

THAME NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN 2 – FAQs

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HISTORY OF THE FIRST THAME NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN ('TNP1')

WHAT ARE NEIGHBOURHOOD PLANS?

Neighbourhood Plans allow communities to have a say in how development takes place in their area. Once published and adopted, they become part of the District Council's planning policy and are used to guide developers when designing their schemes and the District Council when judging them.

WHY DID THAME MAKE A NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN?

In 2011 South Oxfordshire District Council allotted 775 homes and at least 2 hectares of employment land to Thame. Thame's community decided to write a neighbourhood plan to give a clear steer on where the housing and employment land would go, and what it should look like. Following a referendum, the Thame Neighbourhood Plan (TNP) was brought into use on 18 July 2013. Since then, it has helped decide all of the development that happens inside Thame's border. This includes small extensions to houses or businesses, the redevelopment of buildings and land and large, new housing estates on green fields.

WHERE WERE THE 775 HOMES BUILT?

The Thame Neighbourhood Plan split most of the 775 homes around the edge of Thame. Some 135 homes were planned on the Lord Williams's Lower School site, at the request of the school, and up to 45 homes at The Elms. Each of the other 3 large estates planned for around 200 homes each. The idea of spreading development around Thame was popular.

WHERE WAS THE 2 HECTARES OF EMPLOYMENT LAND BUILT?

The employment land was placed opposite the DAF Truck headquarters and warehouse building, and next to an existing business park.

WHAT DID TNP1 DELIVER?

The Plan raised funds from developers for identified community projects in Thame. Works that have successfully been carried out include the refresh or replacement of many of our sports facilities. Money is currently being held to help provide new community meeting space and a new health facility for GP services. Other funds, such as those needed to refurbish Elms Park have yet to be provided as development has stalled.

WHAT WERE THE VISIONS AND OBJECTIVES OF TNP1, AND WERE THEY SUCCESSFUL?

For TNP1, a lot of time was wisely spent on establishing the principles that people felt should be used to write the plan. For example, people thought that Thame should continue to feel compact and have a close relationship with the countryside around it. The principles led to a vision for Thame and a set of objectives for the TNP that gave a clear steer on how the Town should develop and grow.

The vision and objectives have been helpful in arguing our case in recent planning decisions and planning appeals. They also hold up strongly when looked at against recent changes to planning guidance and best practice.

THAME NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN REVIEW ('TNP2')

WHY DO WE NEED A NEW NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN WHEN TNP1 WAS MEANT TO LAST 15 YEARS?

The TNP was meant to cover 15 years from the date it first came into use. The reason 15 years was chosen is because neighbourhood plans need to be in step with the District's other planning policy policies. The policies that guide major development across the wider South Oxfordshire are called strategic policies and they must be designed to last for at least 15 years. If there had been no major change at either the local or national level, the Thame Neighbourhood Plan might have lasted until 2028.

WHAT HAS CHANGED SINCE TNP1 WAS ADOPTED IN 2013?

- The District Council developed a strategy to grow the area's economy
- All of the Oxfordshire District and City Councils then signed up their areas to accept growth based on providing much more employment and housing than normal. This became the Oxfordshire Growth Deal.
- In return the Councils got Government funding towards major projects such as the new river crossing at Culham.

HOW DOES THE DISTRICT'S NEW LOCAL PLAN AFFECT THAME?

To plan for the Growth Deal the District made a new planning document, the [Local Plan 2035](#), and brought it into use in December 2020. In this document, Thame is again asked to take more housing and employment development for the District Council and to also provide for its own very local needs for specialist housing for the elderly and those in specific affordable housing need. The TNP has been made out of date by this, and changes in national planning policy.

WHY DO WE NEED TO LOOK AT THE TNP AGAIN?

- The plan works well at controlling how the new housing estates looked and at proving out needs for community infrastructure. It has helped keep some of our employment land safe and most of our High Street as shops.
- It has been less good at helping with minor planning applications that matter greatly to local people, like simple house extensions.
- It does not currently provide enough steer for brownfield sites, such as the DAF site.

- Further work may be needed, too, to help provide for the infrastructure that the Town needs but those responsible have struggled to deliver.
- Thame also adopted a Green Living Plan in 2020. Some of the projects and ideas will be helped by bringing them into the new neighbourhood plan.
 - The Government is now allowing shops to change more easily to other uses.
 - The Government has now made it law that councils must replace their planning policy documents at least once every 5 years. It is probable that in the future, our neighbourhood plan will need to have at least some minor updates to keep up with the District's plan.

WHAT IS THE RISK OF NOT UPDATING THE TNP?

The District Council will allow any planning application for housing and employment that meets their general strategy. This is worrying as the District do not now look in detail at the level of market towns and will be led by a mix of their planning policy and the developer's designs. The District might also encourage much larger sites than needed locally to help with their delivery of housing against targets. This would be allowed as the policies in their Plan refer to Thame providing "at least" 339 homes and "at least" 3.5ha of employment land.

TIMELINE

WHAT IS THE DEADLINE AND WHY?

The District Council built into their Local Plan a time limit. Our new published Plan should be sent to them by December 2021.

WHY WON'T WE MEET THE DEADLINE?

We, and the other market towns argued for several years that this is not enough time as we have a lot of evidence to prepare, and we must work with and consult fully the residents and businesses of Thame. Thame also has the added complication of having to cover matters that cross the County border. In spite of our best efforts, we have recognised that we will be unable to meet this deadline. It has been difficult to successfully explain complex issues to local residents and businesses while working hard to meet the deadline imposed upon us.

PROGRESS TOWARDS TNP2

WHEN AND WHAT WAS THE FIRST TNP2 CONSULTATION?

A 3-week consultation as part of the TNP2 review was held in August 2021. This first consultation explored people's views on sites put forward by landowners for development as

well as their views on the character of the area within which they live. We also asked if the principles behind our first neighbourhood plan were still seen as important today.

WHAT DID PEOPLE SAY ABOUT THE VISION AND OBJECTIVES?

Instead of starting again on these, it was thought sensible to ask – as part of the first TNP2 consultation – if residents and businesses still believed them a sound basis on which to base a new neighbourhood plan on. Comprehensive support was received for the original vision and objectives. As they also fit well with modern best practice it has been easy to recommend that they are used to help write the next Neighbourhood Plan.

DID THE FIRST CONSULTATION DECIDE THE HOUSING AND EMPLOYMENT SITES?

No decisions have been made. During the first consultation, we were trying to work quickly, given the December deadline. We brought together four main pieces of work. These were the vision and objectives from the first Thame Neighbourhood Plan, the site assessments and site assessment methodology, and the character area assessment. Together, they may have made the plan look more advanced than it was at that stage.

HOW WERE THE HOUSING SITES IN THE FIRST CONSULTATION JUDGED?

1. Landowners and land agents were asked to put forward land they own or control for development, providing details of where their land is, and what it might be used for.
2. Troy Planning (TP) – the Town Council's retained consultants for the Neighbourhood Plan review work – brought together the replies together with information sent to or produced by the District Council.
3. The sites were checked for suitability – including how it would be accessed, if it was in an area with a protected landscape, and flood risk. Sites were then scored with an overall RAG rating (red, amber, or green) based on these factors, as well as how they scored against TNP1's Vision and Objectives.
4. The sites were presented with their RAG rating in the consultation. The 'amber' sites were less understood. People asked why we did not remove the parts of an amber site that could not be developed and show the parts that could as green. We could not have reduced the area of any of the sites shown or suggested lowering the amount of development promoted by the developer. This is because the technique used to score the sites was actively being consulted on at the same time. It would also not be fair to both each site's promoter or the public to change sites without giving them a chance to respond or suggest alternatives. Some sites such as the Cattle Market, Diagnostic Reagents, and the reserve sites from the existing TNP were accepted or welcomed for development.

WHAT DID THE CHARACTER AREA ASSESSMENT SHOW?

Troy Planning undertook an independent assessment to identify and describe each of the areas of Thame that share a common built or natural form. They undertook a fresh approach and recognised a new area, East Thame, and tweaked existing character area boundaries. This work has been well-received and will help us work with the public on developing design policies better suited to each area.

TNP2 HOUSING AND EMPLOYMENT LAND REQUIREMENTS

HOW MANY HOMES DOES THAME NEED TO ALLOCATE IN TNP2?

We now know we have built 600 of the 775 homes the District Council originally asked us to find room for in 2011. Through their new Local Plan 2035, they made us take another 743 homes for the wider District's housing need. The District Council then took account of all sites with planning permission in Thame. In early 2020 the overall number was declared by them as being 339.

Since the target of 339 homes was set, other planning permissions have been granted for housing. We now think we have fewer than 200 homes left to find sites for from the District's allocation. We may have to add some homes to that to take account of our own needs for elderly or affordable housing and so that number may rise.

WHERE MIGHT THE HOMES GO?

With a few brownfield sites able to take a good number of homes, it is possible that we might need as little as one large housing site chosen for the second TNP.

Your views are welcome to help make these choices.

HOW MUCH EMPLOYMENT LAND DOES THAME NEED TO ALLOCATE IN TNP2?

At least 3.5 hectares. The District Council has not taken account of employment land lost to housing since 2011. We will need to work out what could help offset that loss and seek the views of residents and businesses on how and where to provide it. We have therefore put forward two reasonable options for employment sites and would welcome your views on them.