part of the town. However, the railway line was closed in the 1960's as a result of the Beeching cuts, after 100 years in operation. Today, the route of the railway line is used as a popular cycling and walking route, known as the Phoenix Trail.

Despite the lack of an immediate railway line, demand to live in Thame continued to grow into the late 20th century. In the 1970's, the Lea Park housing estate was built, north of the town. Development also occurred to the south and east of Thame's historic centre. Up until this point the western extent of Thame was defined by the Cuttle Brook. However, in the latter part of the twentieth century, development extending from Oxford Road to the west of Thame resulted in the town breaching the Cuttle Brook. The Cuttle Brook and associated space now form an important green lung for the town, providing a north south link to countryside either side of the built-up area.

The growth of Thame has continued over the last decade, with new areas of housing developed to the south along Wenman Road and to the north west along Oxford Road. Tythorp Way together with the A418 effectively define the extent of the current urban area of Thame.

Moreton and Towersey are both small villages in close proximity to Thame. These both have a long history and, despite their proximity to Thame, have retained their separate identity as smaller, free-standing settlements.

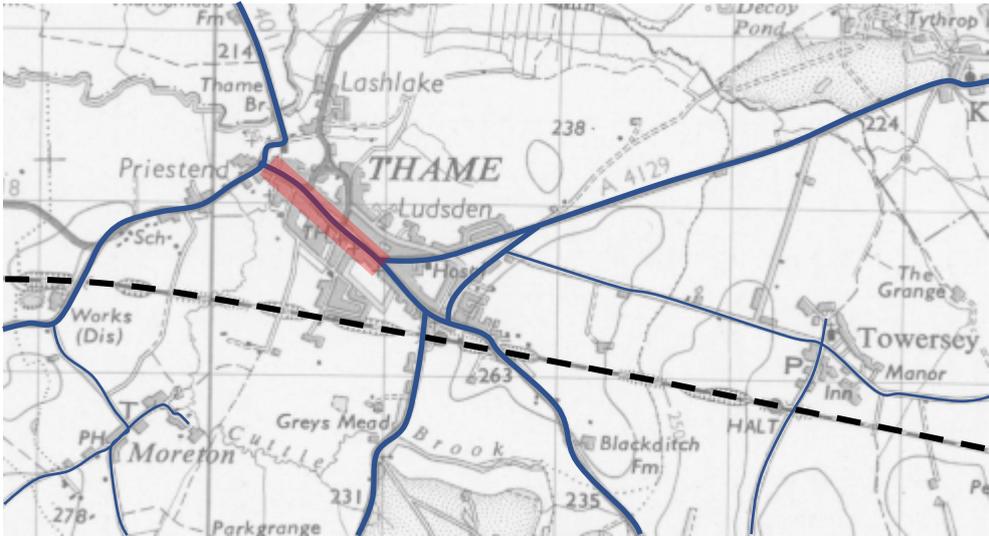
Plans illustrating the growth of Thame are presented overleaf, with key 'structuring features', such as the High Street, other key roads and the route of the railway (now the Phoenix Trail) indicated.



OS One Inch 1895-1900 (Source: National Library of Scotland)



OS 1:25,000 Outline c.1948 (Source: National Library of Scotland)



OS One Inch 7th series map, 1955-61 (Source: National Library of Scotland)



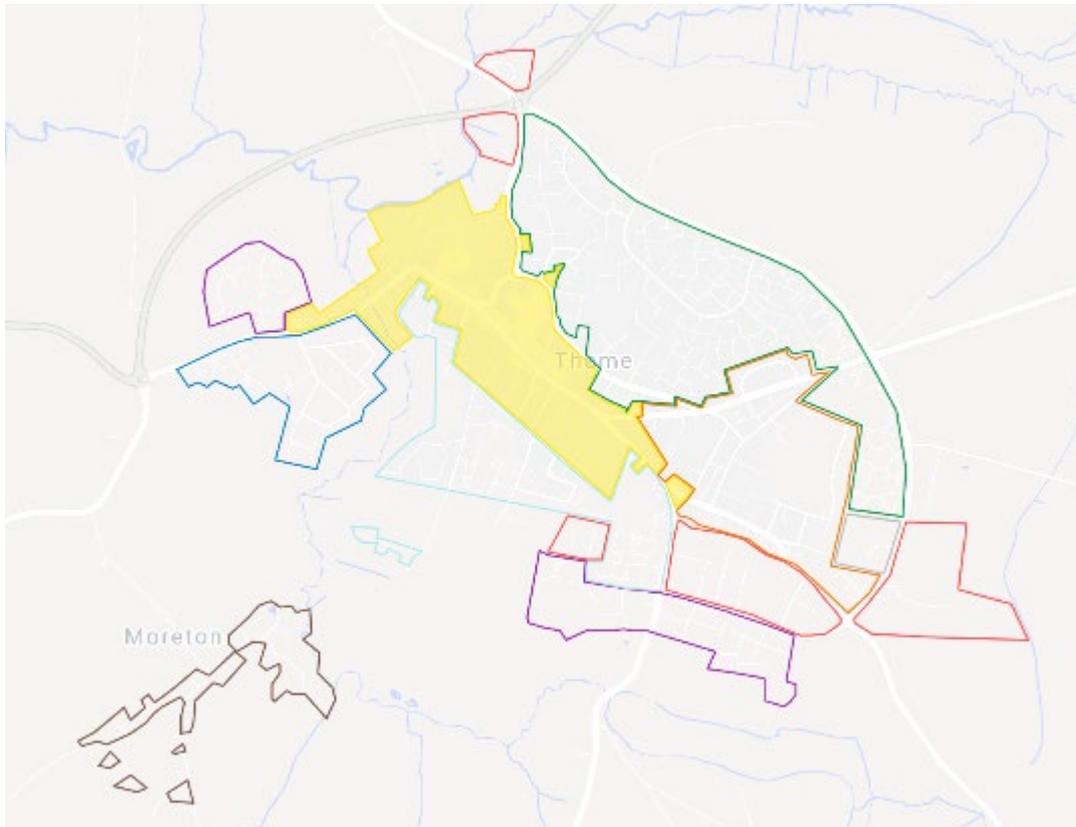
Ordnance Survey c.1980s (Source: National Library of Scotland)



Present day Thame (2021) (Source: Google Earth)

Area 1: Historic Core - Thame Conservation Area

This character area makes the most significant contribution to the character of Thame as a whole. It covers the Town Centre and retains much of the original twelfth century planned form, with a broad main street that widens out into a long marketplace and is lined with burgage plots. Thame has over 200 listed buildings, and most of them are within the Conservation Area.



Historic Core Character Area



Aerial View (Source: Map data © 2021 Google)

Key characteristics of the area:

Land Use	This area has a variety of land uses, with the high street including a variety of retail, commercial, and hospitality uses, while the wider area includes both residential and office use.
Pattern of Development	The key parts of the Historic Core are the main High Street and the lower end of the High Street, as well as a more rural area to the west which includes the grounds of St. Mary's Church and parts of Cuttle Brook. The area around the Church is Anglo Saxon and is the earliest part of the town. The High Street is a product of speculative development by the 13 th Century Bishop of Lincoln. The Historic core also contains Elms Park, a large green space. Most shopfronts in the area date from the 19th century and although they have often been inserted into earlier buildings they have become part of the established character of the town. There are also some seventeenth century houses in the Upper High Street.
Building Line/ Plot Arrangement	The dominant character of the main High St. is its broad, open aspect with the facades of buildings forming an unbroken front uniformly on both sides. Throughout the area, buildings are set back against the pavement, with no front garden area.
Boundary Treatment	Most boundaries in the conservation area are defined by brick or stone walls, with trees, hedging and timber fencing being more prevalent in the residential areas outside the town centre.
Heights and Roofline	While buildings do not exceed three storeys in height, there are several unique rooflines on the high street (see Picture 1) which add to the special character of the area. More commonly found is a mixture of flat and gabled roofs.
Public Realm	Cuttle Brook as well as St. Mary's Church grounds provide open space and make up a rural feel towards the west of the site. The cricket pitch forms the backdrop to and provides views across to the Church. To the east Elms Park, tucked away behind a row of buildings, provides green space for the area. The wide High Street, used for holding markets, is more regularly used for car parking.

Positive Character Features

- The western edge of the area maintains a fairly rural feel due to St. Mary's Church and land surrounding Cuttle Brook
- The principal building materials found in the area are stone, brick, thatch, tile and timber framing, lending the town centre a traditional feel. Buildings were traditionally timber framed, with brick frontages added in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.
- There are a variety of heights and facades of buildings along the main High Street. Buildings consist of a mixture of flat and gabled roofs. Subtle changes in height and materials create visual interest.
- The dominant historic character of the lower part (western end) of the High St. is of two storey houses, singly or in small groups, built onto the pavement edge and with no front gardens.

- In the lower part of the High Street several thatch and timber framed buildings can be seen including no. 69, The Six Bells, The Old Trout and The Cruke, whilst the street frontage of no. 78 (The Brewer's House) is distinguished by the fine chequered brickwork.
- The dominant character of the main High St. is its broad, open aspect with the facades of buildings forming an unbroken front uniformly on both sides. The strong delineations of burgage plots, with trees / gardens are still notable.
- This area has a distinct character about it which sets it apart from the rest of the town.
- The area around the Church and Churchyard maintain a rural feel, helped by the cricket pitch and other historic properties and their curtilages.
- Paved courtyards, glimpsed through narrow openings in the street frontages are a characteristic feature of the town.
- The roofscape is also particularly important, with handmade clay tiles, laid on steeply pitched roofs, being an important local feature characterised by a mixture of narrow and wide streets, with long terraces of varied brick or timber-frame properties on either side

Risks to character

- There is a large amount of surface level parking, particularly along the High Street, which detracts from the historic character of the area. Traffic, and pollution, represent a risk to the quality and attractiveness of the High Street area.
- The offices along Oxford Road contrast with the character of rest of the area
- Although there is green/open space in the area, it is tucked away behind buildings and entrances do not stand out. There is also a lack of greenery on the High Street.
- There is a lack of cycle/pedestrian friendly infrastructure, with the High Street in particular being car-dominated.
- In Nelson St. the forecourt of the fire station is especially noticeable as a hard-surfaced area; trees and shrubs planted on the adjacent roadside could help to soften this.

Opportunities

- Improved greenspace legibility (Elms Park)
- Potential to improve the quality of the public realm, walking and cycling infrastructure. Opportunities include:
 - The greening public spaces.
 - Rationalising street furniture which creates visual clutter in places and can obstruct pedestrian movement.
 - Utilise a consistent palette of high quality materials along primary streets in the areas and at key junctions, creating uniformity across the area.
 - Creating new places for people to sit and relax.
 - Slowing traffic, potentially through implantation of a 20mph scheme.
 - Explore solutions to parking that help reduce queuing and idling.



On street parking (Source: Google StreetView)



Varied heights and types of frontages on buildings along the High Street (Source: Google StreetView)



Residential Properties in the area tend to be made up of exposed brick, terraced properties with no protruding features, on account of their proximity to the pavement. (Source: Google StreetView)



Thame Town Hall is an important local landmark on the High Street (Source: Google StreetView)



Several buildings are of timber-frame design and construction (Source: Google StreetView)



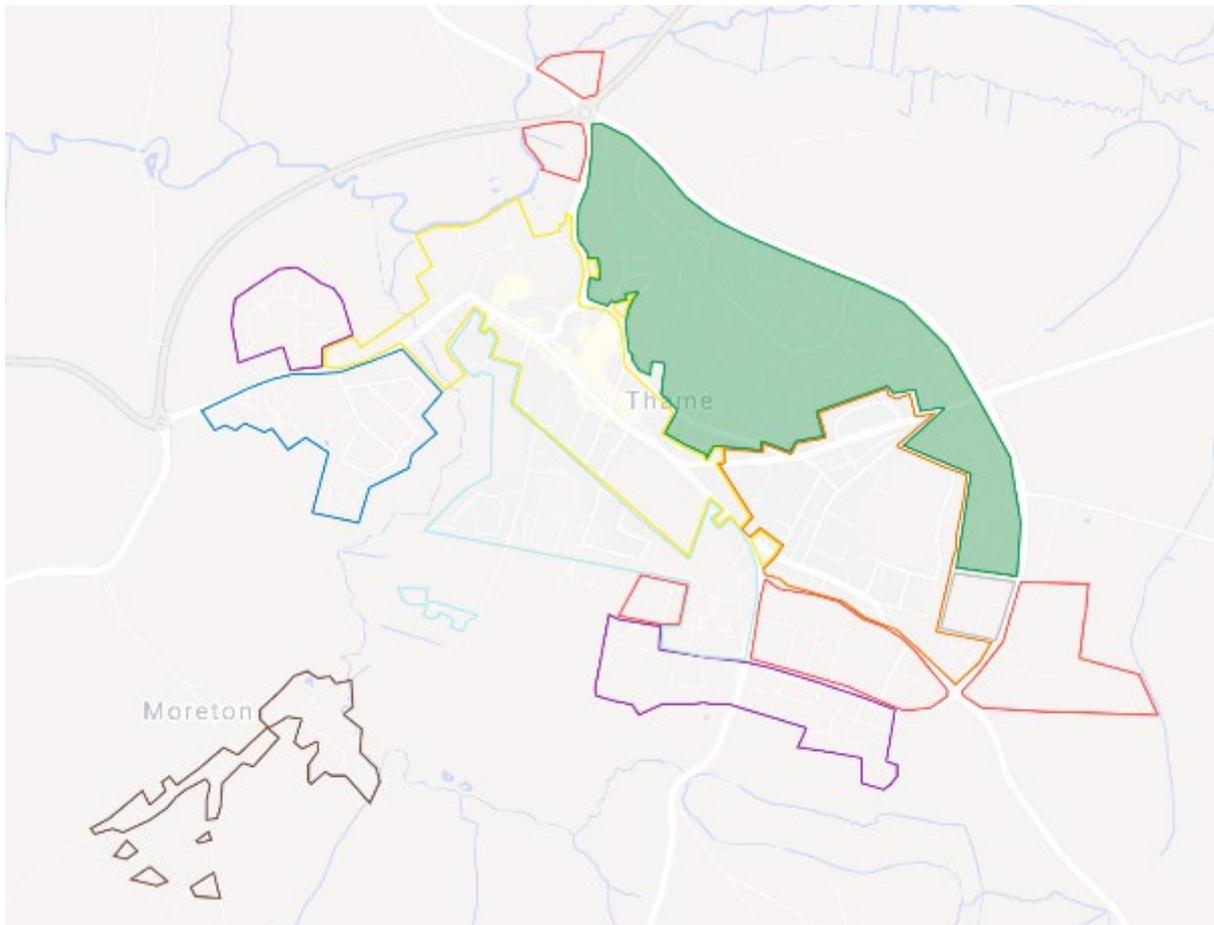
St Mary's Church (Source: Google StreetView)



Offices along Oxford Road contrast with the rest of the historic centre (Source: Google StreetView)

Area 2: Lea Park

This is a large residential area to the north of the historic core. It was developed rapidly, mainly in the 1970s, and is characterised by a cul-de-sac layout with pockets of green space. Dwellings are two storeys, and mainly semi-detached or terraced.



Lea Park Character Area



Aerial view of Lea Park showing the cul-de-sac layout (Source: Map data © 2021 Google)

Key characteristics of the area:

Land Use	The area consists of residential properties in a cul-de-sac layout
Pattern of Development	There are a number of 1970s properties, featuring brick and white weatherboarding. Later housing is primarily of brick construction with some detailing in dark timber. Homes are a mix of detached, semi-detached, bungalows and terraced, and notably all feature gabled roofs. There are pockets of green spaces dotted amongst the estate, with a large open space located towards the NW of the site, bordering Tythrop Way. Area includes the Barley Hill Primary school.
Building Line/ Plot Arrangement	Buildings are generally setback from the pavement with most properties benefitting from a generous front garden. A large number of gardens have been paved over and converted for use as car parking.
Boundary Treatment	Often gardens are open to the street and do not normally benefit from any form of boundary walls or treatment. In many cases front gardens have been paved over to create hard standing for off-street parking. Back gardens are bordered by brick walls where they are adjacent to a street, and by fences to separate against other gardens.
Heights and Roofline	Homes in the area do not generally exceed two storeys in height. There are a mix of property types but most have pitched roofs.
Public Realm	There are a number of alleyways connecting roads. The large greenspace towards the north of the site is the most significant open space in the area, but there are a number of other smaller, amenity spaces within the area. These generally comprise mown grass and present areas for informal play.

Positive Character Features

- Buildings are setback from the pavement, often behind front gardens or driveways. This lends the area a feeling of openness and, in places, creates pleasant, uninterrupted views.
- Building design is consistent and helps confirm the character of the area. Materials include red and orange brick, often in combination with white weatherboarding. Dwellings are two storeys and a mixture of detached, semi-detached, bungalows and terraced, notably they all feature gabled roofs

Risks to Character

- The nature of the cul-de-sac layout does not encourage movement by foot or by bike. Limited connectivity to the wider urban area can cause congestion at points of entry and exit on Cromwell Avenue.
- The area, like many residential estates from this era, includes of a network of narrow alleyways, often between homes and back gardens, and which are not overlooked. Coupled with limited maintenance such routes are often unattractive to use and associated with concerns about personal safety.
- The loss of front gardens and the conversion of these into hard surfaces for parking, resulting in a loss of greenery and biodiversity, and a potential an increase in the risk of flooding from surface water run-off.

- The lack of a footpath along parts of the busy Tythrop Way is uncondusive to pedestrian movement. However, evidence of desire lines and use by pedestrians through the park indicates that such provision is required.

Opportunities

- There are a number of green amenity spaces dotted about within the area, but there is potential for these to be improved and diversified, potentially providing semi-natural greenspaces.
- Increasing the verdancy of some of the areas, through “de-paving” of front gardens and introduction of tree planting and soft landscaping along streets, would strengthen the suburban character of the area.
- Improve street lighting to increase the safety of alleyways in the area, particularly those that are not overlooked, and or encourage alleyways and development around these to be reconfigured to create shorter, more direct, overlooked and safer routes.
- Consider how cycle and refuse storage might be integrated within the property, minimising visual impact on the street.



Terraced properties with no driveways are still setback from the pavement (Source: Google StreetView)



There are many two-storey detached brick properties where front gardens have been paved over to provide off-street parking (Source: Google StreetView)



A common building type for the area, a two storey house with brick in combination with white weatherboarding. Picture also highlights a typical hard-surfaced driveway. (Source: Google StreetView)



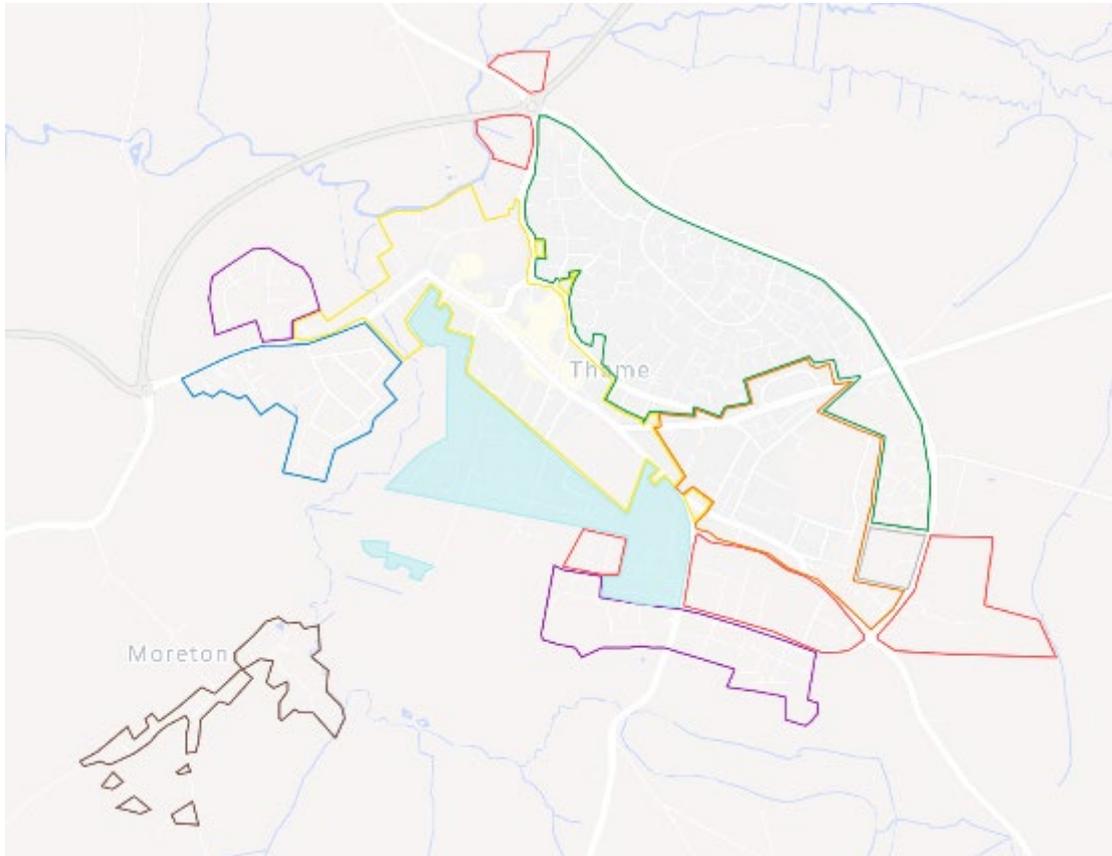
Large green space within the area, bordering Tythrop Way and Roundhead Drive (Source: Google StreetView)



Bungalows can be found to the South of the site. This example is from Ludsdan Grove (Source: Google StreetView)

Area 3: Southern Thame

This is a residential area comprising homes that have been built over the last seventy years. The southern boundary of the area is formed by the Phoenix Way: a footpath and cycle route that follows the alignment of the former railway.



Southern Thame Character Area



Aerial view of Southern Thame (Source: Map data © 2021 Google)

Key characteristics of the area:

Land Use	Primarily residential, but also including the John Hampden County Primary School located on Park Street and The Falcon Pub on Thame Park Road . The Phoenix Trail and open countryside borders the character area to the south.
Pattern of Development	There is a large variety in the type of development in the area, creating a varied character. The area is mainly made up of a series of culs-de-sac accessed from Southern Rd/Elms Rd. It also contains St. Joseph’s Church and a large recreation ground. Houses are a mixture of detached, semi-detached and terraced, with some townhouses.
Building Line/ Plot Arrangement	There is some degree of variation in building setback throughout the area, with some properties benefitting from generous front gardens. Most gardens are deep enough to accommodate a car, as witnessed through the presence of driveways and conversion of gardens into hard-standing in the area.
Boundary Treatment	Most properties have a good size front and back garden. In many instances front gardens are open to the street, with no boundary treatments, though some properties have low brick walls, fences or edges along their front boundary. Brick walls and wooden fences are used to separate back gardens.
Heights and Roofline	Houses are mainly two storeys in height, though older town houses and some new builds extend to three storeys in height. There are also a small number of bungalows in the culs-de-sac near Coombe Hill Crescent. Most properties have simple pitched roofs, though there is also evidence of cross-gabled roofs, created variety.
Public Realm	There is a large recreation ground bordering Moreton Lane/Southern Road. There is also a public garden on Corbetts Way, this appears to be well maintained.

Positive Character Features

- The Phoenix trail, a 12km cycle route part of the National Cycle Network, runs alongside the area. Proximity to this allows access to the countryside and opportunities for travel by bike.
- Unifying character features of the built form include the colour palate, building materials and gabled roofs
- Good quality greenspace in the form of the recreation ground. The area also benefits from its proximity to Cuttle Brook and Elms Park
- Allotments to the south of the area are a valued community resource.

Risks to Character

- Number of culs-de-sac and dead ends create an unfriendly and confusing environment for pedestrians.
- The new build front gardens are dominated by impermeable surfaces
- Along Van Dieman’s Way the public and private realms are not clearly defined, with the backs of properties often facing onto the street.
- Similar to other areas in Thame, a major issue is the loss of front gardens and the conversion of these into hard surfaces for parking.

Opportunities

- Better integrate the Phoenix Trail into the area and thus support a connected town-wide network of walking and cycling routes, including a network of safer crossings to better balance the needs of all users.
- Leftover greenspaces, which are particularly prominent in areas of newer build houses, could be better utilised e.g. pocket parks, more trees planted, flowerbeds
- The lack of greenery associated with hard surfacing of parking areas in front gardens promotes the need/opportunity for depaving and the introduction of more street greenery. Potential for integrating raingardens within the street could help manage the risk of surface water flooding and increase the biodiversity value of the area.



Semi-detached properties on Hampden Avenue (Source: Google StreetView)



The Falcon pub on Thame Park Road (Source: Google StreetView)



Typical new build property in the area on Corbetts Way (Source: Google StreetView)



Holliers Close, semi-detached house with brick and coloured weatherboarding (Source: Google StreetView)



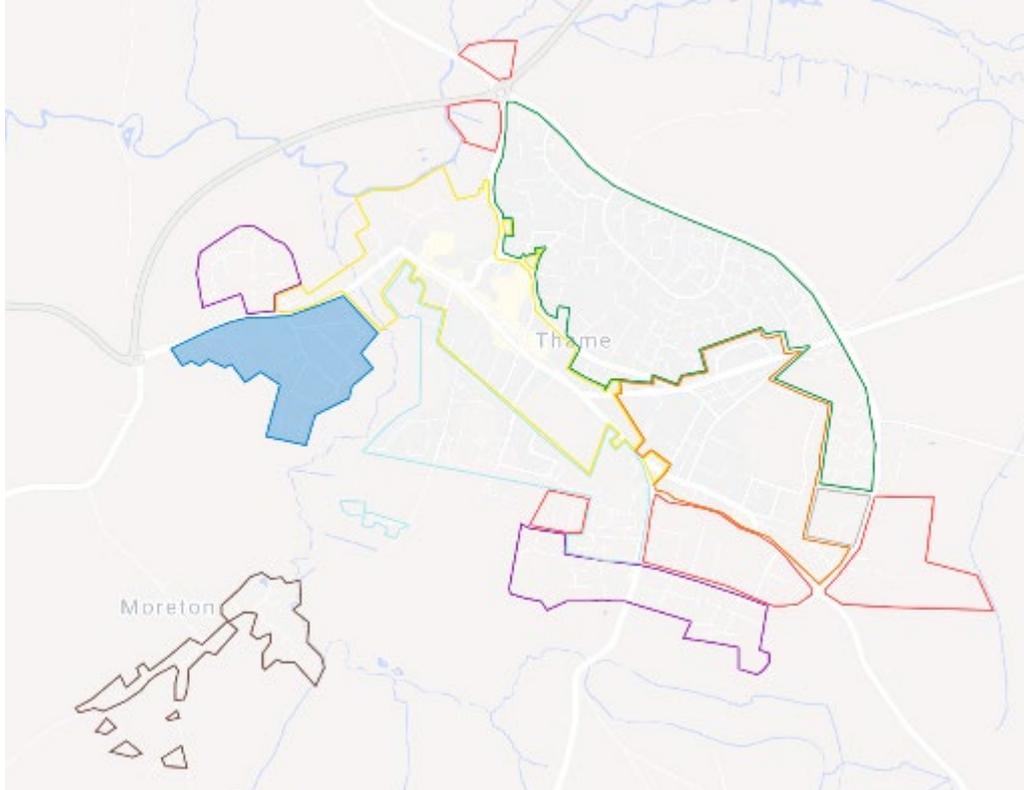
Van Dieman's Road, three storey blocks extend the length of the road with off street parking and a small amount of garden space (Source: Google StreetView)



The Phoenix Trail which runs alongside Southern Thame (Source: Google StreetView)

Area 4: Chiltern Vale Area

A residential area, on land rising up to the west side of the Cuttle Brook valley, which separates it from the rest of the town. It was developed between the 1960s and the 1990s.



Chiltern Vale Character Area



Aerial View (Source: Map data © 2021 Google)

Key characteristics of the area:

Land Use	The area mostly consists of residential properties, but also contains a leisure centre, nursery, and secondary school
Pattern of Development	Homes in the area were built between the 1960s and the 1990s. Properties are a mix between detached bungalows and two storey houses. There are also several smaller clusters of houses on Oxford Road, nestled between/adjacent to the leisure centre and school. The area is slightly separated from the rest of the town. Prominent building material is red brick, often in combination with white weatherboarding. Gabled roofs also feature heavily
Building Line/ Plot Arrangement	Houses are setback from the pavement edge with generous front gardens that often include lawns, soft landscaping and driveways. Buildings are broadly aligned although not rigidly so.
Boundary Treatment	For the majority of properties boundaries tend to consist of either low stone brick walls or hedges. In the areas of newer development on Maple Road, boundaries comprise a mix of low hedges and fences.
Heights and Roofline	Dwellings vary between one and two storeys across the area.
Public Realm	The area includes access points to Cuttle Brook, albeit in the form of two narrow alleyways.

Positive Character Features

- Although the area contains a mixture of development types, it still has a distinct feel to it, almost semi-rural, perhaps due to the fact it is slightly separated from the main built-up area by the Cuttle Brook.
- Properties are set back from the pavement edge, most have large front gardens and buildings are broadly aligned
- Although a lot of properties have converted space in their front gardens for parking, unlike in other character areas they still manage to retain a significant amount of greenery.
- Close proximity to high quality greenspace (Cuttle Brook)

Risks to character

- Considering its proximity to Cuttle Brook, links to this are limited.
- Further residential development in the area may lead to traffic issues at the single entrance to the main housing estate in the area on Oxford Road.
- If the conversion of gardens into parking is not controlled the verdant nature of the area could be at risk.

Opportunities

- The area is surrounded by high quality open space (Cuttle Brook), however it could benefit from improving pedestrian and cycling legibility
- Improved cycling infrastructure along Oxford Road would reduce reliance on car travel for residents as well as those using the leisure centre. It would also make active travel a safer option for students at Lord William's Upper School. It does appear there is already a cycle lane, but lines are faded and there is no physical barrier between the cars and cyclists.



Bungalow with paved driveway and front garden (Source: Google StreetView)



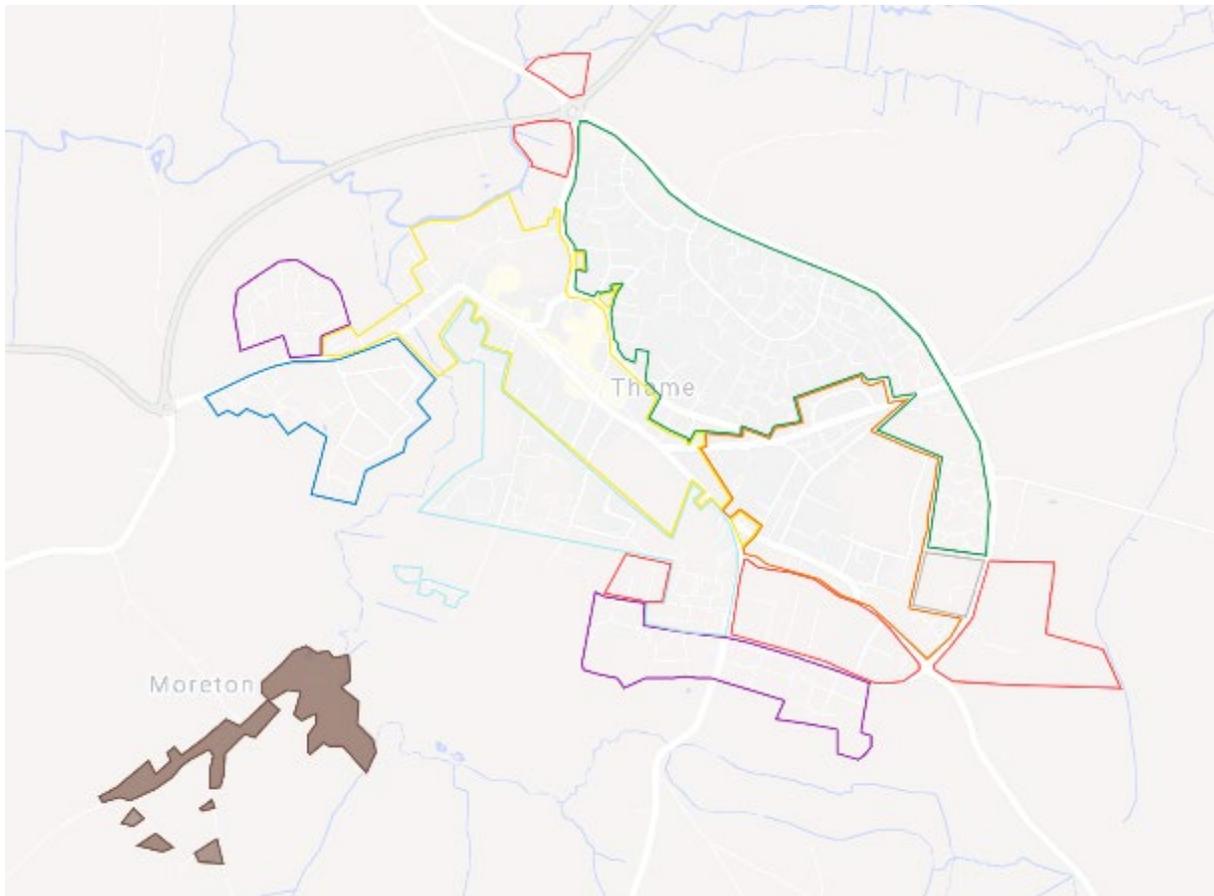
Large detached house with paved driveway and front garden (Source: Google StreetView)



Properties along Maple Road are more modern, and in general larger than the original properties in the adjacent streets (Source: Google StreetView)

Area 5: Moreton Village

A small, historic hamlet to the south of Thame, much of which is designated as a Conservation Area and where there are eleven listed buildings. Moreton retains its separate identity as a place distinct from the main built-up area of Thame.



Moreton Village Character Area



Aerial view (Source: Map data © 2021 Google)

Key characteristics of the area:

Land Use	Land use is mostly residential. It also includes three working farms, a campsite, and a number of holiday cottages (Meadowbrook Cottages)
Pattern of Development	The area is mostly located in a conservation area and its buildings reflect this. There are a number of high-quality converted barns as well as several maintained historic buildings. There are eleven listed buildings in the area. Buildings are generally a mix of two storey houses and bungalows. The area has a very rural feel about it, surrounded by farmland and countryside, and is accessed via a narrow country lane. There are several barn conversions and a limited number of twentieth century dwelling scattered throughout the village.
Building Line/ Plot Arrangement	Most properties in the area feature large front gardens with driveways and extensive amounts of greenery. Houses are therefore usually well setback from the road and, in some cases, not visible from the street. The majority of properties feature large back gardens. Properties towards the east of the area feature large trees at the rear of their gardens.
Boundary Treatment	Boundaries are bordered with hedgerows, traditional stone brick walls, and post and rail fences. Some back gardens do feature more conventional wooden fencing to separate them, but these are not usually visible from the road. Generally, there are no formal boundaries with the road i.e. no pavement, instead there tends to be a grass verge in between properties and the road.
Heights and Roofline	Buildings are one or two storeys, but the roofline and heights are varied and a lot of buildings are completely unique in style. Most houses feature a gabled roof.
Public Realm	The area features a handful of grass verges/ small greens. Of particular note is the small green on the junction towards the East of the area, this currently has a bench located on it and is the largest in the area. There is a well-used tarmac path to Thame that starts between Brook Cottage and Moreton Thatch, through to Bates Leys and Moreton Lane in Thame. This is generally well used by residents from both Moreton and Thame.

Positive Character Features

- The area benefits from a distinct rural and agricultural feel, in no small part due to the operating farm within the site boundary, as well as the existence of a number of converted barn houses
- Moreton was, and is, naturally constrained by the Cuttlebrook and agriculture. As a result, Moreton is clearly distinct and separate from Thame, and an identifiable place in its own right.
- Several unique/older buildings give a sense of historic development to the area.
- Plots are larger here than anywhere else in Thame, with many featuring expansive front and back gardens. Properties north east of the War Memorial benefit from pre-enclosure act long gardens. Many include large, mature trees. Similarly, the cluster of twelve post-WW1 buildings southwest of the War Memorial are notable for long gardens but lack back gardens.
- The area appears to be generally well maintained

- Drainage ditches, ponds and country lane / shared road surface emphasise the rural nature of the area.

Risks to Character

- No opportunities for active travel – no cycle infrastructure as well as no pavements for pedestrians
- The area is extremely reliant on the use of car travel

Opportunities

- The designation of the area as a Conservation Area means that development must respond sensitively to this. This might provide the opportunity for innovative architectural design.



Bungalows with large front gardens, both have off-street parking (Source: Google StreetView)



Homes are set back from the street behind deep front gardens and have off street parking (Source: Google StreetView)



Converted barn with a half-hipped roof (Source: Google StreetView)



Historic building with driveway, front garden, and garage extension (Source: Google StreetView)



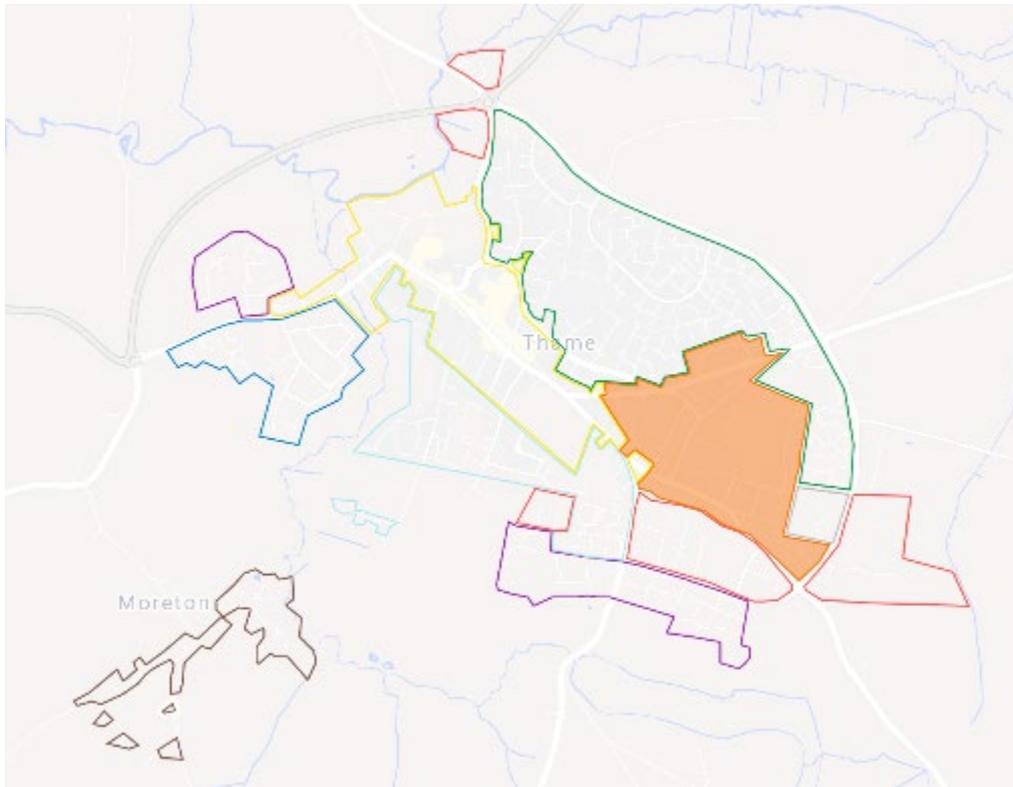
Historic brick building with stone wall, front garden, off street parking and garage extension
(Source: Google StreetView)



Traditional home with timber-frame design *(Source: Google StreetView)*

Area 6: East Thame Area

A largely residential area located to the east of the town centre. The area is bordered by East Street and Chinnor Road, with a network of streets forming a thoroughfare between them. Plots here are larger than most in Thame, with several properties featuring extensive back gardens. Notably, the area also features a secondary school, tennis club, and community hospital.



East Road Character Area



Aerial view (Source: Map data © 2021 Google)

Key characteristics of the area:

Land Use	Primarily a residential area, but also containing a school, bowls club, petrol station, tennis club, service garage, community hospital as well as retail outlets. Area includes Lord Williams's Lower school and playing fields, which are prominent in terms of area and importance to the community.
Pattern of Development	This area appears to have been developed gradually. It features housing developed between the Victorian era and the early 2000s. Properties are a mixture of detached, semi-detached and terraced. Towards the east of the site we see a series of cul-de-sacs coming off of B4012. The other areas feature interconnected roads between Kingsey Road and Chinnor Road.
Building Line/ Plot Arrangement	Houses in the area are generally not set back against the pavement, most have them some form of front garden/driveway. However, due to the variation in development time the extent of this can vary greatly, with some plots having long grassy front gardens with no physical boundary, while others have small, walled off front gardens.
Boundary Treatment	Boundaries again vary depending on type/time of development, can include brick walls, hedges, and fences.
Heights and Roofline	Dwellings vary between one and three-storeys across the area. In general, heights and roofline match their immediate surroundings, but throughout the area a lot of variety can be seen. All houses feature gabled roofs.
Public Realm	The area features a few small amenity green spaces, although these are not landscaped in any significant way. Pavements in places are narrow or only exist on one side of the street.

Character Features

- Buildings tend to be set back behind gardens/driveways
- There are interesting and distinct variations in building design and roofline, but these still manage to maintain a strong sense of coherent character throughout the area, in part due to similar buildings materials of brick, stone and weatherboarding
- A number of front gardens feature large trees that extend over the street. This adds to the suburban verdancy of the area

Risks to character

- The area seems somewhat enclosed by the two roads surrounding it, potentially producing a sense of severance for those within it, or at least a sense of pedestrian severance

Opportunities

- The road network is well connected, particularly from Chinnor Road to Kingsey Road, but cycle infrastructure could be introduced to the area.
- Street greening could be introduced to complement the already existing green spaces and street trees growing from private gardens.
- There is room for improvement on existing green spaces, for example they could play benefit from the introduction of benches or play equipment, and could potentially be diversified, providing more natural space.



Victorian style houses, with small front gardens and decorative arches (Source: Google StreetView)



New build homes made from brick, often making use of the roof space, providing three storeys of accommodation but responding to the prevailing two-storey height of the majority of properties in the area. (Source: Google StreetView)



Terraced properties constructed using brick and weatherboarding and have enclosed front gardens. (Source: Google StreetView)



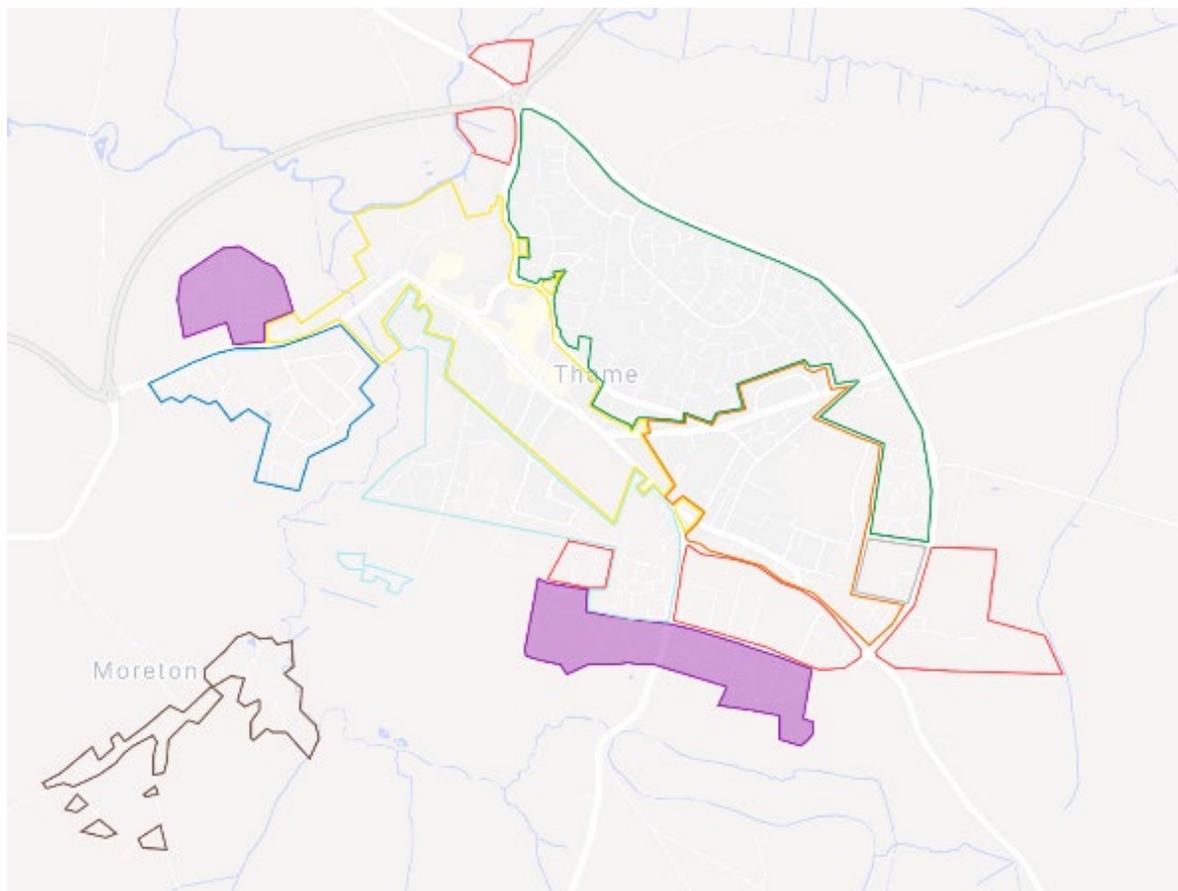
Traditional terraced housing aligned against the pavement edge and with a consistent roofline. White brick detailing adds interest to the buildings. (Source: Google StreetView)



Large amenity greenspace on Seven Acres (Source: Google StreetView)

Area 7: Post 2013 residential development

There are two 'post 2013' development areas in Thame, reflecting recent development on sites allocated in the made Thame Neighbourhood Plan. One site extends southwards from the existing town, bordering employment areas and Southern Thame. The other extends North West , bordering the historic core and Chiltern vale. They share common characteristics.



Post 2013 Residential Development Character Area



Aerial view of the Oxford Road development (Source: Map data © 2021 Google)



Aerial view of new housing development to the south of Thame (Source: Map data © 2021 Google)

Key characteristics of the area:

Land Use	The area features residential land uses and adjoin areas of open space / countryside.
Pattern of Development	The area includes two parts; the development along Wenman Road and the development along Oxford Road. Both areas broadly follow the same pattern of development. Most houses are detached or semi-detached. The areas include a mix of housing sizes, including some large family homes, and all are generally two – three storeys in height. Most properties feature driveways or some form of off-street parking.
Building Line/ Plot Arrangement	There are few variations in building setbacks and plot arrangement. There is a sense of coherence and consistency in the built form. All properties follow the same pattern even where size/style varies. Gardens are a modest size,.
Boundary Treatment	The area features red brick walls and fences to separate gardens. Brick walls tend to be used where gardens are adjacent to the street. Usually no physical boundary at the front of properties, most common is just a grass verge on either side of the path leading to the door..
Heights and Roofline	Buildings in the area are two – three storeys tall and feature gabled roofs.
Public Realm	They both border rural areas, and the development on Wenman Road features trails to a public footpath.

Positive Character Features

- The areas both have a distinct suburban character that sets them apart from the older developments.
- Both areas are surrounded by large areas of countryside, this provides interesting views from houses bordering the area
- Green fingers incorporated with the layout of development provide a connection with and routes through to the surrounding countryside.
- Within the sites different street types help define different areas of development

Risks to Character

- Limited variety in use of building materials, meaning the area lacks distinctiveness
- Lack of facilities integrated within the areas at present beyond housing.
- Some of the green fingers running through the areas lack vegetation beyond mown grass, and some spaces are not addressed by homes, fronted by garden walls and the gable ends of properties.

Opportunities

- There is opportunity to expand the designated cycle lane alongside the Southern Growth area, improving connectivity deeper into Thame. These are currently poorly connected with the wider network and could be actively maintained to encourage use.
- Introduce a greater diversity of landscaping within green fingers, including planting of mature trees, and, over time, explore opportunities that create more active and ownership of these spaces, which might include, for example, opportunities for community gardens and allotment space.



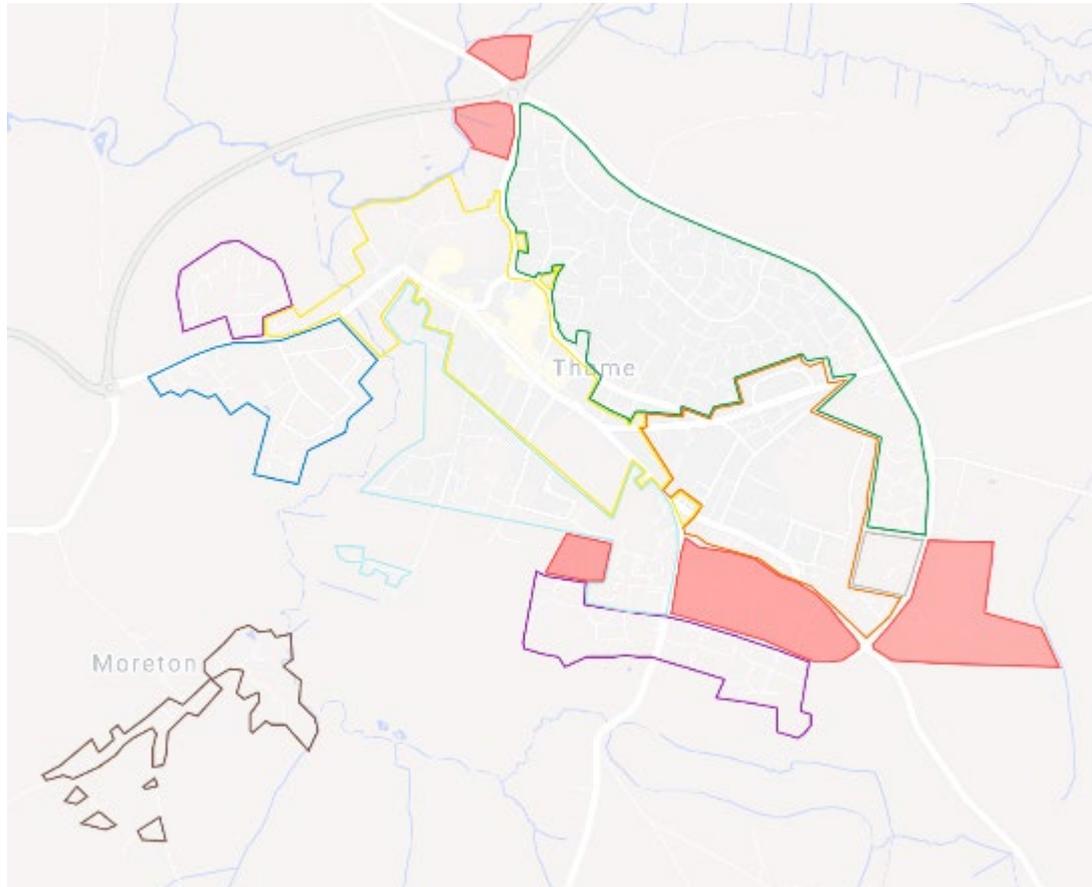
Large family home featuring a cross gabled roof and small front garden such as the one pictured are common in the area (Source: Google StreetView)



Semi-detached properties featuring a partially gabled roof design (Source: Google StreetView)

Area 8: Employment Area

An industrial area containing a variety of units of different sizes and types including some office and light industrial use. Principally characterised by large 'shed' like buildings with few windows.



Employment Character Area



Aerial View of main employment area to the south of Thame (Source: Map data © 2021 Google)

Key characteristics of the area:

Land Use	The area includes industrial, office, retail and hospitality uses, and some recent residential development
Pattern of Development	The Employment area consists of five separate clusters though sharing similar characteristics: the exception being a service station to the north west of Thame. Much of the character area comprises traditional employment development and activity, featuring a mix of light industrial buildings and offices. Development to the east of B4012 features larger industrial units. Some recent development has taken places which has resulted in a loss of employment land and new residential development.
Building Line/ Plot Arrangement	Buildings in the employment area follow a uniform pattern. There is generally a lot of space in front of buildings, for access, parking, loading and unloading. Plots are generally large, although including some smaller office units.
Boundary Treatment	Boundaries tend to be made up of low walls, metal gates and some hedges
Heights and Roofline	Buildings tend to be two storeys in height, although a handful are single storey warehouses with high ceilings. The new residential development is an exception, being three storeys in height. Buildings are usually flat roofed, except for those located in the service station where gabled roofs can be found on the fast-food restaurant and hotel.
Public Realm	The area is vehicle dominated and lacks any distinguishable public or green/open space.

Positive Character Features

- The employment areas are generally well integrated with surrounding development, with landscaping around them responding to the amenity of residential properties.
- The areas are generally well connected to the main road network.
- The areas seem legible and easy to navigate, with a sufficient amount of parking surrounding buildings, particularly useful for warehouses receiving/ sending deliveries

Risks to Character

- Although obviously not the intended 'target audience', the area is extremely unfriendly towards pedestrians and cyclists.
- Although the area does well to not impact nearby residential areas, the built form and materials do not cohere with the surrounding areas
- A lack of street greening and impermeable surfaces dominate the area, with limited green areas for employees or visitors to enjoy

Opportunities

- Opportunities could be explored that provide defined public space and or very local retail opportunities for employees.

- Walking and cycling connections to the other parts of the town may help to reduce the dominance of vehicles in this area
- Potential to explore how building form might be used to better capture green, renewable energy, potentially through installation of roof-based solar panels.



Large, two storey corner plot with paved forecourt and garages (Source: Google StreetView)



Row of offices/warehouses with a large forecourt for parking and space for deliveries into the floor to ceiling garages (Source: Google StreetView)



Large, windowless, flat roofed factory with high garage doors and parking spaces in front (Source: Google StreetView)

Characteristics of a well-designed places

The National Design Guide PPG outlines ten characteristics of a well-designed place, shown in the figure below. These characteristics have been reviewed in the following sections (one characteristic per page) to see how they might be incorporated into opportunities for the neighbourhood plan.



The ten characteristics of well-designed places

1. Context

Characteristic Description

Context is the location of the development and the attributes of its immediate, local and regional surroundings.

An understanding of the context, history and the cultural characteristics of a site, neighbourhood and region influences the location, siting and design of new developments. It means they are well grounded in their locality and more likely to be acceptable to existing communities. Creating a positive sense of place helps to foster a sense of belonging and contributes to well-being, inclusion and community cohesion

Existing Context and Opportunities for Thame

Thame's sense of place is defined by its history as a market town. Thame was granted a Market Charter in 1215 and to this day still boasts a thriving market that runs weekly throughout the year.

An agricultural show was formerly held in Thame every year and although this is unlikely to return it does, alongside the two-day Country Fair, plus the weekly market and various other fairs and events, signify the importance of and help maintain the continuity with the town's history and form a link between past and present.

Any development must be reflective of this history and ideally create a connection between past and present. Any developments that threaten to detract from the history of Thame should be resisted.

2. Identity

Characteristic Description

The identity or character of a place comes from the way that buildings, streets and spaces, landscape and infrastructure combine together and how people experience them. It is not just about the buildings or how a place looks, but how it engages with all of the senses. Local character makes places distinctive. Well-designed, sustainable places with a strong identity give their users, occupiers and owners a sense of pride, helping to create and sustain communities and neighbourhoods.

Existing Context and Opportunities for Thame

Thame's identity is inherently shaped by its Town Centre and high street. This area still retains much of the original twelfth century planned form, with a broad main street that widens out into a long market place. Thame has over 200 listed buildings, and most of them are the Town Centre.

Central to Thame's identity is also its connection to the surrounding countryside and green spaces. In particular the historic town area around the church still maintains a more integrated relationship with the countryside. Views and vistas of surrounding countryside can be found on the Phoenix Trail, an abandoned railway line now designated as part of the National Cycle Network, which runs alongside the town.

Development should facilitate this connection to the countryside by providing further opportunities for movement. Movement should be fluid and natural for those wishing to reach the countryside, even from the Town Centre. This could also encompass improvements to the wider movement network for walking and cycling across Thame as a whole.

Development must also contribute to the existing identity of Thame's Town Centre and high street. All development in this area must respond positively and provide a visual harmony with the existing buildings, in particular those that are listed.

3. Built Form

Characteristic Description

Built form is the three-dimensional pattern or arrangement of development blocks, streets, buildings and open spaces. It is the interrelationship between all these elements that creates an attractive place to live, work and visit, rather than their individual characteristics. Together they create the built environment and contribute to its character and sense of place.

It is relevant to city and town centres, suburbs, villages and rural settlements. It creates a coherent framework that forms a basis for the design of individual developments within a place.

Existing Context and Opportunities for Thame

Thame's built form varies considerably depending on the location within the Thame. The historic core, which contributes most to Thame's overall character features a number of ancient medieval buildings alongside Georgian and Victorian Architecture. To the north of the historic core is a large residential area characterised by a cul-de-sac layout with pockets of greenspace. More cul-de-sac residential areas can be found to the South of the historic core.

There is a large residential area to the north of the historic core. It was developed rapidly, mainly in the 1970s, and is characterised by a cul-de-sac layout with pockets of green space. Dwellings are two storeys, and mainly semi-detached or terraced. Larger plots can be found in the residential area located on land rising up to the west side of the Cuttle Brook valley, which separates it from the rest of the town. It was developed between the 1960s and the 1990s.

New development along and adjacent to the Town Centre and wider urban area should retain the existing built form of the area but include flexible building sizes and floor-to-ceiling heights, therefore allowing for adaptation over time in response to changing economic circumstances and the requirements of different users. Space for independent and high street retailers should be provided.

4. Movement

Characteristic Description

Patterns of movement for people are integral to well-designed places. They include walking and cycling, access to facilities, employment and servicing, parking and the convenience of public transport. They contribute to making high quality places for people to enjoy. They also form a crucial component of urban character. Their success is measured by how they contribute to the quality and character of the place, not only how well they function.

Successful development depends upon a movement network that makes connections to destinations, places and communities, both within the site and beyond its boundaries.

Existing Context and Opportunities for Thame

Thame benefits from the presence of the Phoenix Trail, a 12km traffic-free cycle trail stretching between Princes Risborough and Thame. However, within Thame itself there is a lack of cycle infrastructure, and connections to the Trail are limited. Although a number of roads are quiet and safe to walk and cycle on, there is a lack of signage and road cycle lanes. A number of buses serve Thame, including the Arriva 280 and 40 which allow access to Oxford and High Wycombe respectively.

Thame can capitalise on its proximity to the Phoenix Trail and develop cycle lanes that link up with the trail from the town centre. Equally, the Haddenham to Thame Greenway project provides an opportunity to support active travel. However, any new infrastructure should be designed in line with best principles such that it becomes a safe and attractive proposition for people to use on a day-to-day basis, contributing to health and well-being, as well as bringing environmental benefits.

New developments, particularly within the town centre, should provide facilities for bicycle parking, and encourage a greater degree of active transportation. There is a need to produce better publicity for walking and cycling tracks and routes, both in written and electronic format, linked to other features and routes.

5. Nature

Characteristic Description

Nature contributes to the quality of a place, and to people's quality of life, and it is a critical component of well-designed places. Natural features are integrated into well-designed development. They include natural and designed landscapes, high quality public open spaces, street trees, and other trees, grass, planting and water

Existing Context and Opportunities for Thame

Thame has several local green spaces, these include, amongst others, Elm Park, the Recreation Ground, the Cuttle Brook nature reserve and grounds of St. Mary's Church.

However, there is a significant amount of hard landscaping in Thame, particularly along the High Street and within residential areas, where the conversion of gardens into areas of hard-standing for car parking has an impact on the suburban verdancy of the area and biodiversity value, but also has consequences for surface water flooding.

The use of street trees to create an urban canopy within the town should be encouraged on all new developments, pending other considerations including heritage preservation.

Opportunities can be taken through public-realm interventions and new development opportunities to enhance the quality of nature and green space, contributing towards biodiversity net gain in Thame.

6. Public Spaces

Characteristic Description

The quality of the spaces between buildings is as important as the buildings themselves. Public spaces are streets, squares, and other spaces that are open to all. They are the setting for most movement. The design of a public space encompasses its siting and integration into the wider network of routes as well as its various elements. These include areas allocated to different users—cars, cyclists and pedestrians—for different purposes such as movement or parking, hard and soft surfaces, street furniture, lighting, signage and public art.

Existing Context and Opportunities for Thame

While green spaces such as Cuttle Brook, Elm Park and St.Mary's Church provide unique and high quality public spaces, there are a number of underwhelming public spaces which could be enlivened with even the slightest improvements.

Public spaces should be easy to find, safe to use and pleasant to be in. Simple measures such as increased signposting, improved lighting and the provision of furniture could go a long way in improving the user's experience with Thame's public spaces, as well as diversifying these to improve the relationship with nature.

7. Uses

Characteristic Description

Sustainable places include a mix of uses that support everyday activities, including to live, work and play.

Well-designed neighbourhoods need to include an integrated mix of tenures and housing types that reflect local housing need and market demand. They are designed to be inclusive and to meet the changing needs of people of different ages and abilities. New development reinforces existing places by enhancing local transport, facilities and community services, and maximising their potential use.

Where there is rapid social and economic change, such as sustainable growth or diversification in rural communities or town centres, well-designed buildings and places can accommodate a variety of uses over time.

Existing Context and Opportunities for Thame

Thame offers a wide range of retail options: the high street alone features an independent butcher, artisan chocolate shop, local bakers, cafés and restaurants. These businesses lie among national corporations offering a diverse range of goods from food to clothing, home and hobbies, and beauty and wellness.

As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, many independent retailers have adapted to offer home deliveries.

Thame also features several key employment areas. These offer large spaces for offices and small industrial factories, as well as providing key service stations and hotels. Further out of Thame in Moreton, there are holiday cottages and a campsite.

In the West of the town, along Oxford Road, there is a leisure centre. Other facilities in Thame include community halls, a bowls club, cricket clubs and a family centre.

A mix of retail uses, cafes, and restaurants should continue to be encouraged in Thame town centre. To further the footfall within this area, mixed use developments, with residential properties above new retail, could be encouraged to promote an active use of the town centre at all times of the day. Equally, support for local businesses can be provided through improved walking and cycling connections, enabling travel by people of all ages and abilities into the centre. Furthermore, and as Thame continues to grow, everyday services and facilities, such as schools and healthcare may need to be provided. Where new or expanded facilities are provided, these should be accessible to all and flexible in design so that a variety of activities can be accommodated, and allowing for buildings to respond to changing needs and requirements, both over the day but over time too.

8. Homes and Buildings

Characteristic Description

Well-designed homes and buildings are functional, accessible and sustainable. They provide internal environments and associated external spaces that support the health and well-being of their users and all who experience them.

They meet the needs of a diverse range of users, considering factors such as the ageing population and cultural differences. They are adequate in size, fit for purpose and are adaptable to the changing needs of their occupants over time.

Successful buildings also provide attractive, stimulating and positive places for all, whether for activity, interaction, retreat, or simply passing by

Existing Context and Opportunities for Thame

Traditional suburban design is prominent throughout Thame's residential areas. An issue with the prominence of the suburban design is the network of alleys within these areas, many of which are routes around the rear of properties.

Opportunities should be identified within the neighbourhood plan to enhance and revitalise these alleyways, both to provide a safer and more conducive atmosphere to the public, and to enhance the amenity space of existing homes so they can cater to a more diverse populace and promote the health and well-being of their users.

New residential developments within Thame should also relate positively to the public space around them. This should include the use of "transition space" including front gardens, to ensure a proper divide between the public and private realm.

A diverse mixture of housing types should be allowed to provide for similarly diverse household arrangements, including family housing and smaller units for first-time buyers. Opportunities for self-build should also be considered. Development must also be sure not to exclude certain members of the population such as the elderly.

9. Resources

Characteristic Description

Well-designed places and buildings conserve natural resources including land, water, energy and materials. Their design responds to the impacts of climate change. It identifies measures to achieve mitigation, primarily by reducing greenhouse gas emissions and minimising embodied energy; and adaptation to anticipated events, such as rising temperatures and the increasing risk of flooding.

A compact and walkable neighbourhood with a mix of uses and facilities reduces demand for energy and supports health and well-being. It uses land efficiently so helps adaptation by increasing the ability for CO2 absorption, sustaining natural ecosystems, minimising flood risk and the potential impact of flooding, and reducing overheating and air pollution.

Existing Context and Opportunities for Thame

The character assessment has already repeatedly mentioned the troubling amount of paved front gardens in Thame. These, in connection with other impermeable surfaces such as pavements and car parks, increase the likelihood of surface level flooding in the area.

Thame should support development that feature greening of paved areas, promote the use of walking and cycling, explore emerging mobility solutions and technologies, encourage small scale energy schemes and encourage biodiversity net gain.

10. Lifespan

Characteristic Description

Well-designed places sustain their beauty over the long term. They add to the quality of life of their users and as a result, people are more likely to care for them over their lifespan. They have an emphasis on quality and simplicity

Existing Context and Opportunities for Thame

Thame has a high number of historic buildings. These have stood the test of time and contribute enormously to Thame's sense of place. However, there could be some scope for allowing more flexible use of these buildings, so they can be put to their highest and best value use today.

Thame's town centre, where such buildings tend to be located, should include flexible building sizes and floor-to-ceiling heights, allowing for adaptation over time in response to changing economic circumstances and the requirements of different users.

There is also a need to promote the flexibility and adaptability in new buildings too. This could include new homes being built which can adapt to changing needs over time. It also applies to the provision of community facilities which should act as dynamic spaces.



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