

Thatcham Strategic Growth Study

Stage 1: Thatcham Past

CONTENTS

1.0 INTRODUCTION	2
Background.....	2
Approach.....	2
Assumptions and Limitations	2
2.0 HISTORICAL GROWTH.....	4
Methodology	4
Early History	4
Post-war	5
21 st Century.....	10
Demographic Change	13
Conclusions.....	14
3.0 SERVICE PROVISION	15
Education	15
Health.....	16
Open Space.....	17
Leisure.....	18
Community.....	19
Employment and Retail.....	19
Other Infrastructure Identified in IDP to 2026.....	20
Conclusions	20
4.0 RECENT DEVELOPMENTS.....	22
Summary	23
5.0 TRANSPORT AND ACCESS	25
Highway.....	25
Rail 26	
Cycling.....	26
Bus services	26
Conclusions	27
6.0 COMPARISONS.....	28
Scale Comparisons With Other Towns	28
Performance of Newbury	30
‘Sense of Place’	32
Opportunities and Choices	33
6.0 CONCLUSIONS.....	34
Stage 2.....	34

APPENDICES

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Background

- 1.1 West Berkshire District Council (WBDC) is in the process of preparing a Local Plan Update to ensure sufficient sites are allocated to meet housing need in the period to 2036. An Infrastructure Delivery Plan is also being prepared to ensure new development benefits from appropriate levels of infrastructure, delivered in a timely manner, to support the growth of sustainable communities. WBDC aims to ensure that development and infrastructure are viable and deliverable.
- 1.2 The Local Plan to 2026 concentrated housing expansion within the district in Newbury (with 5,400 new homes), limiting expansion in Thatcham to 900 homes. The Local Plan Update to 2036 revisits this assumption in where to concentrate expansion.
- 1.3 SHLAA submissions made in response to WBDC's recent Call for Sites have highlighted a number of sites which are being promoted at Thatcham. WBDC is currently reviewing all sites; those of a strategic nature may warrant more detailed testing to better understand their suitability, capacity and viability. At Thatcham, WBDC's view is that this could be achieved through a three-stage process, with an emphasis on planning for the future of the settlement as a whole:
1. Understanding historic growth and associated infrastructure/service provision to identify any under or over provision by current day standards, and to be able to relay this information to inform Stages 2 and 3;
 2. To consider the potential to deliver strategic scale growth, from the point of view of the known physical and environmental constraints of the town and the land being promoted, and having regard to their ability to deliver the measures needed to mitigate the impact of growth; and
 3. To test in more detail those areas with the potential to accommodate in the order of 3,500 dwellings and associated needs, to confirm their suitability, capacity and viability, so as to include this study in the Local Plan Evidence Base.
- 1.4 David Lock Associates together with Peter Brett Associates have been engaged to prepare this three-stage study on behalf of WBDC. This report and accompanying presentation detail our findings from Stage 1, the historic growth of Thatcham and associated service provision.

Approach

- 1.5 Our Stage 1 report will undertake the following tasks:
- **Task 1: Historic Mapping**
Review maps and analyse the historic growth of Thatcham, including a review of infrastructure and service provision. Provide a visual timeline charting the town's growth, so that the narrative is clear.
 - **Task 2: Assessment**
Establish a baseline socio-economic position in relation to each of the listed services using published data. Infrastructure provision will be compared with modern provision standards. To provide context, using an objective scoring approach to services, connectivity and proximity we will compare Thatcham's provision with similar settlements. A qualitative assessment of Thatcham's sense of place when compared to settlements of similar scale will also be made.
- 1.6 The outputs from Stage 1, detailed in this report, are the preliminary contextual research for the later stages of a review of present-day conditions and future concept masterplanning.

Assumptions and Limitations

- 1.7 This stage of the research study is derived from desk-based work and a meeting of 6th November 2018 with WBDC. Published sources and public information have been used almost exclusively to form this stage of the work.

- 1.8 This stage 1 report acts as part of the evidence base for WBDC's Local Plan Update to 2036. It does not seek to pre-judge that report and does not recommend whether to include specific sites in the Local Plan site allocations, only to provide evidence on which the Councils' decisions may be based.

2.0 HISTORICAL GROWTH

2.1 Thatcham has an extensive history, and it is claimed to be one of the oldest continually inhabited sites in the country. This section of the report presents a narrative on the history of the town, concentrating on developments since the end of World War Two.

Methodology

2.2 Analysis of Thatcham's historical growth has drawn on a number of desk-based sources, including:

- Historical Ordnance Survey mapping for the period 1970-present
- Historical satellite imagery for the period 2003-present
- ONS Census data for the years 1971-2011
- Recent ONS economic and population estimates

2.3 In addition to historical growth, a number of reports and other sources were used to build a picture of the town's development, including:

- Thatcham Vision 2015 report
- Thatcham Flood Forum and the Thatcham Surface Water Management Plan (2010)
- Recent planning applications
- "Thatcham – an historic town in a changing world", a joint publication by Thatcham Vision and the Thatcham Historical Society (2009)

Early History

2.4 Thatcham is located in the Kennet Valley, just above the flood plain and below the steep slope to the north that rises to the North Wessex Downs and Buckleberry Common. The town has mostly flat relief and only rises slightly on modern developments near Cold Ash Hill.

2.5 Signs of settlement in the Thatcham area can be found as far back as the Bronze Age, and it is one of the oldest continually inhabited sites in the country. During the Roman era, it was the site of a north-south bridging connection on the road between Cirencester and Silchester, at the crossing of the River Kennet. This connection assured its continued importance during the Saxon era, where by the time of the Domesday Book survey of 1086 it hosted a number of wealthy manors.

2.6 Soon after the Norman conquest, the new town of Newbury was founded leading to commercial rivalries. Both towns grew but Thatcham's peak of importance came in the 14th century, after which Newbury began to eclipse it. By the start of the 19th century, the realignment of power and national connections toward London led to a realignment of the geographic situation of Thatcham. No longer was the Kennet crossing as important, and Thatcham became a coaching town on the London to Bristol route. Transport connections such as the Kennet & Avon Canal and the railway continued to connect Thatcham, but the major node of transport shifted west to Newbury.

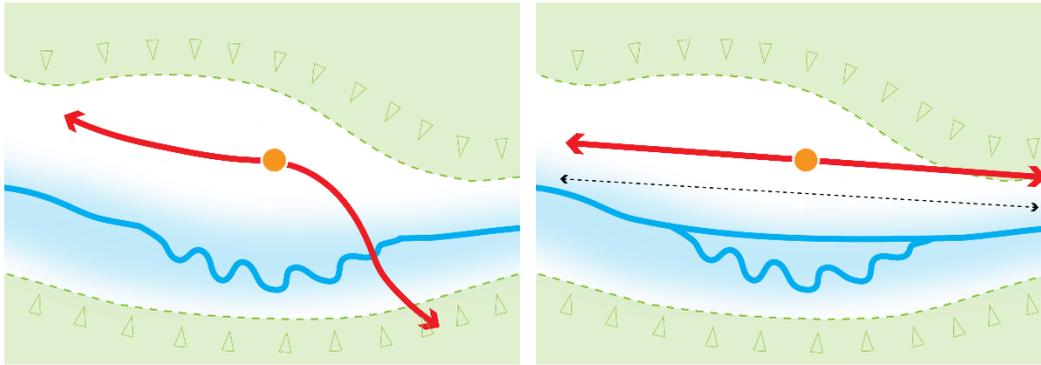
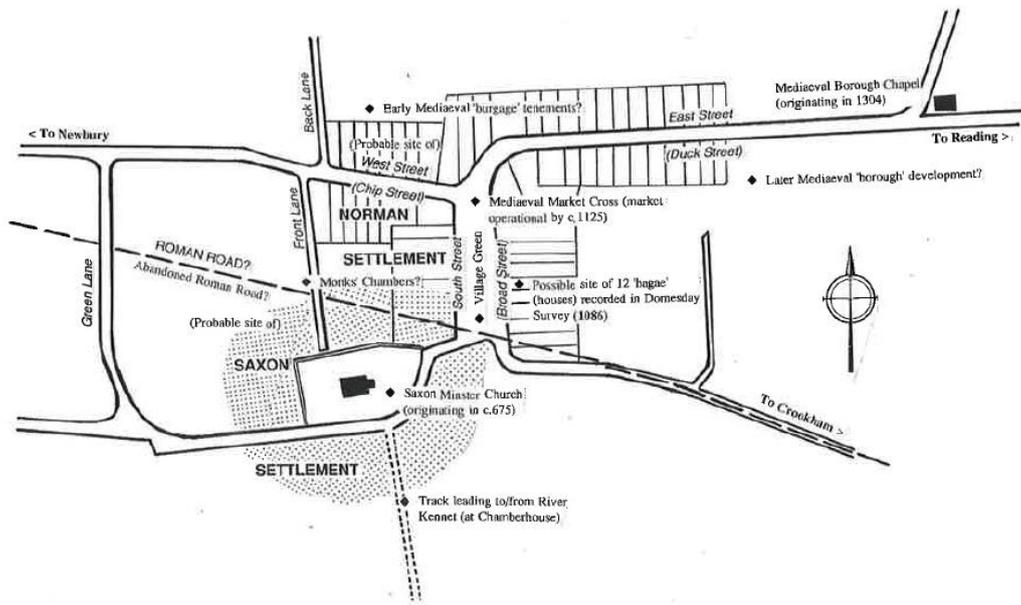


Figure 1: Realignment of primary connections from earliest settlement to modern Thatcham

2.7 A map of the medieval town centre indicates these connections and is still reflected in the structure of the town centre today.

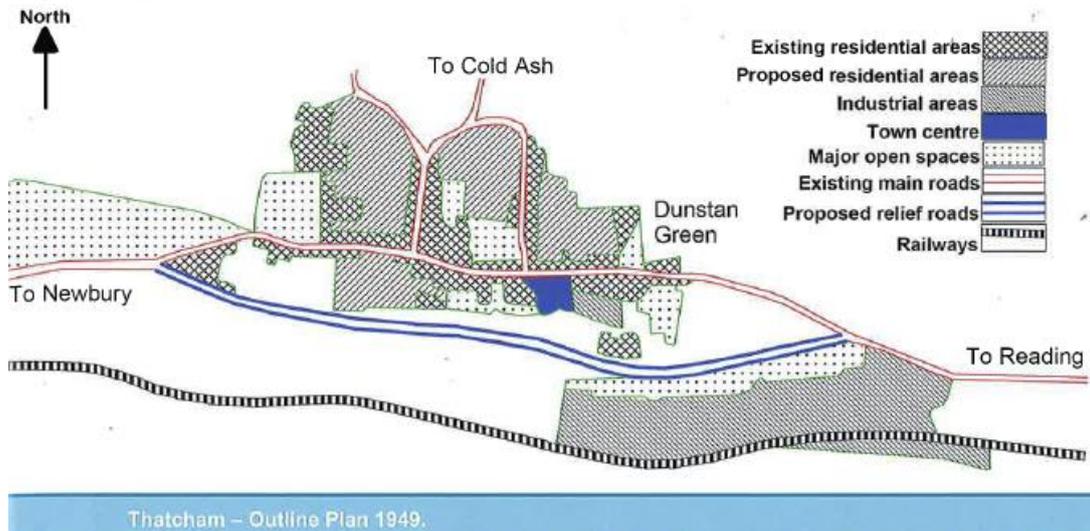


2.8 The town grew modestly until the end of the Second World War. The population was recorded as 2,416 in 1911 and this had risen to 3,320 by 1931¹. The town retained a compact, traditional character, along with a rural economy.

Post-war

2.9 Thatcham’s population in 1951 was 4,788, a 50% rise on the 1931 population which had previously been relatively stable for a number of decades. Post-war pressure for housing, and the policy of dispersal from major urban areas, stimulated development of estates to the north-west and south-east of the town. These were primarily low-density single-use residential areas, with semi-detached and detached houses predominating.

¹ A Vision of Britain through time (<http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/data/>)



2.10 The Thatcham Historical Society has charted the 20th Century development of the housing estates surrounding the town.



Key

1. Thatcham Newtown
2. Dunstan Green 1920/30 (additional housing 1962)
3. Elmhurst Green 1920/30, 1950-56
4. Westfield Estate 1950's onwards
5. Longcroft Estate 1954-59
6. Hartmead Road Estate 1956 (additional housing 1964 onwards)
7. Paynesdown Estate 1950, 1967-70, (additional housing 1989)
8. Whitelands Estate 1954-1982
9. Park Avenue Estate 1961-1968
10. River Estate 1973-78, (additional housing 1982, 1991)
11. Benham Hill Park Estate 1973-1978
12. Lakes Estate 1977 (additional housing 1991)
13. Moors Estate 1978-85 (additional housing 1991)
14. Thatcham Farm Estate 1981-85
15. Kennet Lea and Siege Cross Estates 1983-86
16. Dunstan Park Estate 1990 onwards
17. Kennet Heath Estate - 2000 onwards

2.11 Clear demographic differences exist between the defined estates, related to:

- Initial housing stock which attracted different demographics
- Initial period of occupation, and whether substantial renewal of this population has occurred

Growth of Thattham

🕒 1971

👤 10,590
👥 3,352
📏 286 ha



3x Primary
1x Secondary

🕒 1981

👤 14,716
👥 5,052
📏 371 ha



6x Primary
1x Secondary

🕒 1991

👤 20,225
👥 7,491
📏 469 ha



6x Primary
1x Secondary

🕒 2001

👤 22,284
👥 8,868
📏 520 ha



5x Primary
1x Secondary

🕒 2011

👤 25,267
👥 10,496
📏 533 ha



5x Primary
1x Secondary

🕒 2018

👤 26,000
👥 10,800
📏 533 ha



5x Primary
1x Secondary

Figure 2: Settlement growth of Thattham - urban area, population, population structure

- 2.12 Development accelerated from the early 1970s. From 1971-81 the population grew by nearly 40% to 14,716, with a corresponding growth in the built-up extent of Thatcham, signifying a relatively constant dwelling density. Two new primary schools were added but the newly built areas remained single-use, low density residential areas.
- 2.13 From 1981-2001 the population once again grew by 50% (to 22,284), with a 40% increase in built-up area². No new primary or secondary schools were added, and provision of other services was left to market forces. As the new developments were low density and car-oriented, Thatcham did not see a growth in self-containment. Instead, higher-order services became concentrated in nearby Newbury, which was easy to reach with a short car journey.
- 2.14 Thatcham town centre saw some changes during this period, with the addition of the Kingsland Centre in 1986. This shopping centre is anchored by a supermarket (currently Waitrose), and connects through to the main shopping street, The Broadway. The centre is accessed primarily by car from The Moors, a new access road also serving expanded residential areas to the south of the town centre.



Figure 3: The Moors and Kingsland Centre

- 2.15 By 2001 the town had taken most of the shape it has today. Residential redevelopments of the Ordnance Depot to the south of the town and the Pound Lane waste depot in the west of the town were occurring. The transformation of the Colthrop paper mill site into an industrial estate with warehousing and space for innovative SMEs was also underway.
- 2.16 Although statistics are incomplete, during the period 1971-2001 there was an increase in commuting to Newbury as a proportion of the economically active population³, but job growth in the Thatcham area kept pace with growth of the economically active population⁴. This is likely to be a result of the development of the Colthrop Mill site into a more productive protected employment location, as well as the growth of the AWE site at Aldermaston which comes under

² Derived from Ordnance Survey historical mapping 1970-2000

³ ONS Place of Work Census Data 1981 - 2011

⁴ ONS Place of Work Census Data 2011

one of the Thatcham census employment areas. There is also now a significant contingent of people who work from home⁵, aided by Thatcham’s overall high speed internet infrastructure⁶.

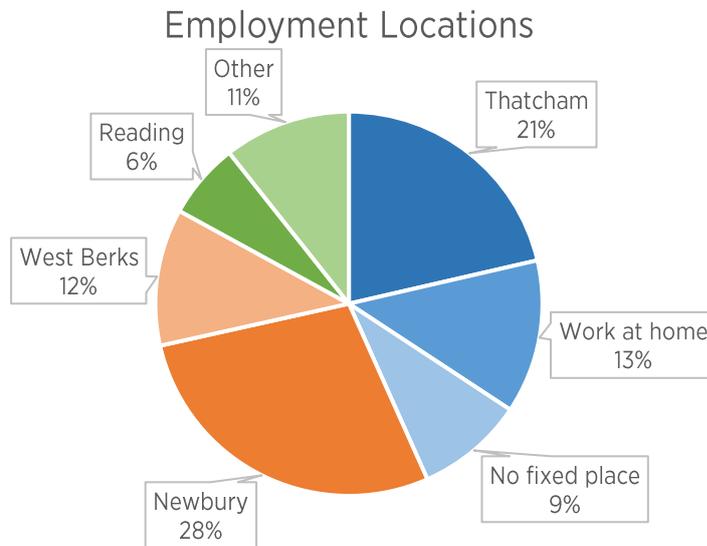


Figure 4: Employment locations (2011 Census)

2.17 The historical development through the 20th Century was typical of many towns in south-east England. Considerable housing growth occurred along with essential services, as well as car-oriented retail and employment development. This had a detrimental effect on sense of place and integration of the town centre core with the suburban surrounds.

21st Century

2.18 The early 2000s saw the completion of the Pound Lane development, the Ordnance Depot (now known as Kennet Heath) and a small number of infill developments. However, it did not see a significant expansion in urban area, and there was little change in infrastructure provision.

2.19 A significant development has been the change in use of the old Colthrop Mill into an industrial estate. This has seen employment on the site intensify in density and increase in value. As well as a number of logistics and warehousing businesses, the site also hosts a number of high-value technology companies, performing support services to a number of key industries such as automotive, aerospace and scientific research.

⁵ ONS Place of Work Census Data 2011

⁶ CDRC, using Ofcom 2017 data

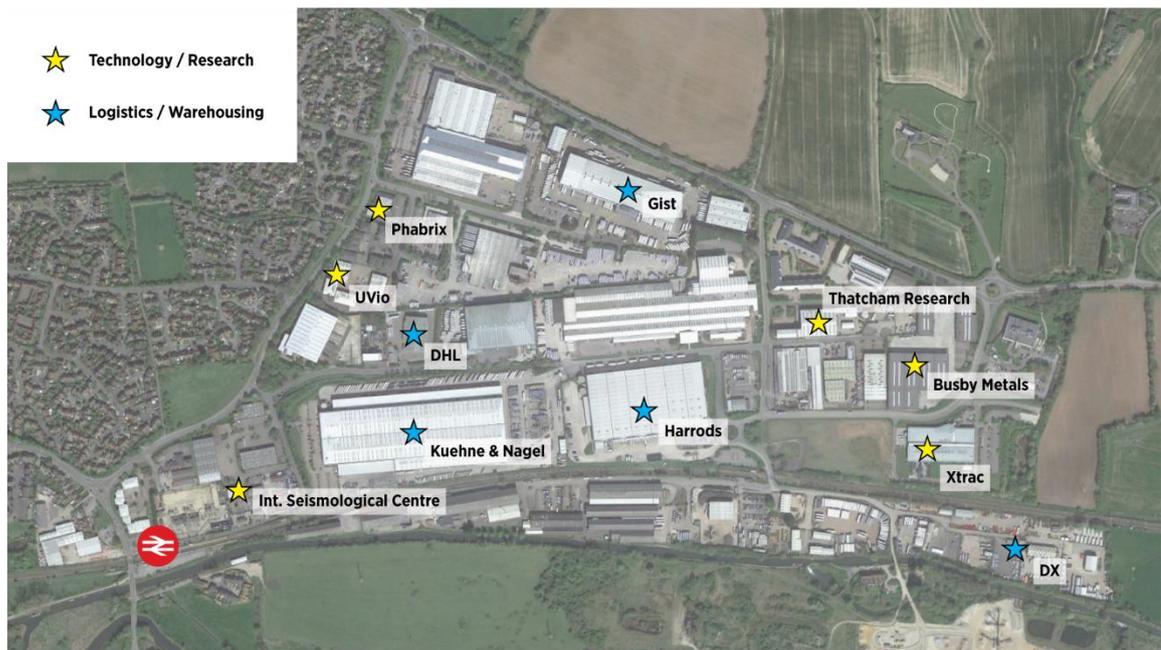


Figure 5: Colthrop Mill industrial estate

- 2.20 During the early part of the 21st century, connections to the natural environment were improved, most notably the establishment of the Nature Discovery Centre in abandoned gravel pits to the south of the town and the establishment of the Berkshire Living Landscape along the Kennet Valley.
- 2.21 July 2007 saw considerable flooding in Thatcham because of surface water drainage issues. The town sits at the bottom of the Kennet Valley, below the North Wessex Downs. "Astoundingly high rainfall fell over a short period of time"⁷, resulting in surface water from the valley slope breaking out of culverts under 1960s and 1970s housing estates. Additionally, 1990s development at Dunstan Park put many springs into pipes which contributed to flooding in the south of the town. Poor recording of culvert locations, lack of maintenance and a reduction in ground permeability due to roads, driveways and other hard infrastructure exacerbated the flooding. Areas affected included north Thatcham near Cold Ash Hill, north-west Thatcham near Tull Way and south-east Thatcham in the Kennet Heath area. Over 1000 residential properties were flooded.
- 2.22 In 2007 outline planning permission was granted for a comprehensive redevelopment of the Kingsland Centre, adding more retail space and additional car parking. Despite permission being renewed in 2015, the redevelopment has not occurred and its status is unknown. In 2018, an outline planning application for assisted living apartments has been submitted for an overlapping portion of the site⁸.
- 2.23 A 2008 design appraisal of Thatcham's town centre was undertaken by Turley Associates⁹. Few of the recommendations on public realm and townscape improvements have been implemented and the Town Council continues to request their completion¹⁰.

⁷ Select Committee on Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Written Evidence, September 2007, <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200708/cmselect/cmenvfru/49/49we94.htm>

⁸ West Berkshire Council, Planning Applications Register

⁹ Thatcham Town Centre Design Appraisal, Turley Associates, 2008

¹⁰ Thatcham Vision, Thatcham Vision 2015 Report (approved 2016)

- 2.24 By 2011 the population of Thatcham had grown to 25,267¹¹ but the built-up area had not expanded, apart from a very small development near Tull Way. However, the number of households had increased by 18%, in excess of the 11% population growth 2001-2011. Average household size dropped from 2.6 in 2001 to 2.4 in 2011, reflecting a national shift. Although there have been some infill developments and conversions to apartments, the demand for smaller dwelling units has not been fully addressed and this is flagged as a major concern by Thatcham Vision¹². Due to the predominance of single family houses there is a lack of small, affordable units for the wider variety of households now present in Thatcham.
- 2.25 The Local Plan for West Berkshire 2006-2026, approved in 2012, put the balance of development during the period on neighbouring Newbury. The document allocated land for 5,400 homes in Newbury versus 900 in Thatcham. West Berkshire Council justified the decision due to the considerable housing growth that Thatcham had experienced in recent years, without corresponding social infrastructure. The focus of the Local Plan period was to be on regeneration and renewal of facilities rather than further growth, in accordance with policy ADPP3.
- 2.26 The sole secondary school in the town, Kennet School, has expanded its intake from 280 annually (the situation in 2009) to 300, the change taking place in 2017¹³. The school is repeatedly over-subscribed, and the catchment area currently only covers the eastern half of Thatcham.

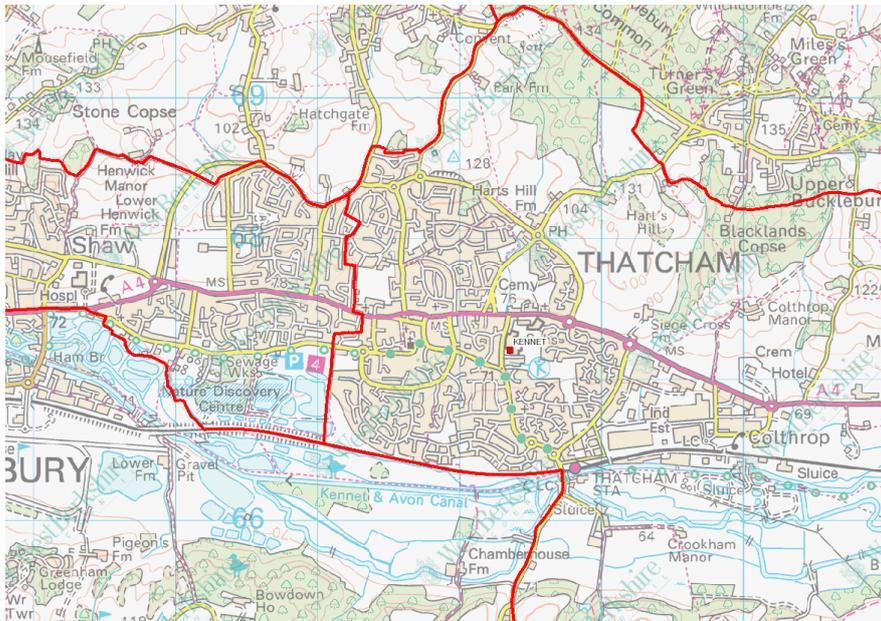


Figure 6: Secondary school catchment areas for Thatcham

- 2.27 Significant investment has occurred in flood mitigation measures. In accordance with WBDC policy CS16 and ADPP3, a number of schemes have been completed to the north of the town. Further schemes in the east of the town are now being progressed to protect the south and east of Thatcham.

¹¹ ONS Census Data 2011

¹² ¹² Thatcham Vision, Thatcham Vision 2015 Report (approved 2016)

¹³ West Berkshire Council, Secondary School Over-subscription Allocations 2017-18

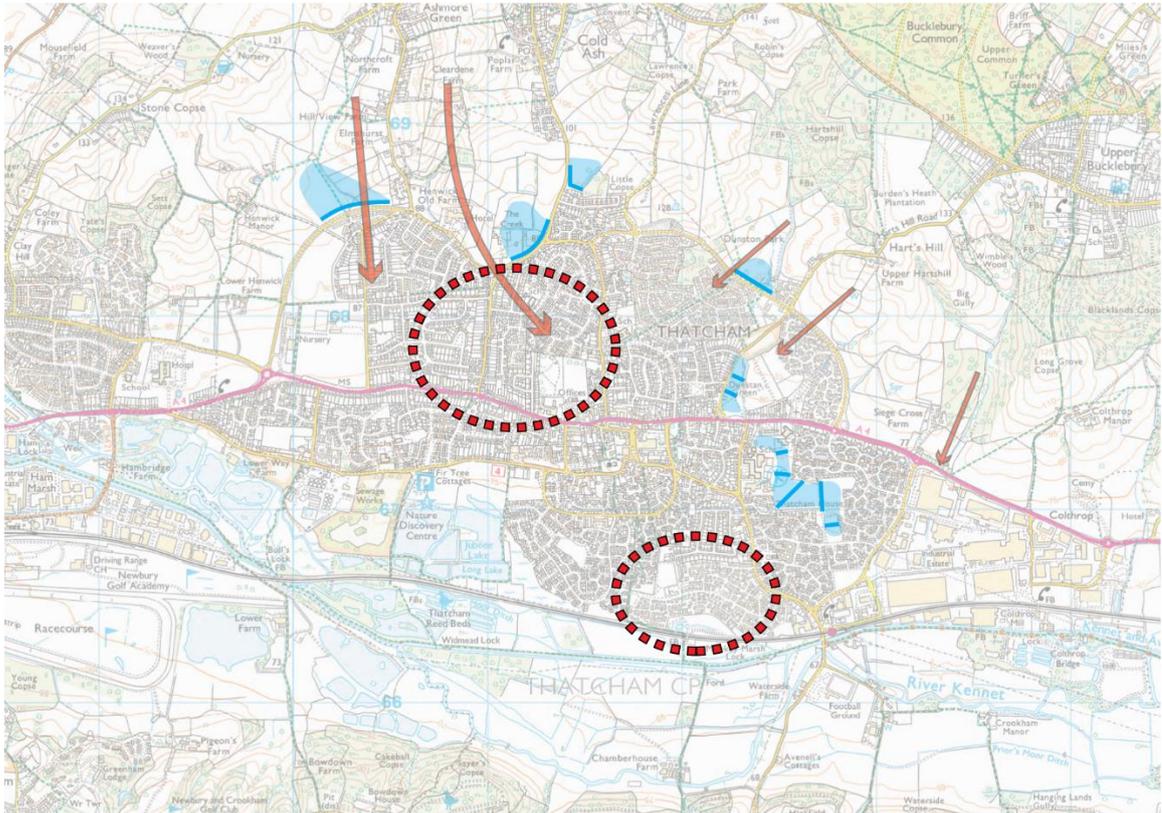


Figure 7: Flood alleviation schemes, protecting circled areas

Demographic Change

2.28 Significant demographic change has occurred in Thatcham since 1971, as shown in Figure 8.

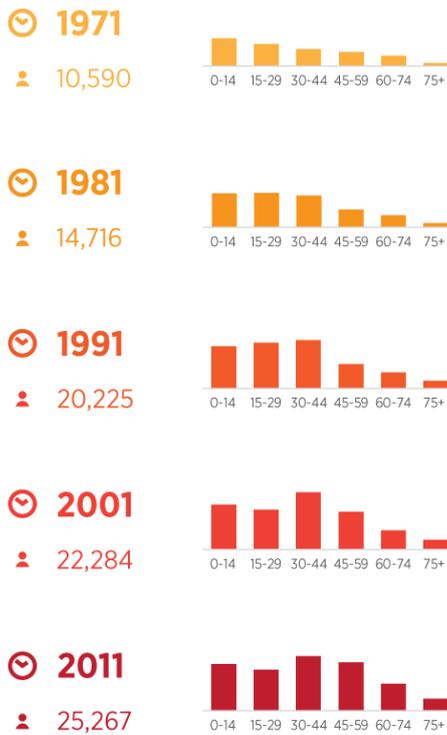


Figure 8: Population Pyramids for Thatcham 1971-2011 (ONS Census Data)

- 2.29 Table 1 below shows the relative growth of different age groups, highlighting the particular growth in the older population over time.

Year	0-14	15-29	30-44	45-59	60-74	75+
1971	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
1981	1.23	1.53	1.81	1.21	1.18	1.31
1991	1.53	2.02	2.76	1.69	1.53	2.42
2001	1.62	1.77	3.29	2.57	1.82	2.99
2011	1.68	1.84	3.14	3.32	2.60	3.76

Table 1: Relative growth of age groups in Thatcham

- 2.30 Whereas in 1971 Thatcham had a relatively youthful population, the town now has a much larger population in the 45-59 age bracket, as well as older brackets.
- 2.31 This change in structure has implications for service provision, such as elderly care, leisure and community facilities, and open space. The population structure also has an effect on the average household size. Older households are more likely to be smaller, with children having left the family home.
- 2.32 The absolute numbers in each category have risen, so an overall expansion of all services would be expected from the 1971 base.

Conclusions

- 2.33 Thatcham has experienced typical 20th and 21st century growth patterns for towns in the south-east of England. Extensive housing development has occurred with associated transportation infrastructure. However, in the case of Thatcham, the nearby presence of Newbury has prevented the development of some of the higher-order services that would otherwise have been expected to develop.
- 2.34 The town retains a surprising degree of self-containment in employment, especially considering its proximity to Newbury, good transport links out to other major employment locations and reduced level of services. Much of this success is due to the employment zone on the eastern edge of the town.
- 2.35 The town has unique infrastructure requirements for flood prevention which have been prioritised in recent years due to the July 2007 flooding event.
- 2.36 Population and urban area growth has tailed off in the 21st century after a very rapid period of growth from 1970-2000. However, household growth has continued due to national demographic changes.
- 2.37 This chapter has summarised the historical development narrative and recent history. This historical context sets contextual understanding for the next chapter, Service Provision.

3.0 SERVICE PROVISION

3.1 This chapter details overall service and social infrastructure provision found in Thatcham today and some historical context on its development. It attempts to identify provision gaps and potential areas for improvement should expansion as identified in the Introduction occur.

3.2 In most categories this report tests two scenarios:

- The change in service provision levels in Thatcham required to provide for expansion on the order of 3,500 homes
- The change in service provision levels required to close any identified gaps within Thatcham’s services **and** provide for an additional 3,500 homes

3.3 Testing both of these is important to understand if residential expansion within the Local Plan Update can enhance and contribute to Thatcham as a whole, and how this might be achieved.

Education

3.4 Thatcham currently has 5 primary schools (including Parsons Down as a single school covering the primary age range, but which is split into Infants and Juniors), with a total of 366 pupils per annum entry (13 FE). This equates to approximately 2,700 places.

3.5 There is a single secondary school, Kennet, with a total of 300 pupils per annum entry (10 FE). This is a rise from the 2016 figure of 280¹⁴. Nevertheless, Kennet remains over-subscribed, and the catchment area only covers half of Thatcham¹⁵. The school has 1,700 pupils, including 400 in the sixth form¹⁶.

3.6 The western half of Thatcham is served by Trinity School, 3 miles away in north Newbury, for secondary education. Students are bused, where eligible, at a subsidised cost of £700+ each year to parents¹⁷.

3.7 Further education is provided by Newbury College in Newbury.

3.8 Dedicated SEN provision is provided outside of Thatcham in Newbury or western Reading (WBDC’s “eastern urban area”).

3.9 Using the most recently publicly available figures for pupil yield in West Berkshire (2004), a provision gap is evident in Thatcham:

Type	Pupils / 100 dwellings ¹⁸	Dwellings	Spaces required	Spaces available	Current FE	Gap
Primary	38	10,800	4,104 / 19 FE	2,700 / 13 FE	13	1,404 / 6FE
Secondary	19.4	10,800	2,095 / 13 FE	1,700 / 10 FE	10	395 / 3FE

¹⁴ West Berkshire Council, Secondary School Over-subscription Allocations 2017-18

¹⁵ Thatcham Vision, Thatcham Vision 2015 Report (approved 2016)

¹⁶ Kennet School, (<https://www.kennetschool.co.uk/app/os#!/home>), 2018

¹⁷ West Berkshire Council, <https://www.westberks.gov.uk/article/32599/Apply-for-the-School-Transport-Farepaying-Scheme-201718>

¹⁸ West Berkshire Council, Delivering Investment from Growth Topic Paper 3 – Education, August 2004

Table 2: Education provision in Thatcham

At present the gaps are primarily covered by provision in Newbury. However with the expansion of Newbury by an additional 5,400 dwellings to 2026, and planning policy to make Thatcham more self-contained and reduce pupil transport costs, provision within the Thatcham settlement boundary becomes more important.

- 3.10 The two main sites for expansion in Newbury (Sandleford and the Racecourse), have agreed to (or propose to provide) funds for the expansion of nearby secondary schools. In the case of Sandleford, 1.2ha of land has been provided for the expansion of the neighbouring Park House School, with an additional 1.6ha safeguarded for future needs.
- 3.11 Should expansion on the order of 3,500 homes take place with similar pupil yield ratios, there are two scenarios for education provision – covering the requirements of the additional development only, or closing the infrastructure gap that has opened in the town as a whole:

Type	Primary	Secondary	Space Required ¹⁹
Development only	6 FE	6 FE	14.3 ha
Covering gap	12 FE	9 FE	23.2 ha

Table 3: New education provision estimates

- 3.12 As well as the calculations above, WBDC has identified the following critical requirements in their Infrastructure Delivery Plan to 2026²⁰:

- SEN provision (£218,000 funding gap)
- Early years provision (£850,000 funding gap)

- 3.13 Limitations of this analysis should be noted. The most recent pupil yield numbers for West Berkshire are old (2004). Demographic modelling by Lichfields on behalf of the NE Thatcham consortium suggests significantly less requirement for education provision, based on forward projection of demographics. However, while this may be accurate in assessing the current gap in provision, it may not fully account for the particular demographics attracted to new-build housing in a new development.

Health

- 3.14 At present there are two GPs’ surgeries in Thatcham, with a total of 17 GPs (12 FTE)²¹. They have approximately 28,000 patients on roll, which results in 2,300 patients per full-time GP²². This is a reduction in FTE GPs since 2015, when there were 14 FTE.
- 3.15 There are 3 dental practices and 1 opticians’ practice in the town. There are 4 pharmacies within the settlement boundary. The nearest 24-hour pharmacy is on the Newbury Retail Park, 3 miles away²³.
- 3.16 Using recent NHS guidance, approximate benchmark figures for GP provision is 1 per 1,750 registered patients²⁴. More detailed calculations are obtained using the Carr-Hill formula, but for gross calculations this basic approximation is valid.

¹⁹ West Berkshire Council, Delivering Investment from Growth Topic Paper 3 – Education, August 2004

²⁰ West Berkshire Council, Infrastructure Delivery Plan to 2026

²¹ NHS Service Finder, December 2018

²² Thatcham Vision, Thatcham Vision 2015 Report (approved 2016)

²³ All data NHS Service Finder, December 2018

²⁴ Department of Health and Social Care, Health Building Note 11-01

- 3.17 Should expansion on the order of 3,500 homes of average UK household size (2.4²⁵) take place, there are two scenarios for healthcare provision – covering the requirements of the additional development only, or closing the infrastructure gap that has opened in the town as a whole:

Type	Additional FTE GPs	Space Required ²⁶
Development only	5	600 m ²
Covering gap	9	1080 m ²

Table 4: New GP healthcare provision estimates

Open Space

- 3.18 Thatcham has significant amounts of public open space of different forms present within and adjacent to the settlement.
- 3.19 There are sports pitches and recreational facilities present at Henwick Lane, Pound Lane, Coldstream Way, the town centre fields, Glebelands and the football club.
- 3.20 Parks and other open spaces are present throughout the town, most significantly at Harts Hill Road and near Hurford Drive.
- 3.21 There are allotments in the east of the town, although they are oversubscribed with a significant waiting list²⁷.
- 3.22 There are around 15 children’s play areas across the town²⁸, maintained either by Thatcham Town Council (TTC) or WBDC.
- 3.23 Total open space within the settlement boundary is around 60 ha. In addition, there is 85 ha directly adjacent to the town as part of the Thatcham Nature Reserve. This nature reserve is accessible to the public via public rights of way and the Nature Discovery Centre²⁹, and is well used.
- 3.24 In total there is 145 ha of accessible open space in or adjacent to Thatcham. This does not include canal-side walking or the fields to the north, west and east of the town.
- 3.25 To determine whether this level of provision is appropriate for the town, there are a variety of standards available. Policy RL.1 of the Local Plan requires ‘*in new developments of ten or more dwellings, the provision of between 3 and 4.3 hectares of public open space per thousand population in such form, scale and distribution as may be considered appropriate depending on local circumstances, together with associated facilities/equipment*’. The Local Plan at paragraph 7.5.2 refers to the National Playing Field Associations’ minimum standard for outdoor playing space of 2.43 hectares per 1,000 population. This is now superseded by the Fields in Trust’s *Beyond the Six Acre Standard*, which is summarised below:

Open Space Typology	Quantity Guideline (hectares per 1,000 population)	Walking Guideline (metres from dwelling)
Formal outdoor space		
Playing pitches	1.20	1,200m

²⁵ NOMIS Estimates, 2016

²⁶ Department of Health and Social Care, Health Building Note 11-01

²⁷ Thatcham Vision, Thatcham Vision 2015 Report (approved 2016)

²⁸ Thatcham Town Council, <http://www.thatchamtowncouncil.gov.uk/local-facilities/listing/play-areas-map>

²⁹ Berkshire, Buckinghamshire & Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust, <https://www.bbowl.org.uk/explore/visitor-centres/nature-discovery-centre>

All outdoor sports	1.60	1,200m
Equipped/ designated play areas	0.25	LAPs – 100m LEAPs – 400m NEAPs – 1,000m
Other outdoor provision (MUGAs and skateboard parks)	0.30	700m
Informal outdoor space		
Parks and gardens	0.80	710m
Amenity green space	0.60	480m
Natural and semi-natural	1.80	720m

Table 5: Fields in Trust: Beyond the Six Acre Standard summary

- 3.26 Summarising these requirements shows that overall, Thatcham is currently well-provisioned for overall open space, but the allocation of space types within this overall availability may need to be examined for future development. There is a significant amount of informal and natural outdoor space, but this may need to be balanced with formal space in the future.

Policy	Space per 1,000 population	Required Space	Gap
WBDC RL.1	3 → 4.3 ha	78 → 112 ha	18 → 52 ha within town 33 → 67 ha in excess overall
NPFA Six Acre Standard	2.43 ha	63 ha	3 ha within town 82 ha in excess overall
Fields in Trust Beyond the Six Acre Standard	6.55 ha (total of different typologies)	170 ha	110 ha within town 35 ha overall

Table 6: Open space provision standards and requirements for Thatcham

- 3.27 Given the very divergent standards, and the ambiguity over whether the nature reserve site should be included within the figures, it is not clear that there is a provision gap for open space within Thatcham. Open space of various types are provisioned extensively around the town.

Leisure

- 3.28 Thatcham's leisure offering is partially within the control of WBDC and partially controlled by commercial operators. Unlike open space provision, the leisure facility offering is less varied and extensive.
- 3.29 A shared leisure centre operates on the Kennet School site. This means that facilities are not available during school hours³⁰, which limits its usefulness for some members of the community.
- 3.30 Two tennis courts are available near the town council buildings near the town centre.
- 3.31 Additional sports pitches are available around the town as detailed in 'Open Space' above.
- 3.32 There are indoor bowling and soft play facilities at Newbury Leisure Park, a privately operated facility on the southwest fringes of the town.

³⁰ Thatcham Vision, Thatcham Vision 2015 Report (approved 2016)

- 3.33 It is recognised by TTC and Thatcham Vision that the leisure centre and number of sports facilities is not sufficient for a town of the size of Thatcham³¹. The Newbury Leisure Park, although recently refurbished, is limited in size and quality.
- 3.34 It is difficult to provide benchmark measures of what is appropriate leisure provision, especially given the nearby presence of Newbury which offers facilities such as a cinema, additional indoor bowling, more sports facilities and cultural locations such as museums and theatres.
- 3.35 As a result, this report collates together commonly identified facilities that the town lacks and local groups have identified would be appropriate for Thatcham. These provision gaps are:
- A dedicated leisure centre, open during school hours, with better indoor sports facilities
 - Improved cultural facilities, such as a museum
 - Youth leisure facilities

Community

- 3.36 Thatcham has limited community facilities. Like many places, it has a number of community halls which provide space for clubs and local activities. There is no larger central community space, something which the town council have identified as a deficiency³².
- 3.37 There is a small library near the town centre, however it is undersized for a town of 26,000 people³³.
- 3.38 There is no location for accessing public services such as WBDC services or other government services. Although many services are now delivered online or remotely, a lack of physical presence and access may impact vulnerable users of government services disproportionately.
- 3.39 Thames Valley Police have no fixed presence in the town and would like to add a small facility that they can use for officers in the area³⁴. Although Thatcham does not have a significant issue with crime and is below national averages for crime rates, there is a local perception of anti-social behaviour as an issue, particularly in the centre of town and at night³⁵.
- 3.40 Once again it is difficult to provide a benchmark measure of appropriate community facility service provision, so as a result, this report collates together commonly identified facilities that the town lacks and local groups have identified would be appropriate for Thatcham. These provision gaps are:
- A central community hub – including flexible space, a larger library, elderly day centre provision, central public services access point, and a cultural facility (see previous section, 'Leisure')
 - Elderly day care and general contact provision
 - A policing facility, i.e. a 'touch-down' point for local officers
 - Additional allotments (see 'Open space' above)
 - Cycleway and canal path quality improvements

Employment and Retail

³¹ Thatcham Vision, Thatcham Vision 2015 Report (approved 2016)

³² Thatcham Vision, Thatcham Vision 2015 Report (approved 2016)

³³ Thatcham Vision, Thatcham Vision 2015 Report (approved 2016)

³⁴ Thatcham Vision, Thatcham Vision 2015 Report (approved 2016)

³⁵ Thatcham Town Council Plan, community consultation survey, 2014

- 3.41 Thatcham has a high percentage of residents working in Thatcham, both in places of work and working from home. The protected employment zone at Colthrop Mill has the highest concentration of jobs and in-commuting.
- 3.42 Thatcham's retail core is smaller than comparable towns of similar population. The centre is classified by the Consumer Data Research Centre (CDRC) as offering 'convenience' shopping, but not 'comparison' – the higher-order retail offering. This is in contrast to nearby, similarly-sized centres, and is likely due to the nearby presence of Newbury preventing the development of comparison retail in the town.
- 3.43 Additional critical mass provided by a well-connected and well-integrated urban extension would enhance the viability and vitality of Thatcham's town centre, and could contribute to the development of some comparison retail in the town.

Other Infrastructure Identified in IDP to 2026

- 3.44 As well as the categories identified above, WBDC has identified a number of other infrastructure gaps in its Local Plan to 2026. These have been detailed in the Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP) to 2026, and those items not covered by sections above are repeated here for completeness.
- 3.45 Should development of a strategic scale occur, it is very likely that any unfunded infrastructure requirements flagged in the IDP as 'critical' or 'necessary' would need to be funded and completed to enable such strategic development to take place.
- 3.46 These items are:
- Air Quality Management Monitoring and Plan: the Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) on the A4 crossroads in the centre of the town currently has no mitigation plan in place³⁶. Should development occur it is likely that this plan and associated measures would be a required item due to potentially increased levels of traffic.
 - Biodiversity Opportunity Area Monitoring: the areas to the north-east of the town which fall under BOA regulations require improved monitoring.
 - Active signage for bus stops along the A4 and other public transport routes

Conclusions

- 3.47 This chapter has looked in detail at the overall level of service provision that Thatcham currently has, and how it compares with benchmark standards and the desires and aspirations of local residents and representatives.
- 3.48 Thatcham has significant service deficiencies in some areas, particularly education and to a lesser extent healthcare.
- 3.49 Thatcham is well provisioned for open space, although additional sports facilities and allotment provision may be required.
- 3.50 There is a poor leisure offering within the town, most likely due to the presence of Newbury nearby and the economies of scale of offering higher-order and higher quality leisure facilities for the combined populations of the two towns there.
- 3.51 This report and WBDC's own Infrastructure Delivery Plan present a number of items that may need to be funded through various mechanisms when considering strategic expansion of

³⁶ West Berkshire Council, Infrastructure Delivery Plan to 2026

Thatcham in a way that reduces or eliminates the present service and infrastructure provision gap.

- 3.52 Dependent on viability testing, it is possible that strategic expansion can offer significant improvement to Thatcham's service offering and perceived or actual infrastructure gap.

4.0 RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

4.1 Since the beginning of the 21st Century, a number of planning applications for growth of Thatcham have been submitted. It is informative to study these and their approval, reasons for rejection and appeal decisions, as this will inform the current planning context for future development in Stage 3, and present-day constraints in Stage 2.

4.2 Planning applications for large sites and urban extensions are shown in Figure 9.

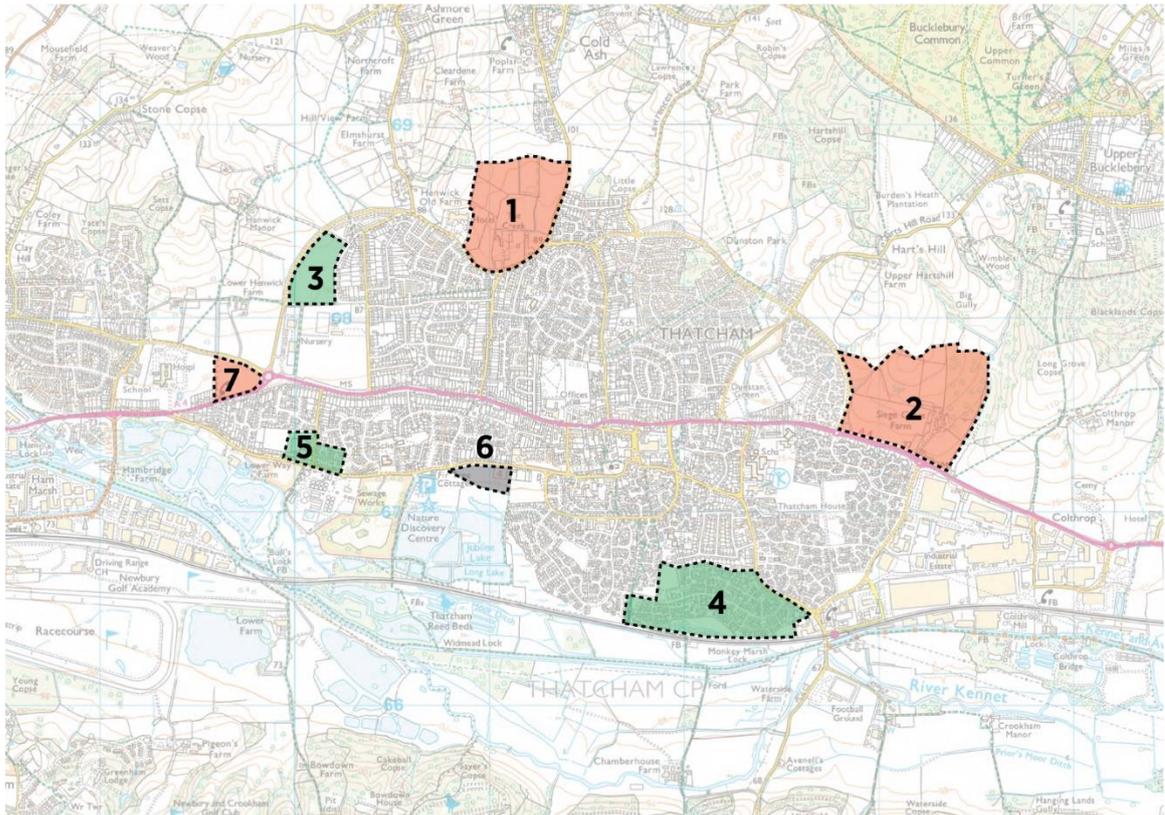


Figure 9: Settlement extension planning applications since 2000

4.3 Full detail of each planning application’s decision and ramifications is given below in Table 7.

Land and Application(s)	Decision	Notes
1 - Land North of Bowling Green Road 15/01949/OUTMAJ - 265 houses 16/01508/OUTMAJ - 225 houses, GP surgery	Refused by WBDC, refused on appeal	Two major (but linked) outline planning applications have been refused on this site. On appeal the Secretary of State backed the refusal but limited the reasons for refusal to lack of inclusion of the land in the Local Plan. The land is beyond the settlement boundary and the SoS determined that the Local Plan and 2017 Housing DPD demonstrated a sound five-year land supply.
2 - Siege Cross Farm 02/00706/OUTMAJ - 550 houses,	Both refused by WBDC, refused on appeal	This land corresponds to SHLAA site THA10. Two major planning applications have been refused, although they are some time apart and were fundamentally different proposals. Both were refused ultimately for being outside of the Local

community facilities 15/00296/OUTMAJ - 495 houses, 2FE primary school, 250sqm D1		Plan, and being beyond the edge of the existing settlement boundaries. On appeal, the Secretary of State did not accept landscape setting arguments for refusal or detrimental impact on educational provision.
3 - Land East of Tull Way 12/00279/OUTMAJ - 90 houses 16/00625/OUTMAJ - 75 houses	12/00279 refused by WBDC, refused on appeal 16/00625 refused by WBDC, approved on appeal	Two planning applications have been submitted on this site, with 16/00625/OUTMAJ being approved on appeal to MHCLG. 12/00279/OUTMAJ was refused on multiple grounds, including impact on landscape, poor accessibility and permeability, and other poor design features resulting from overdevelopment on the site (90 units). A revised application for 75 units was initially refused on landscape setting arguments, but was approved on appeal after WBDC did not contest the appeal. Although the site is not in either the Local Plan or Housing DPD, it is considered within the existing boundaries of Thatcham as it is inside the Northern Distributor Road and was approved on this basis.
4 - Kennet Heath	Approved	A major development of 880 new homes built on a former MOD ordnance depot in the early 2000s. This was the last major expansion in Thatcham, but was on brownfield land and did not expand the built-up area.
5 - Pound Lane Depot	Approved	A redevelopment of a former council waste depot into 47 flats and houses, completed in the early 2000s. This was on brownfield land and did not expand the urban area.
6 - Land South of Lower Way 18/00964/FULEXT - 97 houses	Undecided (December 2018)	The 2017 Housing DPD included this site, which is considered beyond the bounds of the Thatcham urban area. An outline application was submitted in June 2018 and has not been decided as of November 2018.
7 - Land West of A4 Roundabout 18/02634/COMIND - Car dealership	Refused (December 2018)	A planning application for a BMW and Mini car dealership was submitted in October 2018, and was refused in December 2018 by WBC's planning committee. Refusal was based on a number of criteria, including landscape impact, unsuitability of use at the location, drainage and flooding concerns, as well as the closure of the strategic gap to Newbury.

Table 7: Strategic expansion planning applications since 2000

Summary

- 4.4 Planning applications and their refusals or approvals have set a clear precedent in favour of co-ordinated, strategic growth of the town. Speculative, unconnected developments have been refused for a number of reasons, including:
- Landscape impact
 - Poor accessibility and severance from the town
 - Service provision in Thatcham
 - Being outside the Local Plan

-
- 4.5 However on appeal all reasons except for the lack of compliance with the Local Plan have been struck down. WBDC's plan to 2026 is considered sound and provides for anticipated housing growth requirements. Should this remain the case in the revised plan to 2036, the door has been opened to growth of Thatcham if it is part of a co-ordinated, strategic approach through the Local Plan process, rather than piecemeal expansion as occurred throughout the 20th Century. The clear implication is that only growth of a strategic scale can support the service provision and regeneration that Thatcham requires.

5.0 TRANSPORT AND ACCESS

- 5.1 To determine existing travel patterns in Thatcham, the 2011 Census has been reviewed, which provides modal split data for travel to work to and from Thatcham. The modal split is summarised in Table 8.

	Train	Bus	Motorbike	Car Driver	Car Passenger	Cyclist	Pedestrian	Total
Travel from Thatcham	4%	4%	1%	73%	6%	4%	8%	100%
Travel to Thatcham	1%	2%	1%	65%	5%	4%	22%	100%

Table 8: Thatcham Travel to Work Modal Split

- 5.2 From Table 8 it is clear that private car forms the main mode of transport in Thatcham at 79% and 70%, with walking being the next major mode, especially for jobs within Thatcham, with 22% of trips being by pedestrians. With major employment centres in Newbury, Reading and London accessible directly by train, there is a higher proportion of public transport trips out of Thatcham by these modes, at 8% of the total by train or bus. For jobs within Thatcham, there are less trips by public transport, but a higher proportion by walking.

Highway

- 5.3 The A4 Bath Road is a major route connecting Thatcham directly to the M4 Junction 12 and Reading to the east and Newbury to the west, along with further destinations to both the west and east. The A4 experiences congestion during peak periods, and forms a significant barrier between north and south Thatcham.
- 5.4 The A4 also effectively serves a local function being the main spine road for the Thatcham settlement area and has a 30mph speed limit through Thatcham.
- 5.5 There are seven signalised junctions on the A4 between Lower Way to the west and Harts Hill Road to the east. Roundabout junctions are provided on the A4 with Tull Way/Turnpike Road west of Thatcham, Floral Way/Falmouth Way, Pipers Way, and Gables Way to the east to Thatcham. Further priority junctions are provided on the A4 through Thatcham.
- 5.6 The signalised junctions provide controlled pedestrian crossing facilities, and there are also staggered signalised pedestrian crossings provided west of the Floral Way roundabout, east of Stoney Lane, and east of Green Street.
- 5.7 The section of A4 from the Broadway junction to the junction with Harts Hill Road is designated as an Air Quality Management Area (AQMA).
- 5.8 West Berkshire Council has identified the A4 corridor through Thatcham for improvements to reduce congestion and improve facilities for non-motorised users.
- 5.9 There is a route to the north comprising Tull Way, Bowling Green Road, Heath Lane and Floral Way which avoids the A4 through Thatcham. This is not signed as a route but has become a local rat run.
- 5.10 Cold Ash Hill to the north of Thatcham is used as a local route to the M4 and A34 via Hermitage, avoiding the A4 through Newbury.

- 5.11 There is a level crossing at Thatcham on Chamberhouse Mill Lane/Station Road which is a local constraint for north-south vehicular traffic, with long queues often forming in peak periods on both sides of the railway, which sometimes do not clear before the barriers come back down again for the next train. This route forms part of a rat run between the A339 and A4. As such, there have been proposals to provide a new bridge across the railway line. A significant constraint on the provision of the bridge is the headroom required due to the electrification of the line. Any bridge will also have to cross the Kennet and Avon Canal located south of the railway, further increasing the costs.
- 5.12 There are also environmental and flooding constraints south of the canal to providing a bridge. A new bridge at this location may also open up an existing constraint and increase vehicular traffic through environmentally sensitive areas south of Thatcham.

Rail

- 5.13 Thatcham station is on the Great Western Railway line between London Paddington, Reading, Newbury, Bedwyn and Frome. There are typically 2-3 services per hour in each direction with the opportunity for interchange at Reading for access to the wider national network.
- 5.14 With the electrification of the route between Reading and Newbury, GWR will be able to run new Electrostar trains between Newbury and station stops to London, as well extend the operation of new, bi-mode Intercity Express Trains (IET) beyond Newbury to Bedwyn, and direct to Wiltshire, Devon and Cornwall. Many of these services stop at Thatcham.
- 5.15 These trains will provide more seats than the current fleet, are less polluting and enable wider timetable improvements.
- 5.16 Thatcham railway station is located to the south-east of Thatcham, approximately 1.5km walk from the town centre. The station therefore does not provide easy accessibility for residents of north and west Thatcham.
- 5.17 There is a limited amount of car parking at Thatcham rail station, with 56 parking bays including 2 disabled bays on the southern car park, and 33 bays including 3 disabled bays on the northern car park. For cyclists, there are also 15 covered Sheffield stands and 4 uncovered Sheffield stands located north of the station, and 24 spaces in a covered two-tier cycle stand on the station.

Cycling

- 5.18 Thatcham is located in the River Kennet valley, and therefore the topography is generally flat which helps to encourage cycling, especially for the young and elderly. National Cycle Route (NCN) 4 links west Thatcham to Thatcham Rail Station via Lower Way and Station Road. This provides an off carriageway route avoiding the A4, with NCN4 connecting Newbury to Reading.
- 5.19 There are signed off carriageway paths along sections of the A4, as well as short sections of on carriageway cycleways on Chapel Street and east of Floral Way.
- 5.20 A further off carriageway cycle route is located along the northern route across Thatcham.

Bus services

- 5.21 There are a number of bus services in Thatcham that provide routes to Newbury and Reading. The main routes use the A4 although there are no bus priority facilities within Thatcham.

-
- 5.22 There are no direct services to destinations south of Thatcham and Newbury, including Basingstoke, Newbury Retail Park, New Greenham Park and Newbury College. These destinations require changing services at Newbury Bus Station and are therefore not attractive to residents of Thatcham.

Conclusions

- 5.23 The development of Thatcham has resulted, as in many towns, in a car-dominated modal split. This reflects the underprovision of services within the town, leading many to use Newbury for daily requirements and employment.
- 5.24 An oft-cited concern is the level crossing at the station, however with flood plain and a local-only transport link beyond, improvements to this constriction may not deliver the return that its considerable cost would require, and may not aid in provision of sustainable transport choices as an alternative to the car.
- 5.25 However, the town has potential for sustainable transport provision through its cycling links, recently improved rail connections and linear axis along a well-served public transport corridor. Future development must exploit and improve on these advantages to create truly sustainable expansion.

6.0 COMPARISONS

Scale Comparisons With Other Towns

6.1 Although some guidance exists for infrastructure provision under the direct control of public authorities, such as schools, healthcare provision and transport infrastructure, the overall sense of a town’s status is more complex. As the Thatcham Vision report clearly states;

*"Thatcham’s village style-town centre is seen by many as a very positive, desirable asset but while many may want it to look like a village, Thatcham must think and act like a modern town providing comprehensive modern services. Only then can Thatcham live up to its potential, socially and economically."*³⁷

6.2 Comparisons with other towns of similar population, socio-economic status and nearby settlements can assist in qualitatively and quantitatively considering overall provision of infrastructure, services and sense of place.

6.3 Comprehensive service levels can be gauged using a ranking approach, giving weighted scores to different services within a settlement.

6.4 The methodology selected was the South Oxfordshire Settlement Hierarchy methodology (2017), due to its:

- Comprehensive service listing
- Recent revisions to improve efficacy
- Recent use in a neighbouring district (South Oxfordshire) with similar demographics, population distribution and settlement types
- Inclusion of public transport
- Inclusion of proximity to employment zones and other settlements

6.5 Five towns were selected as comparators, detailed below in Table 9.

Town	Population	Similarities	Differences	Score
Romsey	17,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Close to much larger centre (Southampton) • Historic market town • Similar socio-economic demographic³⁸ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Significantly smaller population • Nearby larger centre further than case at Thatcham 	495
Witney	28,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Historic market town • Similar socio-economic demographic³⁹ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some distance from another nearby centre (Oxford) 	613
Wallingford	12,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Historic market town • Similar socio-economic demographic⁴⁰ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Significantly smaller population • Some distance from another nearby centre 	277

³⁷ Thatcham Vision, Thatcham Vision 2015 Report (approved 2016)

³⁸ NOMIS NS-SeC 2011 data

³⁹ NOMIS NS-SeC 2011 data

⁴⁰ NOMIS NS-SeC 2011 data

Didcot	30,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Similar population • Hi-tech employment base • Historic under-provision of services⁴¹ • Similar socio-economic demographic⁴² 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rapidly growing town • Lack of historic core 	610
Abingdon	33,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Close to much larger centre (Oxford) • Historic market town • Stable population for ~15 years, pressure to expand • Similar socio-economic demographic⁴³ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Population 25% larger 	511
Thatcham	26,000			426

Table 9: Comparison town summary

6.6 Two towns with significantly smaller populations (Wallingford and Romsey) were selected for comparison to understand Thatcham’s relative service provision and sense of place when compared to these centres.

6.7 The ranking results show that Thatcham considerably underperforms other similar centres in terms of overall service provision. The comparison diagram in Figure 10 below shows urban extent, population and service assessment (SA) score.

⁴¹ Didcot Garden Town Masterplan, 2016
⁴² NOMIS NS-SeC 2011 data
⁴³ NOMIS NS-SeC 2011 data

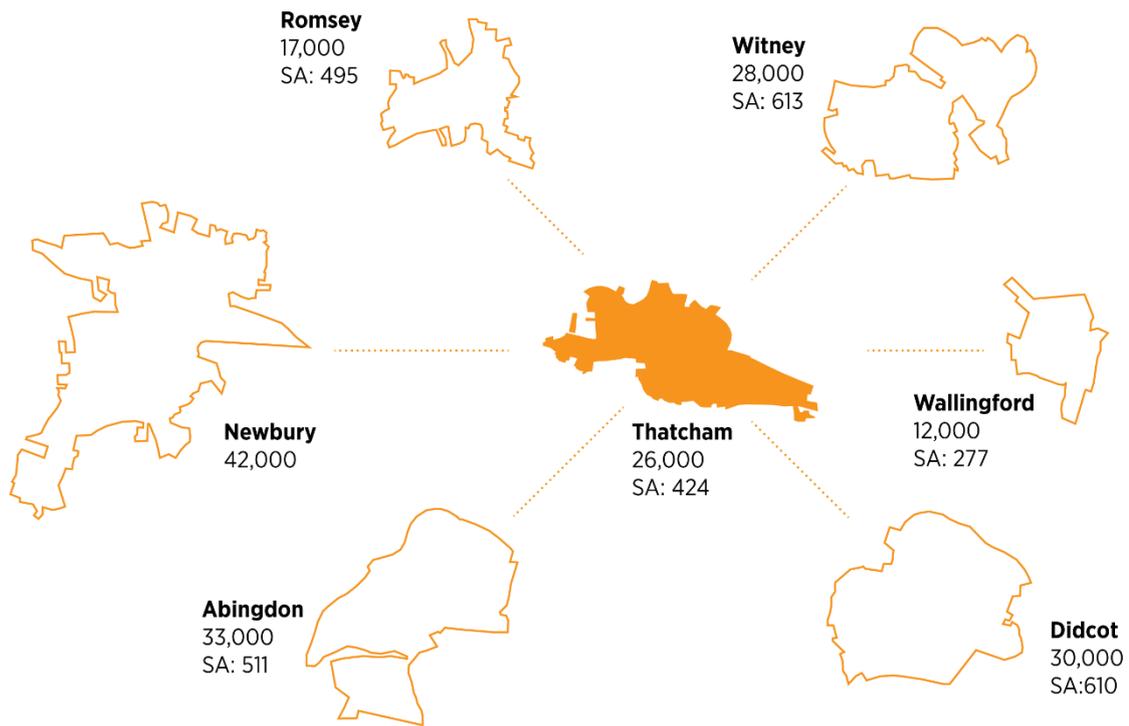


Figure 10: Scale comparison of similar towns, with settlement assessment (SA) score

6.8 Thattham underperforms when compared to all others except Wallingford, which has a considerably lower population. This is likely due to Thattham’s proximity to Newbury which has prevented the development of higher-order (and higher-scoring) services.

Performance of Newbury

6.9 Given the hypothesis that Thattham underperforms in part due to its proximity to Newbury, does Newbury, or the combined Newbury-Thattham urban area, over-perform when compared to similar settlements?

6.10 Qualitatively, Newbury is home to several higher-order services that seem to belie its 42,000 population. These include an extensive retail offering, leisure facilities and specialist employment clusters in horseracing and telecommunications. There is a non-linear change in service provision when compared to Thattham (26,000 population) nearby.

6.11 Two nearby comparison centres for Newbury can be looked at qualitatively: Salisbury and Winchester. Two comparison centres for Newbury + Thattham combined can also be looked at: Canterbury and Harrogate.

Centre	Population	Similarities	Differences
Salisbury	45,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Distance to nearest major centre (Southampton): 19 miles Wealthy rural catchment area Medieval centre 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Historical city status due to cathedral No motorway connection

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rail connection to London • Near to AONB 	
Winchester	45,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distance to nearest major centre (Southampton): 12 miles • Wealthy rural catchment area • Medieval centre • Rail connection to London • Motorway (M3) • N-S Freight Corridor (A34) • Near to National Park 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Historical city status due to cathedral • University • Mainline rail route
Newbury	42,000 68,000 when combined with Thatcham	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distance to nearest major centre (Reading): 16 miles • Wealthy rural catchment area • Medieval centre • Rail connection to London • Motorway (M4) • N-S Freight Corridor (A34) • Near to AONB 	
Canterbury	62,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distance to major centres: Ashford 12 miles, Margate 15 miles, Maidstone 22 miles • Rural catchment area • Medieval centre • Rail connection to London • Motorway (M2) • Freight corridor (to Dover) • Near to AONB 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nearby population centres are smaller, but there are more • Historic city status due to cathedral • University
Harrogate	72,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distance to nearest major centre (Leeds): 14 miles • Rural catchment area • Historic spa centre • Near to AONB and National Park 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not part of SE economic region • Wealthier demographics • No regular rail link to London • No motorway connection

Table 10: Comparison towns

- 6.12 When qualitatively compared with the first two places, Newbury appears to match well. Both have
- Extensive retail provision, including out of town retail parks.
 - Regular, fast rail services
 - A variety of state and non-state secondary schools
 - Leisure facilities, both public and commercial
 - Extensive green open space based along a river corridor and other parks
- 6.13 Newbury appears to lack in the following services:
- Accident & emergency hospital facilities
 - A large, multi-department hospital
 - A university (vs. Winchester)
- 6.14 When compared to these centres, Newbury may appear to compare or even slightly underperform. The combined population of Newbury and Thatcham, c. 68,000, should result in a significantly higher level of provision than is present, especially given the distance to other population centres and wide catchment area. Comparing with the larger centres, we find:
- Canterbury also lacks an A&E, but Harrogate does have A&E
 - Both centres have significant retail offerings
 - Both have significant cultural and leisure provision
 - Newbury appears to outperform other centres for specialist employment clusters
- 6.15 In summary, there is no proof that the under-performance of Thatcham has led to a larger over-performance by Newbury in service provision. The combined area of Newbury and Thatcham, given its catchment, appears to perform on-par or slightly below other similar settlements. Newbury + Thatcham lack university and A&E facilities but perform comparably for retail provision within Newbury. The combined area performs well for employment, and specialist employment clusters.

'Sense of Place'

- 6.16 As well as quantitative comparisons, it can help to understand qualitative aspects of Thatcham's growth and present status.
- 6.17 There is a recognition by the town council and Thatcham Vision that Thatcham must recognise its status as a town in order to provide high-quality services and the living standards that its residents demand, as evidenced in paragraph 5.1.
- 6.18 In order to help the Stage 3 masterplanning process, it is instructive to look at the qualitative aspects of the comparison towns, to understand their external image, their ambitions and scale. This work is in addition to the quantitative service provision understanding that has been built up earlier in this report.
- 6.19 This work is ongoing and is at a preliminary stage. It will be one of the guiding principles to producing a vision for strategic growth in stage 3.
- 6.20 A set of photographs of the comparison towns' 'external image' is shown below in Figure 11. This is a visual guide to the 'feel' of these places.



Figure 11: Images from comparison towns

- 6.21 Our initial survey confirms that Thatcham’s centre is of smaller scale and retains a more village-like feel than other comparably-sized towns. This is part of the character of the town, but may, as recognised by Thatcham Vision, be preventing its development. It is likely a result of its historical overshadowing by Newbury.
- 6.22 This work to understand the town as compared to others will continue during Stage 2, in particular during community stakeholder workshops.

Opportunities and Choices

- 6.23 Residential development in Thatcham, as identified in section 3.0 (Service Provision) has the opportunity to enhance Thatcham’s overall service provision. With appropriate planning, such development has the possibility of enhancing the town centre, fulfilling a number of the objectives of Thatcham Vision and WBDC.
- 6.24 Such opportunities to enhance the whole town could be released by growth, bringing wider benefits to the community within Thatcham.
- 6.25 Any growth is likely to present choices about the location of facilities and services. Do they remain within the boundary of the new settlement expansion, or can they be located at other sites within Thatcham?

6.0 CONCLUSIONS

- 7.1 This report has presented the findings of Stage 1 of the Thatcham Strategic Growth Study.
- 7.2 Thatcham has experienced rapid population growth during the post-war period, expanding more than 5x since 1951. This growth has been accompanied by infrastructure growth in transport, and a considerable expansion in the built-up area to match the population growth.
- 7.3 However, in recent decades, the provision of social infrastructure has not kept pace with housing growth. This has manifested itself in:
- Education, including primary, secondary and SEN
 - Healthcare
 - Community, leisure and sporting facilities
 - Policing facilities
 - Public facilities for older people
- 7.4 The nearby presence of Newbury has resulted in an under-representation of higher-order services. As many of these are commercially provided by private operators this is not something that can be directly addressed by WBDC, but does feed into strategic growth planning. It presents challenges and opportunities to a master planner in the context of the Local Plan which has the ambition of making Thatcham more self-contained.
- 7.5 Thatcham compares poorly to other similar centres in terms of overall service provision, including public services and commercial services. The town's self-image is of a large village, rather than as a thriving market town.
- 7.6 Recent planning decisions support the approach that only growth of a strategic scale can support the service provision and regeneration that Thatcham requires. Co-ordinated growth within a sound Local Plan would be consistent with recent decisions and appeals.
- 7.7 This report and WBDC's own Infrastructure Delivery Plan present a number of items that may need to be funded through various mechanisms when considering strategic expansion of Thatcham in a way that reduces or eliminates the present service and infrastructure provision gap.
- 7.8 Dependent on viability testing, it is possible that strategic expansion can offer significant improvement to Thatcham's service offering and perceived or actual infrastructure gap.

Stage 2

- 7.9 This report forms the base for Stage 2 of the Strategic Growth Study: Thatcham Today. This stage will seek to understand current constraints on growth and development through desk work and technical stakeholder engagement, and the market for housing growth.