



TNP2 Consultation Summary Character Area Study

September 2021





THAME
Town Council

PREPARED ON BEHALF OF:

Thame Town Council

TNP2 Consultation Summary – Character Area Study

September 2021



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1. Introduction

In August 2021, alongside the consultation on the Neighbourhood Plan's vision, objectives, and site selection, consultation on Thame's character areas was undertaken. The purpose of this was to help understand residents' views on the character area within which they live: what they considered to be positive features of the area, what concerns they had about new development, how this might be shaped and how character might be strengthened or enhanced. The consultation also sought to understand the views on the character areas which have town-wide significance, including the historic core (town centre) and employment areas.

This consultation allows for an evaluation of the effectiveness of policies in respect of design quality and character of the built environment, to identify those qualities that new development should be sensitive and respond positively to.

This consultation took the form of a questionnaire that was able to capture feedback electronically as well as by hand. All summary information material, including consultation boards, were also made available to view via the Town Council website as well as at a series of drop-in events and exhibitions held at the Town Council offices.

The consultation was advertised through the Thame Town Council website, through social media, by emails sent to those who had opted in to updates, and through banners placed around the town advertising the consultation.

2. Response rate

A total of 99 responses to the questionnaire were received, the vast majority of which (89%) were from residents. Other respondents included local businesses / organisations, people visiting the area or living nearby, and employees of the area.

There were slightly more responses from men (56%) compared to women (42%) with only a handful (2%) declining to respond to the question.

In terms of the age of respondents, there was a very limited response from those people aged under 26 (just one response in total), even the representation from those aged under 36 was limited with only nine responses. There was a fairly even split between those in the, 46-55, 56-65 and over 65 age groups.

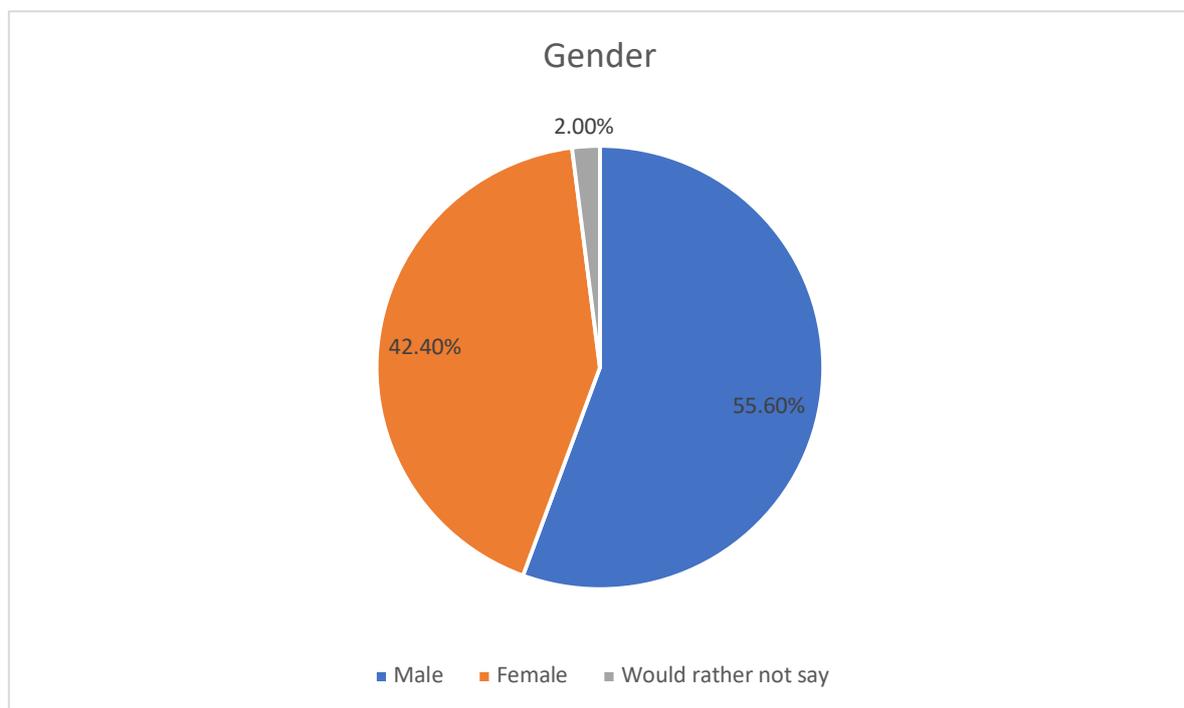


Figure 1. Gender breakdown of respondents to the character area questionnaire

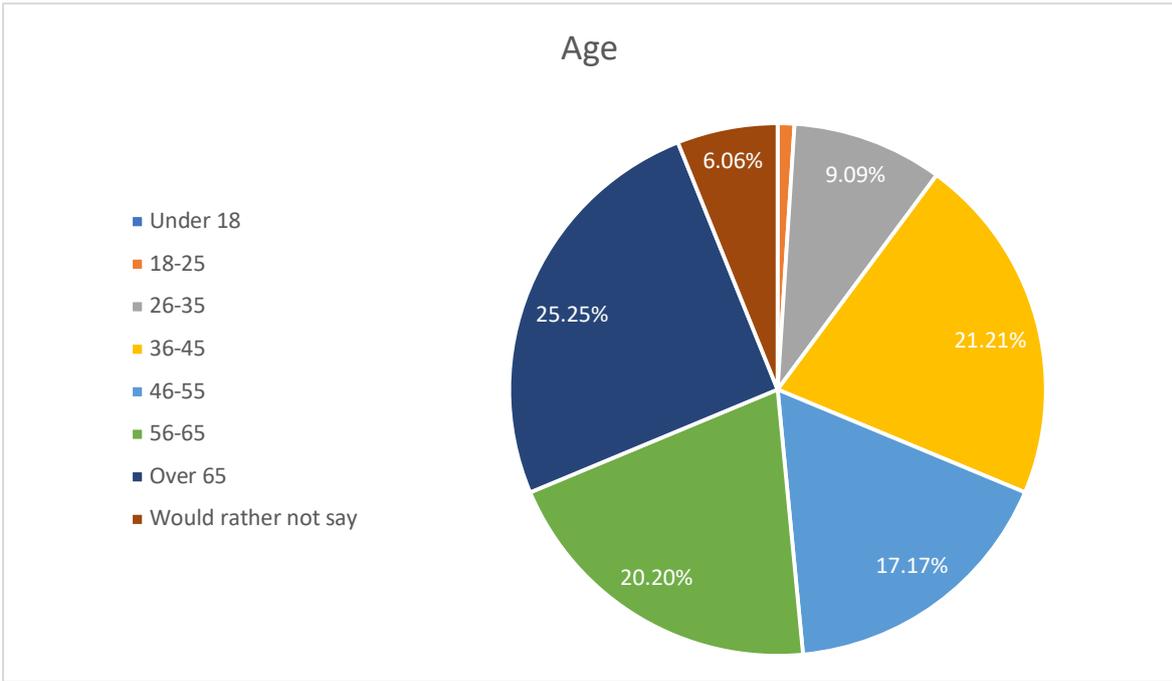


Figure 2. Age breakdown of respondents to the character area questionnaire

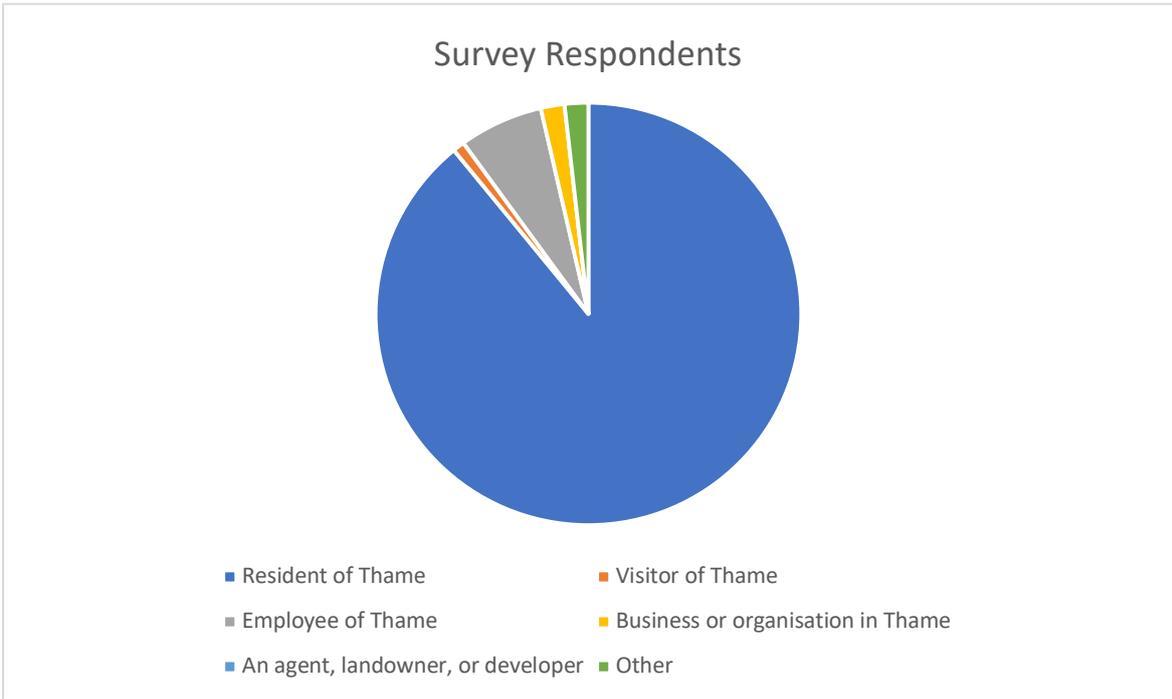


Figure 3 . Breakdown of respondents based on their relationship to Thame

3. Character Area Survey

Respondents were first asked to state which character area, based on a map provided (Figure 4), they lived in. The chart below (Figure 5) provides a breakdown of responses. There was a fairly even mix of respondents who lived in the Town Centre, Lea Park, Southern Thame, East Thame, and the Post 2013 areas of housing. There were fewer respondents from Chiltern Vale, Moreton Village, and the Employment areas, however it is felt this reflects their generally smaller size compared to other character areas.

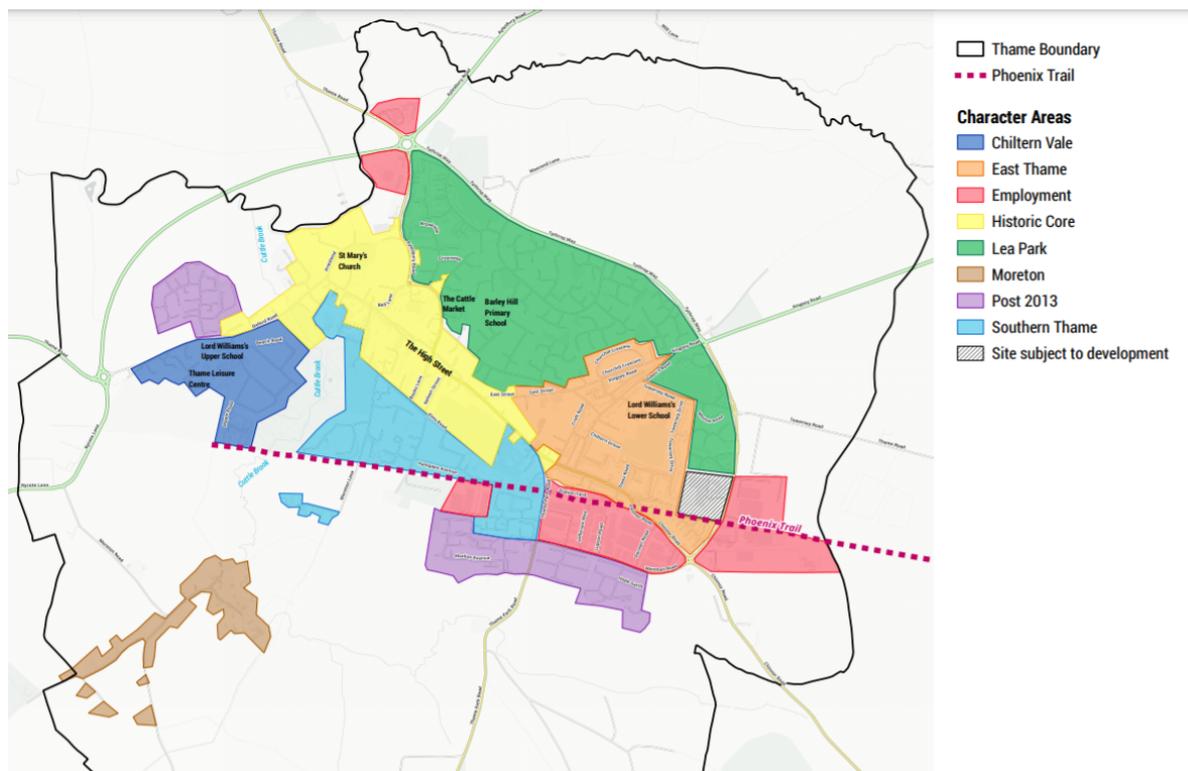


Figure 4. Map displaying the boundaries of Thame's character areas

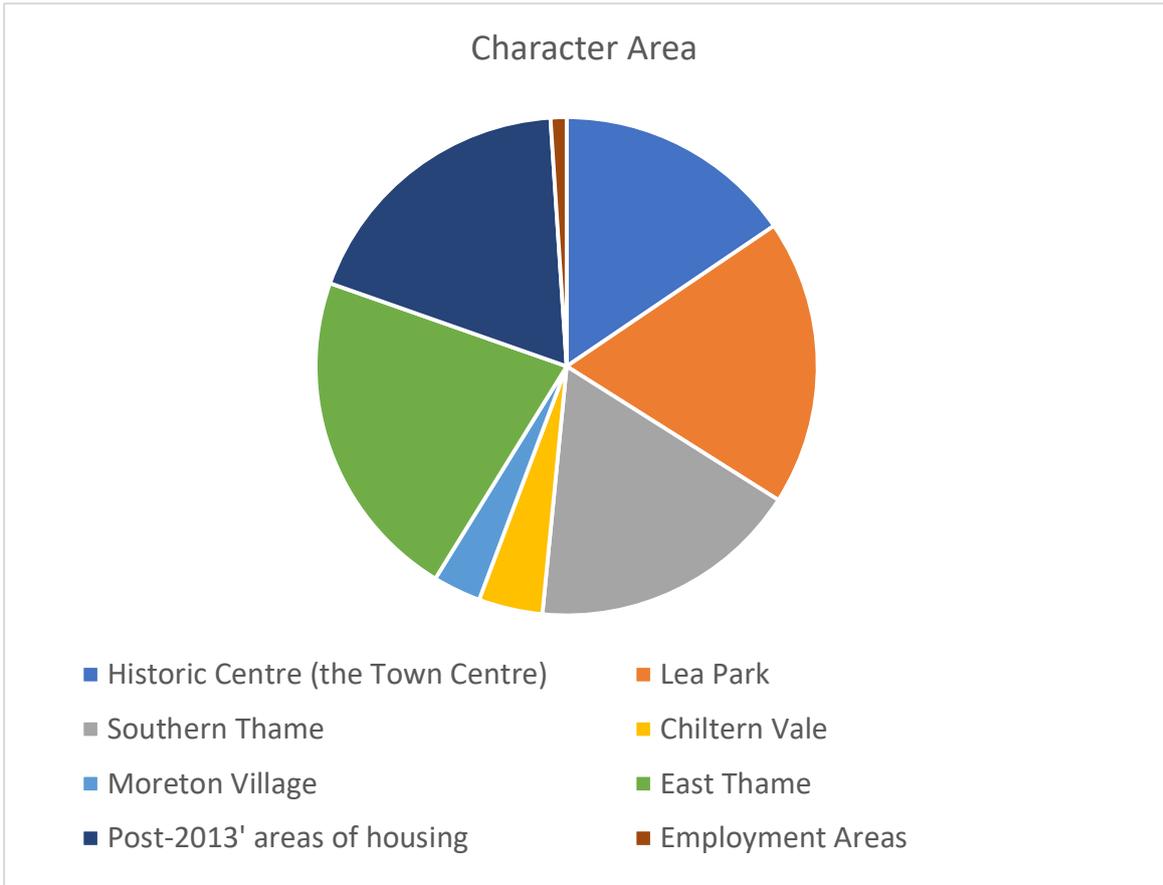


Figure 5. Breakdown of respondents based on where they live in Thame

Respondents were asked to respond to three questions about the character area they lived in. The questions were:

1. Please provide up to three words or phrases that you think best describe the character of the area you live in.
2. What are the positive features of the built environment in your character area? Please provide up to three words or phrases.
3. Are there any negative features that detract from the character of the built environment? Please provide up to three words or phrases.

Respondents were then asked whether they had any ideas for improvements for their character areas, again respondents were asked for up to three ideas, but for this question they could be more detailed in their responses.

Responses are summarised in the following sections and include the use of word clouds. Where a word or phrase was repeated frequently in responses this appears more prominently in the word cloud.

Post-2013 areas of housing

The responses indicate that the things the residents of the newer 'post-2013 housing areas' (i.e.: those areas built since the first Neighbourhood Plan was 'made') feel describe the character of their area best are:

- The friendly atmosphere.
- Modern design.

The positive features of the built environment in this character area are presented in Figure 10 and include proximity to Thame's countryside and green spaces, and the integration of greenery within the streets in these areas.

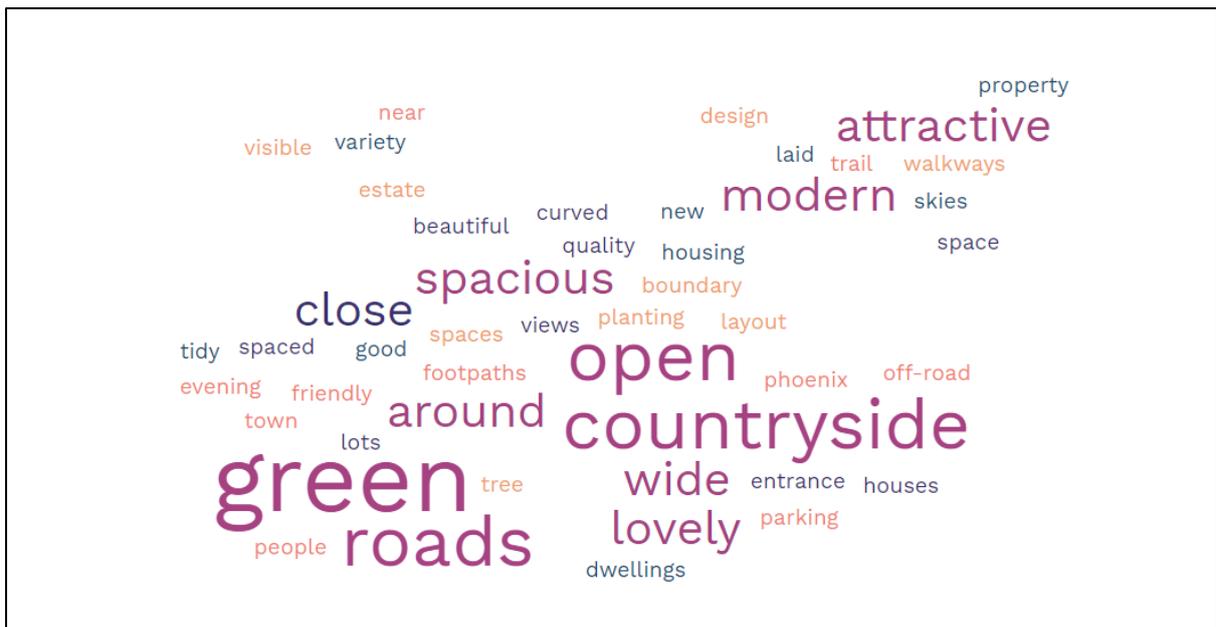


Figure 10. Word cloud of responses to what residents would say the positive features of the post-2013 areas of housing are

The negative features of the built environment in the character area were cited as:

- That the area generally feels unfinished, and needs 'polishing' off.
- That residents felt too far away from the Town Centre, commenting that it was too far to walk or cycle into town (but which may be linked to a lack of infrastructure connecting these areas to the town centre – see for example, the comment for improvement below).

Ideas for improvement included:

- Incorporate green spaces into new developments.
- Introduce better pedestrian / cycle connection into Thame town centre and to the Phoenix Trail Better.

Chiltern Vale

There were only a limited number of responses from residents of Chiltern Vale, and not enough to produce a useful word cloud. However, based upon the responses received, it is considered that the area is best described as being a quiet and pleasant residential area.

The positive features of the built environment in the Chiltern Vale character area were cited as:

- Quality design of houses, which come in a variety of building materials.
- Green and leafy streets, coupled with easy access to the Cuttle Brook Nature Reserve.

The negative features of the built environment in the character area were reported as:

- Poor quality road surfaces.
- Overflow parking from Lord Williams school which produces congestion issues.

Ideas for improvement included:

- Improve the condition of road surfaces.
- Introduce parking control measures.

Moreton Village

As with the Chiltern Vale area, responses from residents of Moreton were limited. However, based upon those received, it is considered that the area is best described as having a real sense of community and having a rural nature.

The positive features of the built environment in the Moreton character area were considered to be:

- The number of listed buildings in the area, which contributed to a feeling of historic character.
- Mixed variety of high-quality houses.
- Access to green spaces.

The negative features of the built environment in the character area thought to be:

- Some of the 'newer built' houses in the area did not match the historic character of buildings throughout the village.

Ideas for improvement included:

- Introduce traffic calming measures to reduce speed
- Improve footpaths and cycle paths

5. Wider comments

Respondents were asked if they had any other comments on the character of Thame as a whole, including any wider opportunities for change that might benefit the town as a whole

The key themes that emerged from the responses were:

- The need to maintain Thame's identity as a market town / avoid losing its identity as a market town.
- Support for improving cycle and pedestrian connection both into Thame Town Centre and the surrounding countryside.
- Support for the above point was linked to the high number of concerns over increasing traffic in the town centre and the prioritisation that seems to be given to vehicles.
- The desire to introduce more pedestrianised and outdoor seating areas on the High Street.
- The importance of Thame's connection to the surrounding countryside, with many suggesting this connection should be reinforced, particularly through improvements to the Phoenix Trail.
- The need to be environmentally conscious and for the Neighbourhood Plan to respond to the Thame Green Living Plan.

6. Summary

Town Centre

Those who lived within the historic core felt that it was defined most strongly by its historic identity, the welcoming atmosphere, and its regular markets. The high quality buildings and well-maintained public spaces were listed as the biggest positive features of the area. Meanwhile, issues with traffic detracted from the quality of the area. Ideas for improvement included introducing more pedestrianised areas, green features and traffic calming measures, as well as improving parking opportunities for residents without off-street parking.

Responses from those who lived outside of the town centre followed a similar pattern in their answers. They noted the value in the walkability of the town centre, and how compact it was. They also highlighted the importance of the independent retailers on the High Street. Similar to residents of the area, responses acknowledged the issues of congestion and parking in the High Street, particularly on market days.

Ideas for improvement included developing more pedestrianised areas, improving cycle infrastructure, traffic calming measures, and support for independent retailers.

Lea Park

Responses from Lea Park residents indicated that the area is best defined by its friendly atmosphere and family-centred community. Positive features of the character area include the estate's spacious layout, the large number of green spaces, and its proximity to the town centre. The most common issue in Lea Park appears to be the lack of available parking spaces at peak times and traffic issues. Furthermore, ideas for improvement include better street maintenance and improving cycle/pedestrian infrastructure.

Southern Thame

Southern Thame is considered to be best characterised by its quiet atmosphere and proximity to the Phoenix Trail and wider countryside, with the latter point being noted as the key positive feature of the area. Negative features included issues finding parking spaces at peak times and the general condition of the roads. Ideas for improvement included improving the condition of the roads, preserving the area's open spaces, and to maintain/improve access to the Phoenix Trail.

East Thame

Residents from East Thame felt the quiet atmosphere and historic residential buildings were what described the area best. Positive features of the area were reported as being the high-quality houses and tendency for properties to have large rear gardens. Negative features included lack of access to green spaces and, for those without private driveways, parking. Ideas for improvement included street greening, improved cycle infrastructure, and developing a new community green space.

Post-2013 areas of housing

Residents described these areas as having a modern design and friendly atmosphere. Positive features include proximity to Thame's countryside and the spacious street layout. However, residents reported that the area generally felt a little unfinished, and that they were distant from the Town Centre. Ideas for improvement included incorporating green spaces into new development and introducing better pedestrian/cycle connections into the town centre.

Chiltern Vale

Chiltern Vale was described by its residents as a quiet residential area. The positive features included the high-quality design of buildings and green streets, which connected well with the Cuttlebrook Nature Reserve. Negative features included poor quality road surfaces and parking issues during peak school times. Ideas for improvement focused on improving the conditions of the roads and introducing parking control measures.

Moreton Village

Responses from residents of Moreton Village felt the community feel and rural nature of the village best described it. The positive features of the area included the number of listed buildings, the mixed variety of high-quality houses, and good access to green spaces. Negative features suggested by residents were that the newer built houses did not match the historic character of the traditional buildings. Ideas for improvement focused on traffic calming measures and improved footpaths and cycle paths.

Employment Areas

For the employment area, responses indicated that while it was felt the buildings were not particularly attractive, they did serve their function well. Furthermore, respondents felt there was good accessibility to the area both from the ring road and the town centre, and that there was sufficient parking.

Ideas for improvement included making sure any future employment development was clearly separated from residential areas. Several responses suggested creating natural barriers/screens on the edge of development. Others suggested introducing smaller units and providing for public spaces for outdoor seating.

Wider Comments

General comments from respondents highlighted the importance in maintaining Thame's identity as a market town. There was also strong support for improving cycle and pedestrian connections across the town. There was a significant amount of concern over the level of car use in the town centre, with many responses suggesting a need for areas of pedestrianisation and outdoor seating in the town centre. Other comments highlighted the need for the Neighbourhood Plan to respond to the threat of climate change, as well as reinforcing Thame's connection to the countryside, particularly through improvements to the Phoenix Trail.

Appendix: Copy of Survey Form



INTRODUCTION

The current Neighbourhood Plan for Thame (TNP1) was 'made' in 2013 and forms part of the Development Plan which is used by South Oxfordshire District Council to help determine planning applications for development in Thame.

However, following the adoption of the new South Oxfordshire Local Plan (SOLP) in December 2020 there is a need to update TNP1 to reflect new policies and pressures. It is equally important that this update is also reflective of your views on the future for Thame. A review of the Neighbourhood Plan is thus now taking place (TNP2).

Through this review we are looking at the effectiveness of policies in respect of design quality and character of the built environment, to identify those qualities that new development should be sensitive and respond positively to.

The character of the built environment relates to but is not limited to matters such as the mix of uses in an area, the appearance of development, materials used, building heights and layout, the density of development, provision and type of greenery in the area, parking provision, local views, walking and cycling networks. Character is informed by existing development but can change and evolve in response to new development.

A set of character areas has been identified, building upon those identified in TNP1.

We would like to know your views on the character of the area within which you live: what do you consider to be positive features and qualities of the area, and what concerns do you have, if any, about the impact of new development.

We are also seeking your views on those character areas of town-wide significance, including the historic core (the town centre) and employment areas.

Your views will help further develop our understanding of each area and how we can create policies that influence the delivery of good quality design.

Please do let us know what you think by completing the survey.

This survey is open until 23rd August.

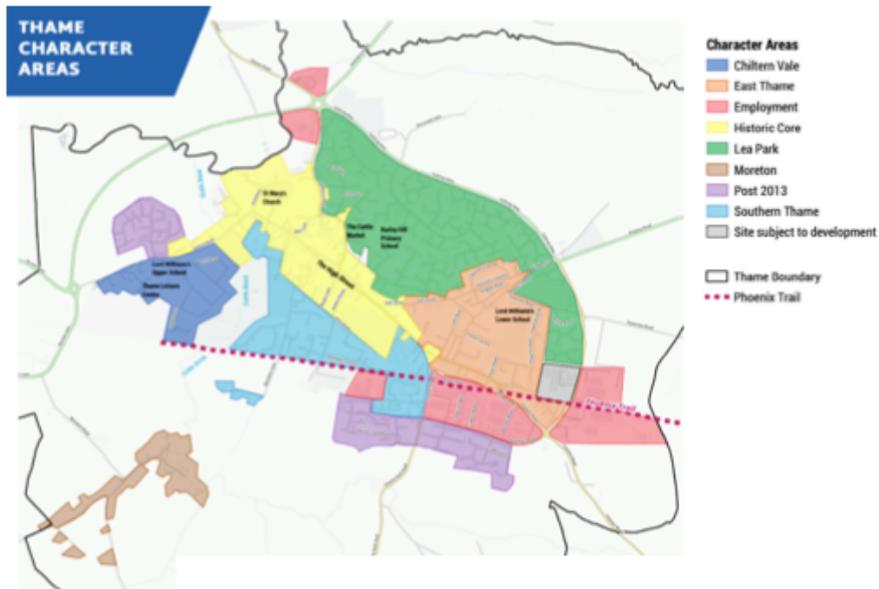


PART 1: YOUR CHARACTER AREA

1) Which Character Area do you live in?

The map below identifies the defined character areas in Thame. Based on this, please tell us which area you live in:

Character Area	Please tick which area you live in (please tick only one):
Historic Core (the Town Centre)	
Lea Park	
Southern Thame	
Chiltern Vale	
Moreton Village	
East Thame	
'Post-2013' areas of housing	
Employment Areas	





2) Please provide up to three words or phrases that you think best describe the character of the area you live in.

1	
2	
3	

3) What are the positive features of the built environment in your character area? Please provide up to three words or phrases.

1	
2	
3	

4) Are there any negative features that detract from the character of the built environment? Please provide up to three words or phrases.

1	
2	
3	

5) Do you have any ideas for improvements in your character area? This could relate to the area as it is now, or be aspects for consideration in new development proposals or other initiatives. Please suggest up to three.

1	
2	
3	



PART 2: THE HISTORIC CORE (TOWN CENTRE)

The town centre represents the 'historic core' of Thame and is used by all residents. We'd like to know your views about the character of the built environment in the Town Centre.

If you have indicated that you live in this character area and have already completed the questions in Part 1 you can skip to Part 3.

- 6) Please provide up to three words or phrases that you think best describe the character of the town centre.

1	
2	
3	

- 7) What are the positive features of the built environment in the town centre? Please provide up to three words or phrases.

1	
2	
3	

- 8) Are there any negative features that detract from the character of the town centre? Please provide up to three words or phrases.

1	
2	
3	



- 9) Do you have any ideas for improvements in the town centre? This could relate to the area as it is now, or be aspects for consideration in new development proposals or other initiatives. Please suggest up to three.

1	
2	
3	

PART 3: EMPLOYMENT AREAS

There are a number of employment areas in Thame, including activities such as light industrial and manufacturing uses, storage and distribution.

We'd like to know your views about the character of the built environment in the Town Centre.

If you have indicated that you live in this character area and have already completed the questions in Part 1 you can skip to Part 4.

- 10) Please provide up to three words or phrases that you think best describe the character of the employment areas in Thame.

1	
2	
3	

- 11) What are the positive features of the built environment in the employment areas? Please provide up to three words or phrases.

1	
2	
3	



12) Are there any negative features that detract from the character of the employment areas? Please provide up to three words or phrases.

1	
2	
3	

13) Do you have any ideas for improvements in the employment areas? This could relate to the area as it is now, or be aspects for consideration in new development proposals or other initiatives. Please suggest up to three.

1	
2	
3	

PART 4: THE WIDER AREA

14) If you have any other comments on the character of Thame as a whole, including any wider opportunities for change that might benefit the town as a whole, please comment below:

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PART 5: YOUR DETAILS

It is important to understand the demographics of those undertaking the survey to establish trends in different genders, age categories or stakeholders in Thame to provide a plan for the community. Please let us know the following:

15) Gender

Male	Female	Other	Would rather not say
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16) Age

Under 18	18-25	26-35	36-45	46-55	56-65	Over 65	Would rather not say

17) Are you:

A Resident of Thame	
A visitor to Thame	
An Employee in Thame	
A business or organisation in Thame (if so, please provide the name of organisation)	
An agent, landowner, or developer (if so, please provide the name of organisation, and whom you are acting on behalf of)	
Other (please specify)	

KEEP IN TOUCH

18) If you would like to be kept updated on the Neighbourhood Plan, please provide your email address:

DATA PROTECTION

Data is being collected by Troy Planning and Design on behalf of Thame Town Council. Data in this questionnaire will be analysed to inform the contents of the Neighbourhood Plan. Anonymous data may be shared as evidence that the Plan reflects the aspirations of the community. Email addresses will only be used as stated and will not be shared with third parties.

If you wish your data to be removed or to change your contact preferences, please email: info@troyplanning.com.

Please see our privacy and data retention terms at: <https://troyplanning.com>.

Thame Neighbourhood Plan Review: TNP2

Consultation Summary:

Character Areas

September 2021