25. Thame

25.1 Thame is a market town with a strong agricultural base, situated on the eastern edge of Oxfordshire adjacent to Aylesbury Vale District. Thame is an important local service centre for near by villages both in Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire. Thame is 10 miles southwest of Aylesbury, 15 miles east of Oxford and 16 miles northwest of High Wycombe.

25.2 Thame is an historic and attractive market town, offering a range of independent shops, as well as key services. Agriculture is a main element of Thame's economy, with regular auctions taking place at the Cattle Market site. Other employment is situated at Thame Park Business Centre south of the town centre.

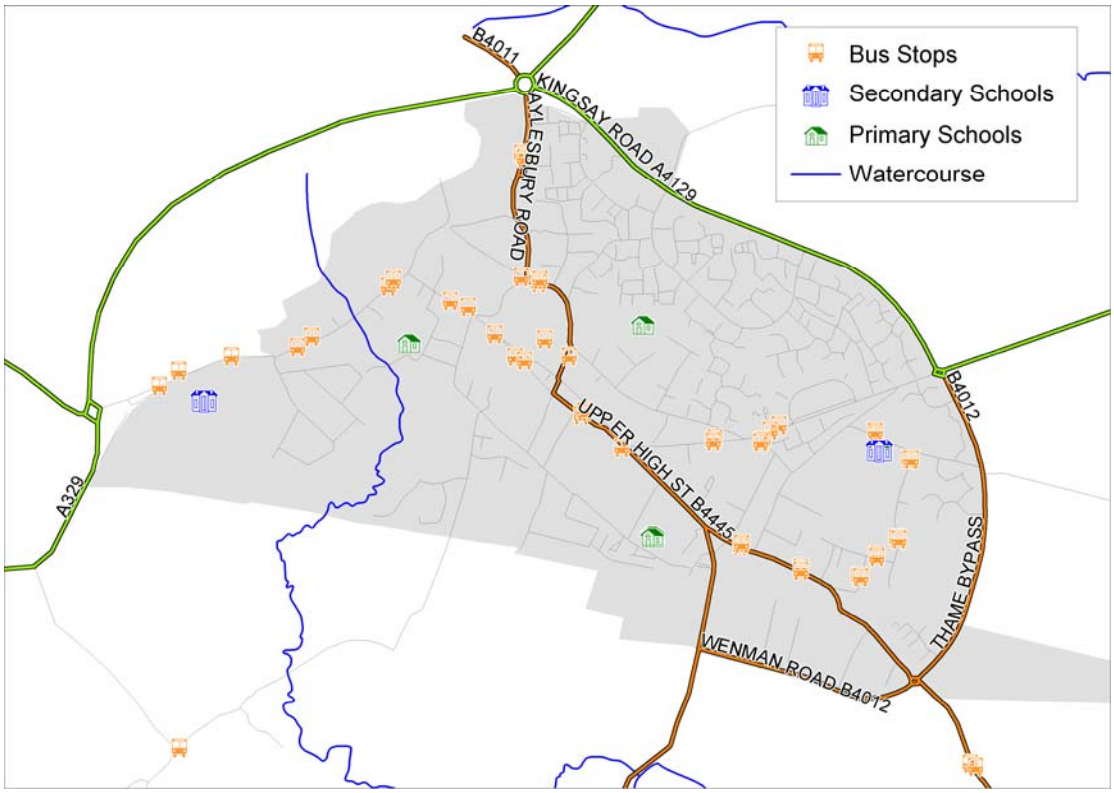

Figure 1 – Plan of Thame

25.3 Although Thame is a small town, with a population of around 10, 000 (2001 Census), some of the key services are located on the edge of the town, in particular the Sports and Arts centre at Lord William's (upper) School to the west, and Oxford and Cherwell Valley College Campus to the north west. Thame has three primary schools which are well dispersed across the town. Lord William's Secondary School operates a split site, the Lower School, located to the east of the and the Upper School located to the far west of the town.

25.4 The two health centres are well distributed, with the Thame Community Hospital centrally located on East Street.

25.5 Thame has a new public library located in the town centre on North Street.

Transport in Thame

25.6 Thame situated north of the M40; this along with the A418 to the east and A329 to the south of the town provide road links to the strategic road network. The A418 and A4129 provide a northern bypass to Thame, which removes strategic traffic from the town centre.

25.7 Thame's nearest rail station is at Haddenham & Thame Parkway which is around 2.5miles from Thame by road and there is a desire to develop an all weather cycle route between Thame and the station. The station car park has 488 car parking spaces.

25.8 The Phoenix Trail provides a walking and cycling route to Princes Risborough which forms part of the National Cycle Route 57. There is a good range of public rights of way that connect Thame to the surrounding countryside. However the network is disjointed in many places where paths meet the road network. Selected improved management, road crossings and traffic-free links could help enable more people to access the countryside on foot, cycle or horseback.

25.9 Thame has a good range of bus services running from the town centre. The Arriva 280 Aylesbury to Oxford service is a Premium Route that runs via Thame every 20 minutes during the daytime Monday – Friday. Additional fast buses to Oxford operate in the peak hour and less frequently during evenings and weekends. Additionally the Arriva 40 bus service runs from Thame to High Wycombe hourly, every day excluding Sunday. A range of infrequent bus services serve villages in the Thame area and provide connections from Watlington, Chinnor, and Brill. There is also a town centre service providing an infrequent service locally Tuesday to Saturday.

25.10 Thame town centre, primary schools, secondary schools and health centres are accessible from all areas of the town within a 20-30 minute walk, or 5-10 minute cycle. All parts of Thame are within a 15 minute cycle ride of the town centre. The location of Lord William Upper School on the western edge of the town is around 2 miles from the residential areas to the east of the town centre; however the Phoenix Trail SUSTRANS cycle route provides a good

route for cycling to the school. All of Thame schools have a School Travel plan.

25.11 Thame has a total in excess of 400 car parking spaces.

Problems and Challenges

Walking

25.12 Thame provides good conditions for walking and cycling throughout the town due, to the relatively flat topography and compact nature of the town. However, the condition and width of footways in some areas of the town centre could be improved to enhance the pedestrian environment.

25.13 Pedestrians experience difficulties crossing the road is several locations, those identified and requiring further investigation include High Street, Wellington Street, Bell Lane, and Thame Park Road. In some locations it may be the volume of on street parking and the width of the road especially at junctions, which present difficulties to pedestrians crossing.

25.14 There are many footways linking residential areas of the town, however the footway network is not fully marked on a local map, nor well sign posted on the ground, which may mean people are not aware and do not use the existing footways.

25.15 The peripheral road provides the only road access to housing developments in north and eastern Thame from A4129 Kingsey Road. There is no footway or cycleway along this road. Chinnor Rugby Club is situated on the peripheral road, at the junction of A4129 Kingsey Road and B4012 Howland Road, there is poor pedestrian access to the rugby club site from the north and south.

25.16 Maintaining and improving links where public rights of way meet urban footways and highways could help to enable more people to feel confident in using alternatives to the private car for local journeys and recreation. There is currently no formal provision of a footpath along the River Thame (to the north of Thame) including along Cuttlebrook from Moreton to the River Thame. Improvements to link urban footways with rural rights of way including footpaths and bridleways would improve conditions for walkers, cyclist and horseriders to access the countryside for leisure and health.

Cycling

25.17 The provision of formal cycle infrastructure such as on road cycle lanes, and advanced stops lines across Thame are not comprehensive and do not form a joined up network of cycle ways. Provision of cycle infrastructure should be route and destination based.

25.18 Cycling is a popular mode of transport among rail commuters, and providing an all weather cycle route from Thame town centre to Haddenham & Thame Parkway station will enable better cycling access.

25.19 There are a number of unclassified tracks and paths within the countryside surrounding Thame which are available for walking and cycling however these are not publicised within the town. Although cyclists can use bridleways, restricted byways and byways (along with horseriders) these often do not connect up safely with roads that are safe to use. The National Cycle Network route number 57 runs through the south of the town.

25.20 More safe and secure cycle parking should be provided at key destinations throughout the town, particularly in the town centre and at employment sites.

25.21 The existing Phoenix Trail cycleway to the south of Thame is an excellent well used facility and should be preserved.

Public Transport

25.22 The main town centre bus stops are located in the High Street and Cornmarket. Although the town centre is within a walkable distance of the majority of the town, for some people this walk will be too great a distance, or the network of footways is not easy to navigate. Northeast Thame is not served by any bus service, neither are the employment areas to the south of Thame.

25.23 Public transport needs to be attractive and convenient to ensure it provides a real choice as a credible mode of travel.

25.24 A bus service from the town centre to Haddenham & Thame Parkway rail station operates every 20 minutes but are less frequent during the evenings. Improvements to the frequency of the bus service may encourage greater use of bus and rail, rather than car and rail travel.

Roads and Traffic

25.25 Thame suffers from localised congestion within the town due to the volume of on-street parking.

25.26 The nature of the historic town of Thame with many dwellings directly fronting the footway, with little or no rear access, results in an increased need for on-street car parking by residents. There is no formal residents on-street parking scheme, and within the town

centre there are marked parking bays with time restrictions to ensure a circulation of visitors and shoppers using the spaces; these restrictions prevent residents from parking all day. In North Street in particular, the need for on-street car parking out strips supply and residents are parking in unsuitable spaces.

25.27 Nelson Street is characterised with on street parking which reduces the width of the two-way carriageway, and narrow footways on both side of the road. Rooks Lane runs parallel to Nelson Street which is one-way southbound from High Street. This increases the pressure on Nelson Street and Southern Road for two-way traffic. Southern Road is very narrow in places with footway only on the northern side.

25.28 The volume of car parking provision in High Street and Upper High Street, limits the amount of available public space for events. The weekly market is held in Upper High Street and reduces available car parking on a day that attracts more visitors and shoppers to the town.

25.29 Measure such as high quality signing should be maintained to ensure through traffic uses the Thame bypass.

25.30 Low emission vehicle technologies and associated measures will be of benefit to Thame over the next 20 years to improve general air quality and quality of life across the town. Bus companies operating in Oxfordshire are already rolling out new low emission fleets on services mainly in Oxford and Oxfordshire County Council will continue to support bus operators in further developing low emission fleets for all services in the County.

Transport Strategy

Walking and the Pedestrian Environment

To improve facilities for all pedestrians in Thame through developing good, clear routes from residential areas to the town centre and other key services and facilities around the town.

To join up urban footways with public rights of way for both access and leisure.

25.31 When resources or opportunities allow this is to be achieved by:

* Improving facilities for pedestrians, including disabled people, across Thame by conducting an audit of current footways. The audit will identify schemes to improve

legibility, way finding and permeability by creating formal walking routes to key facilities from residential areas, and between key facilities by providing signage and improved crossing points. It will also identify where footways can be improved through widening, providing dropped kerbs, and new or improved crossing points. Special attention will be given to improving footways in the vicinity of schools, leisure facilities and health centres.

* Explore new and improved crossing points including on High Street, Wellington Street, Bell Lane, and Thame Park Road, including a review of the mouth width of road junctions, to identify were road space can be re-allocated as pedestrian space. The junction of Wellington Street with North Street is particularly wide and this junction could be realigned to provide more area for pedestrians with a reduced crossing width.
* Publicise and promote walking routes from residential areas to key services and facilities by producing, maps, literature, and route planners, both in written print and electronic format.
* Improve connections to the rights of way network particularly where urban footways meet rural rights of way though new footways and signage to provide footways throughout the town and into the countryside.

Cycling and Behavioural Change

To develop new cycle routes and ensure that the best cycle links from residential areas to local services, schools, employment areas the town centre and access to National Cycle Route no. 57 are publicised. To provide a suitable number of good quality cycle stands at the key destinations and appropriate infrastructure where required along the routes.

25.32 When resources or opportunities allow this is to be achieved by:

* Improving facilities for cyclists by conducting an audit of existing cycleways, well-used routes and locations of cycle parking across Thame. This data will be used to develop schemes which will provide a high quality cycle network. Measures will also involve the provision of additional cycle infrastructure such as cycle lanes/cycle paths, advanced stops lines, and cycle parking where appropriate, with a particular focus to improve accessibility to key destinations.
* The introduction of an all weather cycle route from Thame to Haddenham & Thame Parkway Station.

* Conduct a feasibility studying into providing a signed cycle route from Haddenham via Thame town centre to the Phoenix Trail.
* Joining up the cycling network across the wider area using public rights of way so that routes for commuting and recreation are improved.
* Publicise and promote cycling routes by producing, in conjunction with information on walking, maps, literature and route planners, both in written print and electronically.

Public Transport

To work with local bus companies, developers and other partners to improve the frequency and attractiveness of the bus services in Thame, thus increasing patronage.

25.33 When resources or opportunities allow this is to be achieved by:

* Improve the accessibility of bus services in Thame by providing new stop locations, pedestrian crossings and safe walking routes.
* Work with local bus companies, developers and other partners to improve the frequency and, attractiveness of the bus routes to Oxford, Aylesbury and High Wycombe.
* Work with local bus companies, developers and other partners to improve bus services towards employment sites in Aylesbury, High Wycombe and Oxford, and also to/from Haddenham & Thame Parkway Station.
* Continue to work with bus operators to upgrade the existing 280 bus service to 4 buses per hour, in line with the Premium Route Strategy, ensuring all stops along the route are of a high standard and where appropriate real-time information is provided.
* Encourage the use of the bus by improving marketing and by providing passenger information systems
* Implement bus priority measures along the Premium Routes to improve access to Thame & Oxford, comprising bus lanes, traffic lights, and clearways to reduce delays to bus services and improve reliability. For specific journeys the overall effect will be to make bus travel more attractive than travel by car.
* Make other targeted improvements, such as improved frequency or greater area coverage of local bus routes in the Thame area, particularly the existing local bus service from villages in the area.

* Pay attention to provision of rail/bus connections at Thame & Haddenham Parkway during weekday evenings, when lower frequency bus services operate. This may take the form of additional journeys to the station.

Traffic Management

To make best use of existing road space through careful planning, working with partners and utilisation of technology.

25.34 When resources or opportunities allow this is to be achieved by:

* Work in conjunction with SODC to review and implement a joined up car parking strategy for the pay and display car parks across Thame. Including reviewing long and short stay car parks, uniform and clear charging regime and opening times, attractive town centre employee car parking, as well as ensuring adequate supply of car parking for shoppers, visitors and tourists. As well as effective car parking signage from radial routes.
* Assess the costs and benefits to introducing one-way traffic northbound on Nelson Street to complement, traffic one-way southbound on Rooks Lane.
* Continue traffic monitoring to ensure that the strategic road network, such as Thame bypass does not develop sever congestion.
* Conduct a signage review of Thame town centre, peripheral bypass & strategic road network, in order to route strategic through traffic via the bypass, and route town centre traffic on the most appropriate route.
* Evaluate the costs and benefits of reducing car parking within the High Street/Upper High Street to provide a formal public space for events such as markets, parades and festivals.