

Thatcham Town Centre Strategy

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Foreword

We're delighted to present the Town Centre Strategy for Thatcham, commissioned by West Berkshire Council from a team led by HemingwayDesign and endorsed by our Executive on 23rd March 2023.

Thatcham is a friendly, vibrant market town, where you can visit independent shops along with larger chains. The Town Centre Strategy considers the wider social and economic changes in shopping habits, retail decentralisation, working patterns, environmental concerns and the impact of Covid. The Strategy begins to reconsider the purpose of our high streets and aim to create a space which bring the community together and offers different experiences. We welcome the range of exciting proposals set out in the Strategy to help shape and adapt Thatcham Town Centre to do just that over the short, medium and longer terms.

One of the key features of this work has been the engagement with stakeholders and the local community. The public survey received 1060 completions, which then developed the strategy. The HemingwayDesign team has worked with business representatives, landowners, community groups and Thatcham's Town Council among others to ensure that their ideas and comments have been taken on board. A lot of hard work has gone into this Strategy by the Council, the design team, residents, businesses and partners and we thank all those involved.

The Thatcham Town Centre Strategy is one of a number of place-shaping initiatives we're developing in line with our Council Strategy and in support of our Local Plan Review. We want residents and visitors to come into our town centres and enjoy all they have to offer and we want businesses to start up and thrive here. We are really looking forward to working together with stakeholders, businesses and residents to bring forward these exciting proposals.

Clare Lawrence
Executive Director Place,
Director & Support Environment



01

Purpose

This report was commissioned to guide and support the future of Thatcham town centre, in the context of continuing planned growth of the town's population and continuing change in what society expects and demands from our town centres.

The purpose of this study has been to develop a set of projects and actions that will enable Thatcham town centre to adapt and respond to these changes and to thrive socially and economically. Whilst this report considers Thatcham, it should be noted that it has been undertaken in parallel with a similar study for Hungerford. This dual process has enabled consideration of the similar issues that they both face as market towns, to view the different ways in which they are used and perceived by their local communities, and to identify the distinctly different ways in which they need to respond.

Process

Perhaps most importantly, successful market towns are driven by their local communities, and through a 'bottom-up' approach to change that creates a distinctive local identity. This creates a loyal and committed local catchment. It is attractive to visitors seeking to discover something different from the standard High Street. It creates political consensus and helps support external funding bids. The studies for both Thatcham and Hungerford have therefore been heavily focused on local engagement, through walkabouts, workshops and on-line surveys.

The recommendations within this report are therefore directly linked to the outcomes of this engagement, and to the specific request from Thatcham's stakeholders for a bold and ambitious approach to be taken. It presents a strategy of action for Thatcham, but not a rigid blueprint for its future, enabling it to continue to evolve and adapt. There is considerable consensus on the direction of change in the town, but many projects still require further work and further engagement with the community. Whilst this report represents the outcome of this particular study, it should therefore be seen as the start of a process that continues to involve the community of Thatcham in the development and implementation of the priority projects their town needs and deserves.

02

Key Issues



This study has had regard to the following existing documents and reports:

- Thatcham an historic town in a changing world (2009)
- Design Appraisal for Thatcham Town Centre February 2009 (no copy of the subsequent update was available for review)
- Thatcham Vision Report 2015 Edition
- Western Berkshire Retail & Leisure Commercial Assessment 2016
- West Berkshire Vision Local Plan Review Baseline Report & Socio-Economic Report (2022)

This existing information has been supplemented by a walkabout with officers from West Berkshire Council and members of Thatcham Town Council, together with our own analysis and review of the town centre. We have not sought to prepare a formal 'health check' for Thatcham town centre, but to identify areas where the position has changed since previous studies, to proceed as quickly as possible to identify the key issues facing the town centre, test these with stakeholders and local residents and propose potential solutions.

The following issues were identified through the review of existing information, walkabouts with stakeholders and the first stakeholder workshop:

- Creating a 'village centre like' quality at The Broadway
- Improving the parks and green spaces
- Creating opportunities for independent & start-up businesses
- Attracting more cafés, restaurants and independent retail
- Having more activity in the evening
- Encouraging people to stay longer in the town centre
- Creating a dedicated space for markets and events
- Reducing noise and pollution of traffic circulation at the Broadway
- Encouraging shoppers to visit Broadway and High Street – not just the Kingsland Centre
- Providing better community facilities in the town centre
- Reducing the impact of A4 and making it safer for people to cross by altering traffic flow, visible information and improved street scenes & making traffic on the A4 more aware of Thatcham town centre
- Making car parking less confusing.

Creating a ‘village centre like’ quality at The Broadway

The Thatcham Vision 2015 stated that:

“The residents of Thatcham have clearly said in the community survey that they like living in Thatcham and want it to be a healthy, happy place to bring up a family and live into old age. 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.” Thatcham Vision 2015

The 2015 Vision notes that 90% of residents agreed (and over 60% strongly agreed) that Thatcham Town Centre should be supported and developed whilst retaining its ‘village feel’. There was a clear desire expressed during the walkabout and the initial workshop that this ‘village quality’ be promoted through this study. Measures to promote this were therefore identified and tested through the formal on-line survey.



The Broadway is an important space at the heart of Thatcham, home to the market and events, and a social space bringing greenery to the town centre.



Improving the parks and green spaces

Our surveys across a number of market towns since the start of the Covid 19 pandemic show the increasing importance attached to green spaces. They are seen as destinations and attractions in their own right and a reason for people to visit town centres.

The green space in Broadway is the most prominent in the town centre but is dominated by the traffic that surrounds it. It means it is not always a pleasant environment, particularly when traffic queues around The Broadway looking for parking spaces. Improving this space was highlighted by local stakeholders as a priority for the town centre.

Turnfields Play Area (at the junction of the A4 and The Moors) is a larger park with play facilities but feels disconnected from the town centre, reinforced by the large fence which limits the access points. Improving this as a space, and as an arrival feature into the town centre along the A4 was highlighted on the walkabout with local stakeholders.

There are important sports and recreation facilities at Brownsfield Road. Local stakeholders, including the cricket club, expressed a strong desire to see these improved and to see better use made of the large parks and playing fields. It was considered that this could form an important extension of the town centre, and create a high quality gateway into the town centre from the west.

To the east (although technically outside the boundaries of this study) stakeholders, including students and representatives of Kennet School, highlighted the importance of the green space at Harts Hill Road on the A4. It is an important crossing point for students walking and cycling to local schools (including Kennet School and Francis Baily primary school). Again it was considered that it could help to slow traffic and create an eastern gateway into Thatcham along the A4.



Thatcham has a number of important parks and green spaces, but they can feel isolated and disconnected from the rest of the town centre.



Creating opportunities for independent & start-up businesses, attracting more cafés, restaurants & independent retail, having more activity in the evening & encouraging people to stay longer in the town centre

Independent businesses bring a stronger sense of identity to a town centre, particularly market towns. They also help make a town centre less vulnerable to decisions made at a national level.

The 2016 retail assessment highlights the level of competition which Thatcham inevitably faces from the much larger centre of Newbury, which will make it even more difficult for Thatcham to attract large numbers of national retailers and even more important that it puts in place measures to promote local independent businesses.

There is evidence from national surveys and other town centres which provides some cause for optimism that Thatcham can attract more independent businesses. Recent national surveys indicate that whilst there has been a decline in demand for retail floorspace from national retailers, those towns which have focused on independent retailers have seen growth.

Surveys also indicate that a significant number of the

working population are spending at least two days a week working from home. The positive impact of hybrid working / working from home on small town centres such as Thatcham is being measured in a raft of studies. This shift in working patterns provides more opportunities for Thatcham as the spend shifts from larger towns and cities to a more local spend which in turn can support more local businesses. It can also support the provision of office space for small businesses and shared workspace.

The 2016 retail assessment also highlighted that there is expected to be significant growth in spending on leisure and cultural activities and on eating and drinking in the local area. It is considered therefore that there is scope for Thatcham to widen and improve its offer in this respect, despite the proximity to Newbury.

All these elements, together with improved green space and community facilities, will help encourage people to spend more time in Thatcham.



Thatcham has a variety of interesting independent shops across Broadway, High Street and the Kingsland Centre.

Creating a dedicated space for markets and events

Markets provide variety and diversity, history and character. They are an expression of community, and help build a strong sense of local identity. They provide affordable opportunities for new businesses to set up and grow, make it easier for young people and new traders to access trading opportunities, offer environmental and health benefits by encouraging people to shop locally, and providing affordable fresh food produce. They are an important 'tool' for driving town centre footfall, increasing dwell time, and ultimately helping to build and promote the 'brand' of a place.

Lack of space for the market was highlighted in the 2009 Design Appraisal as a key weakness of Thatcham town centre, and there was a desire expressed in the workshops for a dedicated space that would give more flexibility for markets and events throughout the week. This issue was therefore tested through the online consultation.



Desire was expressed for a dedicated space to be provided for the market. This would give more flexibility for additional markets/events on other days.

Reducing noise and pollution of traffic circulation at the Broadway

Concern was expressed during the walkabout about the physical environment at The Broadway, in particular the noise and pollution created by the traffic. This is created not just by the presence of the central parking spaces but by the ability of motorists to circulate around the Broadway waiting for a space to become available.

The 2009 Design Appraisal identified a total of 500 car parking spaces in five car parks serving the town centre. The report concluded:

“Whilst stakeholder consultation identified a lack of car parking in Thatcham as a common concern, we consider that there are plenty of car parking spaces to meet the current range of facilities in the town centre.”

In 2015, the Thatcham Vision report reinforced this point, stating:

“The town centre is served by several car parks but inadequate car parking remains a common complaint. There are spaces in several locations close to (within

100-200 metres) of the centre and car parks are rarely full during the week. There is anecdotal evidence to suggest that the lack of parking is more than often not related to driver perception and behaviour (including unwillingness to pay to use the main car park) rather than lack of parking.” Thatcham Vision 2015

No new surveys of car parking have been undertaken for this study, but our visual surveys throughout the study period reinforce the conclusion that free on-street spaces in Broadway are very popular, as is the Waitrose car park. The Co-op car park is much less busy as are the car parks at Brownsfield Road which are a 2-minute walk from the High Street.

It is considered therefore that there is sufficient car parking capacity within Thatcham town centre to consider removing some of the parking spaces within The Broadway. This is reinforced by the fact that this parking area is used by the market stalls on a Friday and therefore not available for parking on those days. It was agreed therefore to test support for this proposal through the online consultation.



Traffic circulation around the Broadway, often searching for a parking space, creates noise and fumes which undermine the quality of the space.



Encouraging shoppers to visit Broadway and High Street – not just the Kingsland Centre

Waitrose is a key ‘anchor’ destination for Thatcham town centre, serving an important function for the town as a foodstore. The Waitrose car park also provides around 40% of total parking spaces within the town centre and is therefore an important arrival space into Thatcham for shoppers and visitors.

- This is reflected in the 2009 pedestrian flow counts which indicate:
- The biggest shopper numbers are at Waitrose and in the Kingsland Centre
- There is a significant drop (around 50%) in pedestrian numbers immediately outside the Kingsland Centre.
- There is a further fall in pedestrian numbers on the High Street.

Although these figures are relatively old, they reflect our observations during site visits. The town centre has not changed structurally in the time since those surveys were undertaken. Waitrose remains the dominant store in Thatcham and there is no reason to believe that the barrier effect of leaving the Kingsland Centre will have changed significantly.



The physical and visual clutter within the Kingsland Centre undermines pedestrian connections to The Broadway. This is not helped by the vacant units at key entrance points.

The Design Appraisal identified the ‘pinch points’ at the entrance into the Kingsland Centre by Waitrose which still exist and will discourage pedestrian flow through to the town centre. It also identified low levels of footfall as a threat to the High Street.

The connection from Waitrose (and its car park) to The Broadway is suffering from a number of vacant units and is in need of environmental improvement. The cluster of vacancies on the northern side of the arcade, and the fact that the two large units marking the entrances at either end (former Lloyds Bank and former Lloyds pharmacy) are vacant also discourages visitors into the centre.

The ‘public realm’ in the arcade is cluttered and of varying quality. It creates a substantial visual and physical barrier which will deter some Waitrose shoppers from visiting The Broadway. The strategy has therefore considered measures to encourage more shoppers visiting Waitrose to visit the Kingsland Centre Arcade and continue to explore the rest of the town centre. It has also considered potential ways to increase footfall into the High Street and make it feel less peripheral.



Providing better community facilities in the town centre

Delivering an improved community hub has been a priority for Thatcham for over a decade. The West Berkshire Infrastructure Delivery Plan (2010) stated that a 'major centrally located community facility' was a priority for Thatcham, stating that:

Although this is a major and costly project for the town the benefits are vast. The building could include the council offices, the local library, a local museum and heritage centre, an information point for citizen's advice bureau, the police, etc., a lifelong learning classroom, offices for local volunteer groups, an internet café, meeting rooms for use by local groups and start-up businesses. Using such a centre as a base for senior citizens support and a place for teenagers to meet safely are other ideas.

The Infrastructure Delivery Plan also highlighted that the library needed significant expansion:

A new library is considered vital to Thatcham, as the current library provision is grossly inadequate for a town of 25,000+ people. The library is too small, in the wrong place and with limited scope to expand its activities. It needs to be accessible and larger (at least 700 square metres) and to have an enlarged mandate. It needs to retain present activities but also to expand them in a number of ways, such as becoming an information centre, the centre of a learning town provision and the heart of the networking of the town.

Although this study did not include a detailed review of community requirements, the demand for community services will have increased with the planned population growth for Thatcham and this is confirmed by informal discussions with stakeholders and service providers. Perhaps unsurprisingly therefore provision of a new community facility for Thatcham was identified as a priority issue in the walkabout and the initial stakeholder workshop. The study has therefore considered ways in which this need can be addressed.

The 2009 Design Appraisal also highlighted as a weakness the fact that existing community facilities (such as the library and Town Council) were outside the town centre. These facilities are however only a 2-3 minute walk from the edge of the High Street and the study has therefore considered ways in which this area can be viewed as the town centre location it potentially is.



The cluster of important community facilities at Brownsfield Road, including health, library, sport and Town Council offices, can feel isolated from the rest of the town centre, despite being 2 minutes walk from the High Street.

Reducing the impact of A4 and making it safer for people to cross by altering traffic flow, visible information and improved street scenes & making traffic on the A4 more aware of Thatcham town centre

Market towns of a similar size to Thatcham generally serve a compact local catchment, with residents having relatively easy walking and cycle routes into the town centre, but also a wider rural population which is increasingly reliant on access by car.

Thatcham is a relatively compact town with almost all residents living within a 1-mile radius (20-minute walk) of the town centre. Although it has been outside the scope of this report to consider the quality of walking and cycling routes to the town centre, the 2009 Design Appraisal highlighted barriers to walking and cycling into the town centre. The largest barrier is clearly the A4/Bath Road, which separates the northern half of the population from the core town centre shops and services and the southern half from the health centre, library and sports provision.

The Design Appraisal, and update, also noted that “the appearance of the town also affects how visitors, and those who pass through it, perceive Thatcham”. The

SWOT analysis identified the lack of key landmarks and arrival points into Thatcham, the fact that the A4 diverts traffic away from the town centre and the poor quality environment including backs of buildings along this route as key weaknesses and these problems still exist.

Improving the ‘walkability’ of a town brings social, economic and environmental benefits. It improves physical and mental health, air quality, and helps address climate change and our surveys also show that those people who walk into town centres visit more often, spend more (particularly in local and independent shops) and are more likely to visit in the evening and support the evening economy.

Reducing the barrier effect of the A4 and improving its appearance to passing motorists were therefore considered key issues for Thatcham at the walkabout and at the initial workshop and were tested with the wider public via the online survey.



The A4 could present a much more positive image of Thatcham town centre to passing motorists. It also acts as a barrier for people walking to the town centre, to school or other facilities.

Making car parking less confusing

A key concern highlighted during the walkabout and initial workshop was the variety of different parking controls and pricings that existed across the town centre car parks. It was considered that this discouraged parking in a number of car parks, particularly Co-op and Brownsfield Road car parks, putting additional pressure on the Waitrose car park and on The Broadway.

Studies elsewhere have shown the benefits of introducing coordinated parking strategies across car parks, and it was considered that such a strategy could help divert parking to those areas which were currently less well used. It was acknowledged that different landownership's and operators meant it was not in West Berkshire Council's direct control to change this, but the issue was tested through the wider consultation.



There are a variety of different operators of the town centre car parks, with varying approaches to pricing, payment and enforcement. The feedback from stakeholders was that this was confusing and deters visitors to certain car parks.

03

Engagement

The strategy responds to priorities highlighted through public and stakeholder consultation. The survey questions were agreed with stakeholders via workshops and subsequent correspondence. This section of the report documents the responses from the public survey, which was open from the 5th of December 2022 to the 9th January 2023, receiving 1060 detailed completions.

Thatcham Town Centre Strategy

HemingwayDesign, NEW Masterplanning & Urban Movement are working with West Berkshire District Council, as well as Thatcham Town Council, and other stakeholders on how to improve Thatcham town centre.

We have held meetings and workshops with local stakeholders, and are now seeking the views of residents, workers, business owners, and visitors on what should happen.

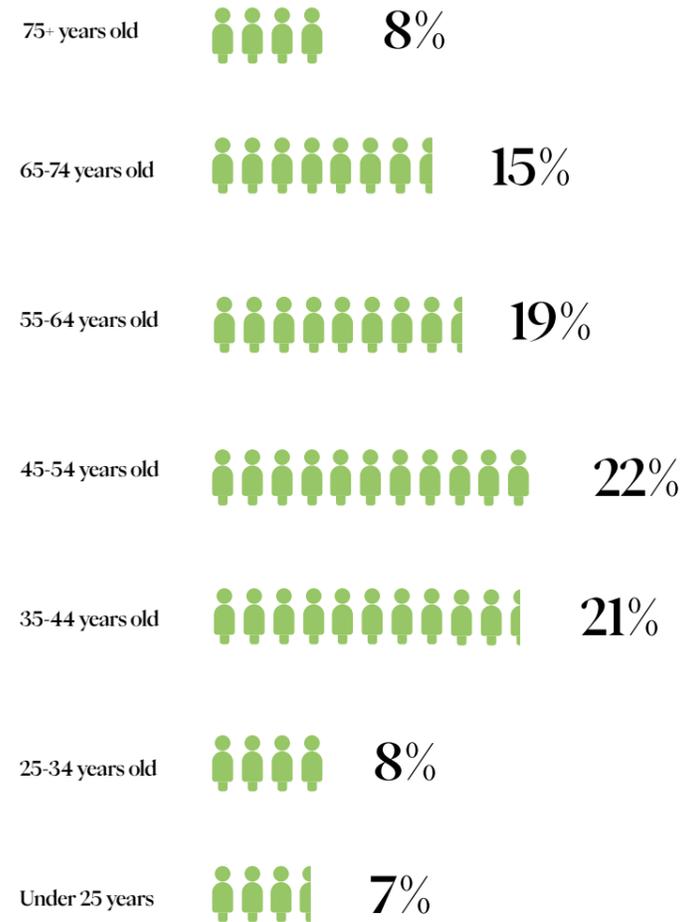
Please scan the QR code below to take the survey or visit <https://www.westberks.gov.uk/thatcham-hungerford-strategies> to find out more.



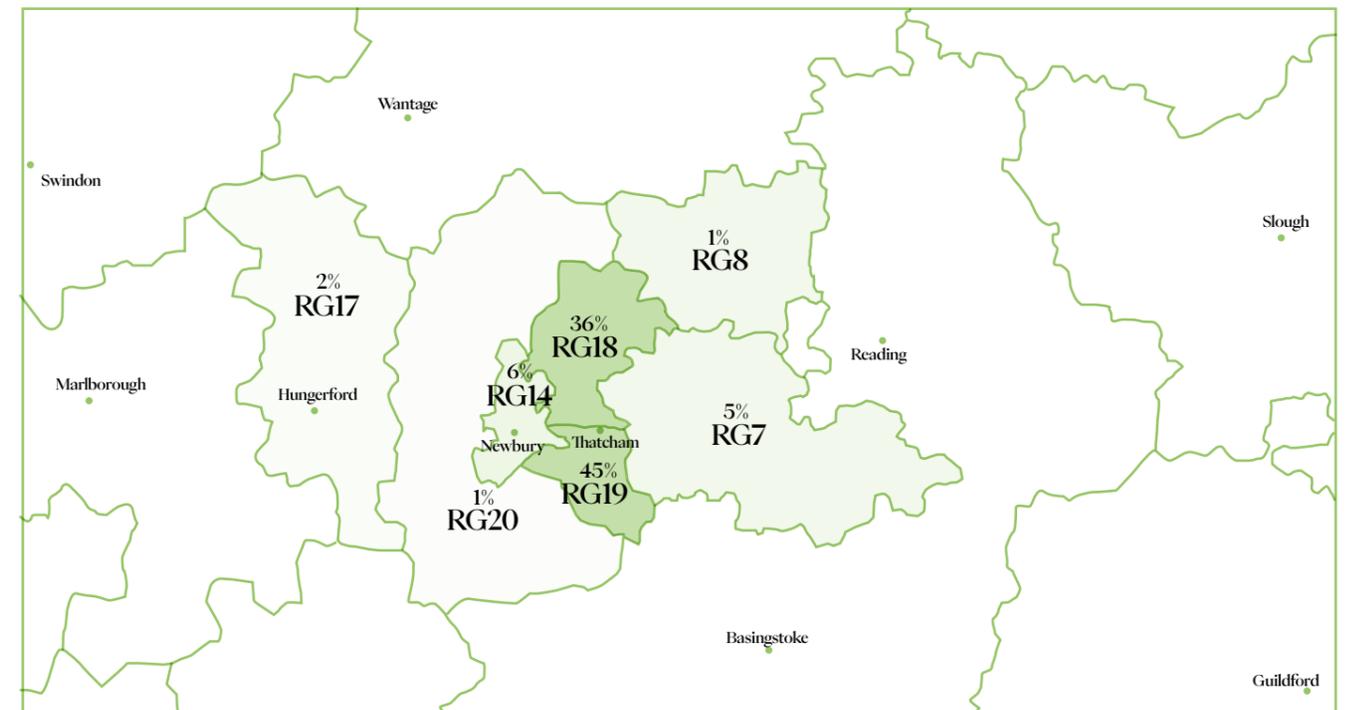
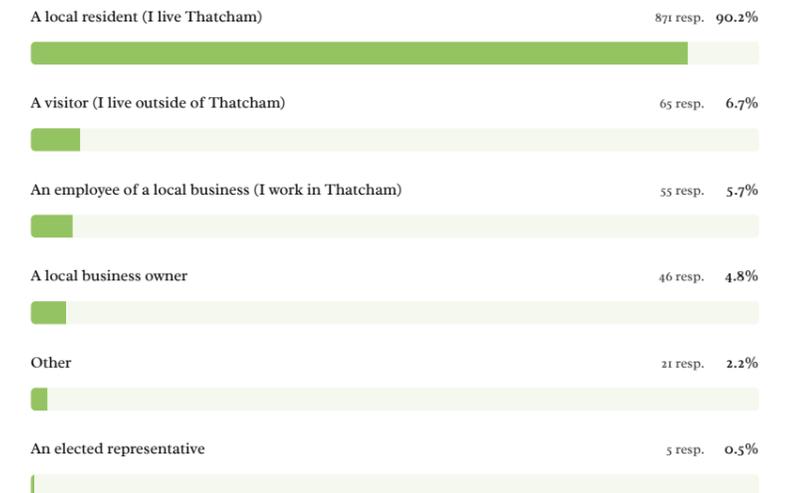
On the behalf of West Berkshire District Council, your enquiries and comments will be analysed by HemingwayDesign. Copies will be made available to the relevant planning authority so it can note your comments. Your personal details will not be placed on the public record. Your personal details will be held securely by HemingwayDesign in accordance with the Data Protection Act 2018, will be used solely in connection with the Thatcham Town Centre Strategy and, except as noted above, will not be passed to any third parties. HemingwayDesign will only keep your personal details until the studies have been completed

Demographics

As expected, the greatest response was in the 35-54 age ranges, as this is the largest demographic in West Berkshire. 43% of respondents were within this range. There was however a good response rate across all age ranges. Around 10% of West Berkshire residents are aged 15-24, and the survey response rate was 7%. Further engagement was held with students of Kennet School to allow for more specific feedback on issues of importance to young people.



The vast majority of survey respondents identify as local residents of Thatcham, living in postcodes RG18 and RG19. This is not surprising, and reflects the findings of the previous retail studies that Thatcham serves a local catchment and the larger centre of Newbury will attract visitors from further afield.

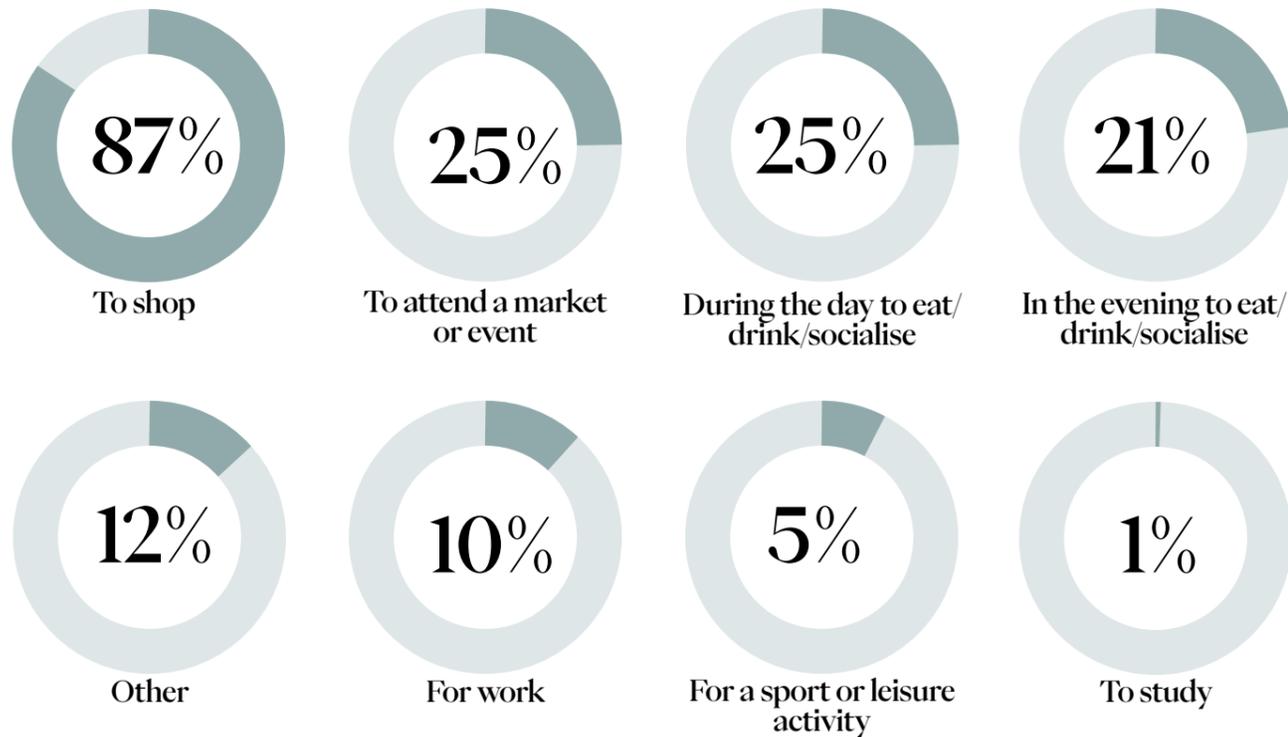


Visiting the town centre

Reason for visit

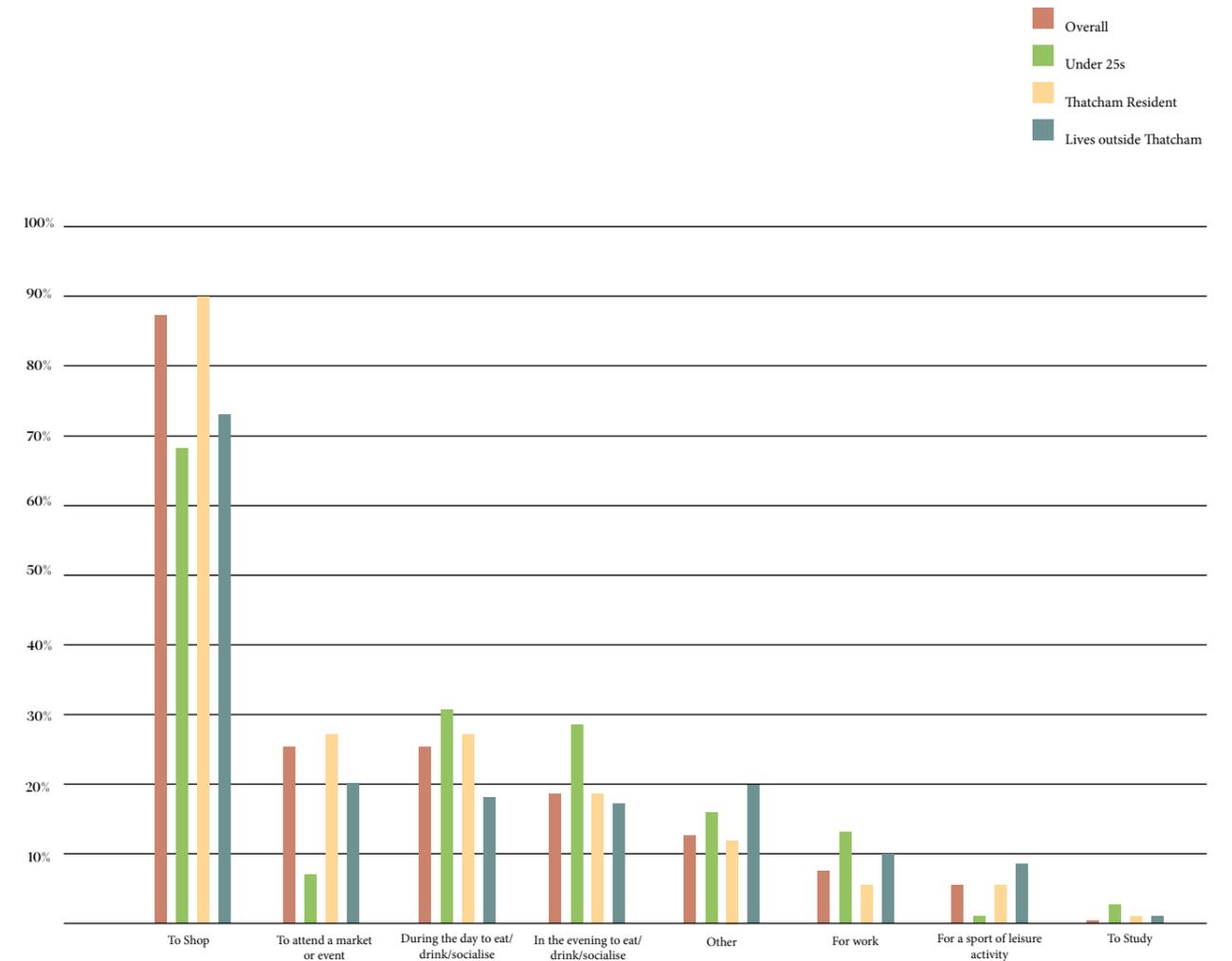
87% of respondents say they usually visit the town centre to shop. 25% are most likely to visit to attend a market, event or to eat, drink, socialise in the daytime. Only 5% of respondents say they are likely to visit the town for a sport or leisure activity.

Other common reasons for visiting include visiting family, attending church, passing through when walking or driving elsewhere, and to visit the GP, dentist, post office or library.



U25s visit the town centre less frequently than other age groups, but are significantly more likely to visit on a Friday or Saturday evening.

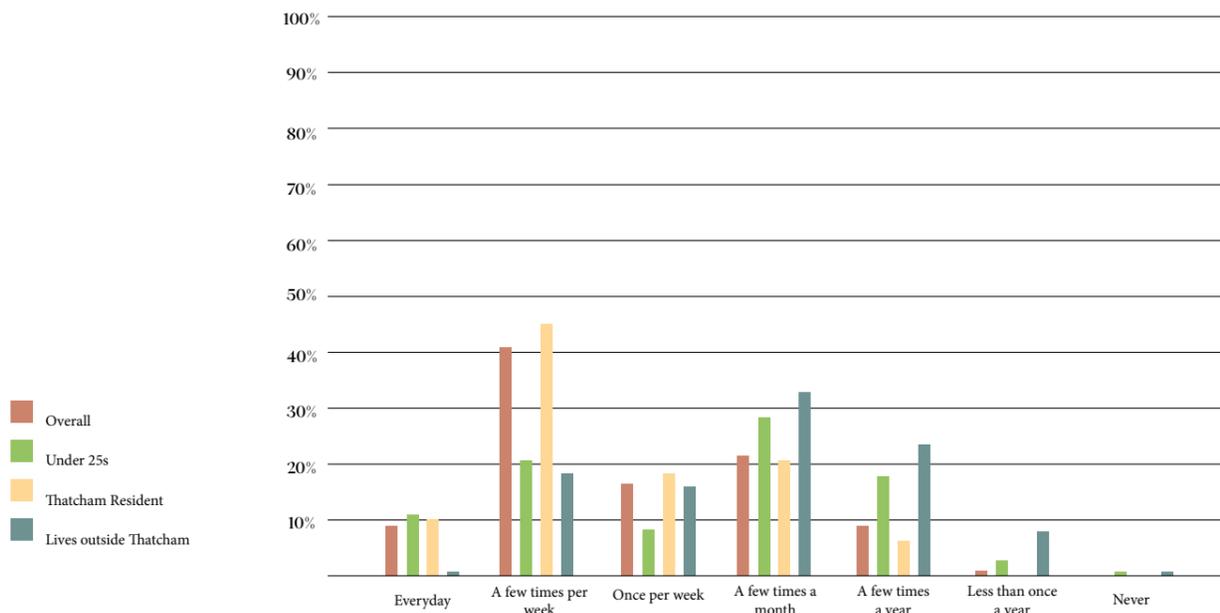
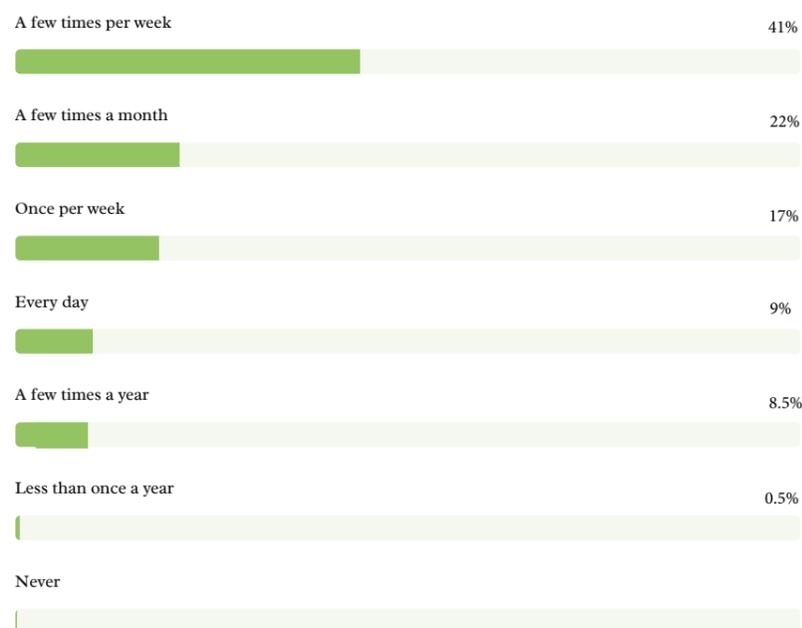
U25s are less likely to attend a market or event in the town centre, or visit for a sport or leisure activity than other demographics.



Visit Frequency

50% of respondents, and 55% of local respondents, state they visit Thatcham town centre a few times a week or more.

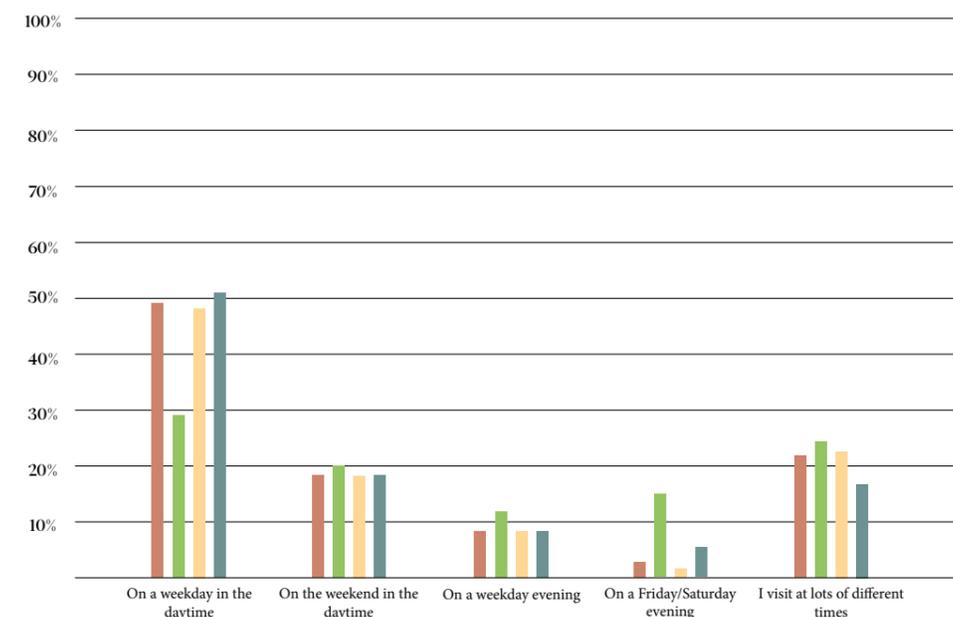
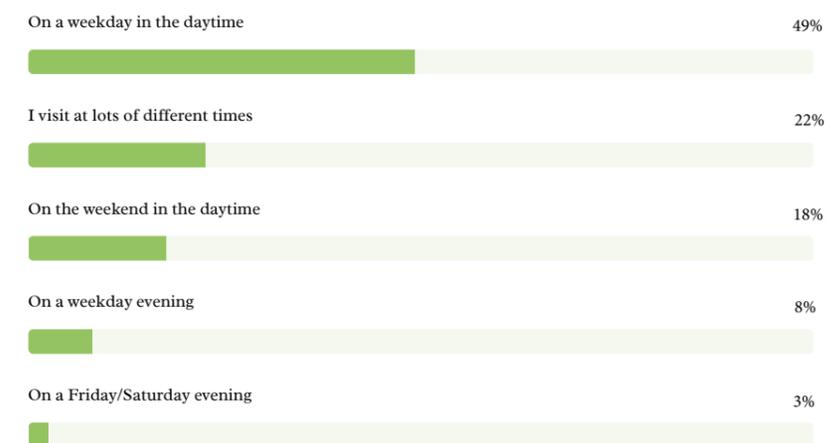
65% of visiting respondents visit the town centre a few times a month or less. 32% will visit the town centre a few times a year or less.



Time of Visit

22% of respondents say they visit at lots of different times. 49% are most likely to visit on weekday in the daytime, and 18% most likely to visit on the weekend in the daytime.

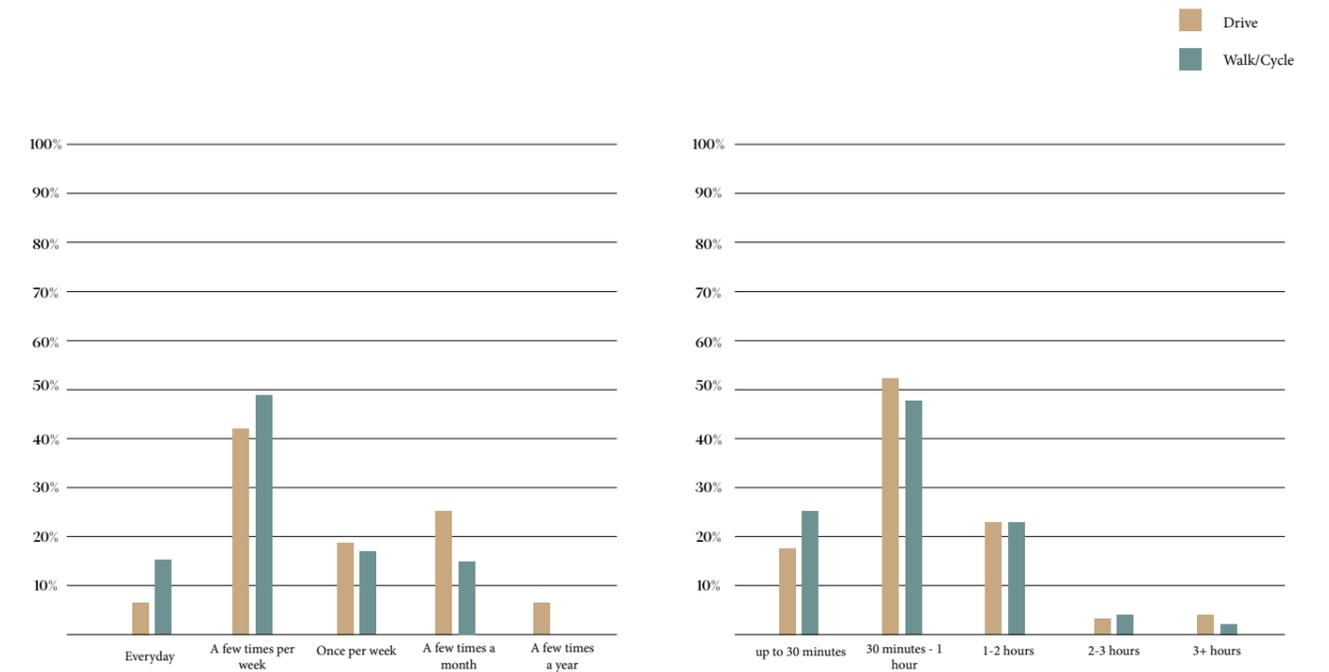
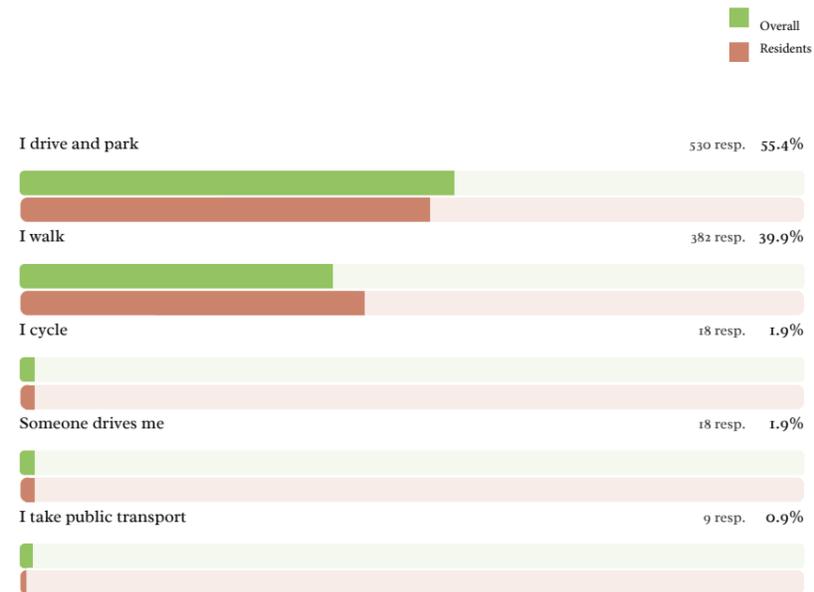
U25s are more likely to visit the town centre on a weekday or weekend evening than other demographics.



Travel

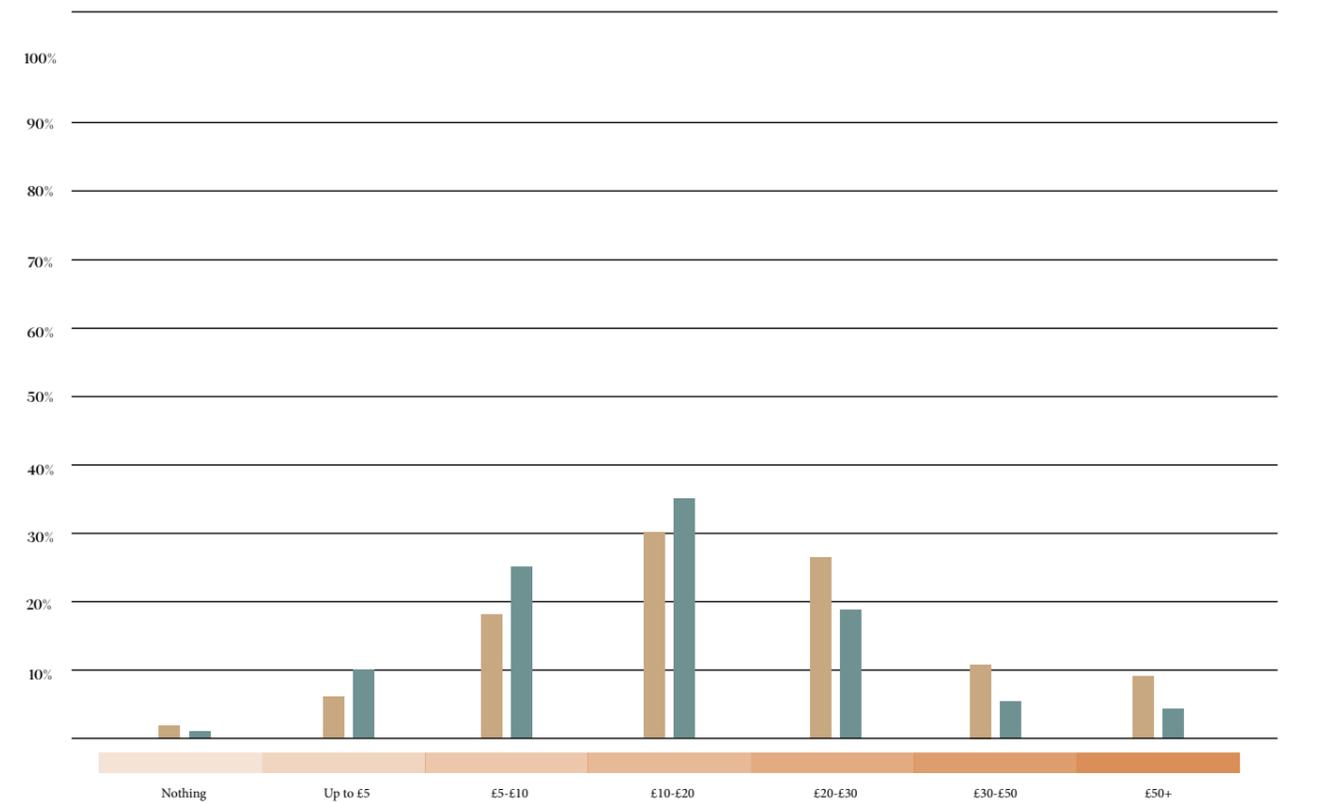
52% of local respondents usually drive and park when visiting the town centre, 43% usually walk.

Local respondents that walk or cycle to the town centre visit the town centre more frequently than those that drive and park (approximately 35% more per month).



Visit frequency / Mode of transport

Length of visit / Mode of transport



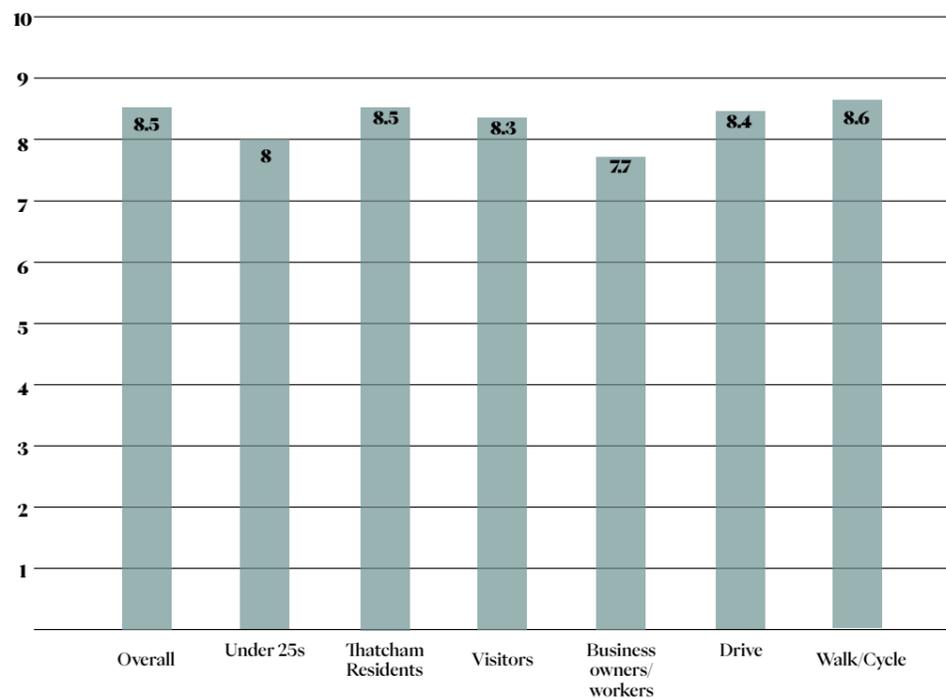
Spend / Mode of transport

Issues & Opportunities

A number of issues and opportunities were highlighted through stakeholder engagement and initial site appraisals. These issues were then agreed with stakeholders for testing with the wider community via the online survey.

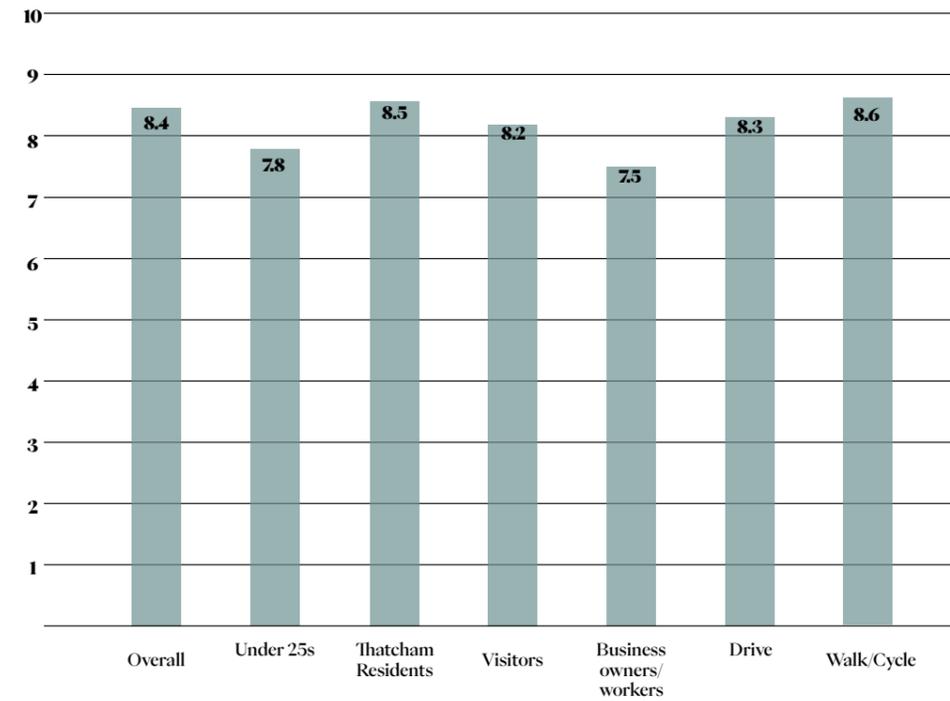
Respondents were asked to rate the importance of these issues and opportunities, from 1 (unimportant) to 10 (vital). The responses are shown here, with the highest scoring issues listed first.

Creating opportunities for independent & start-up businesses



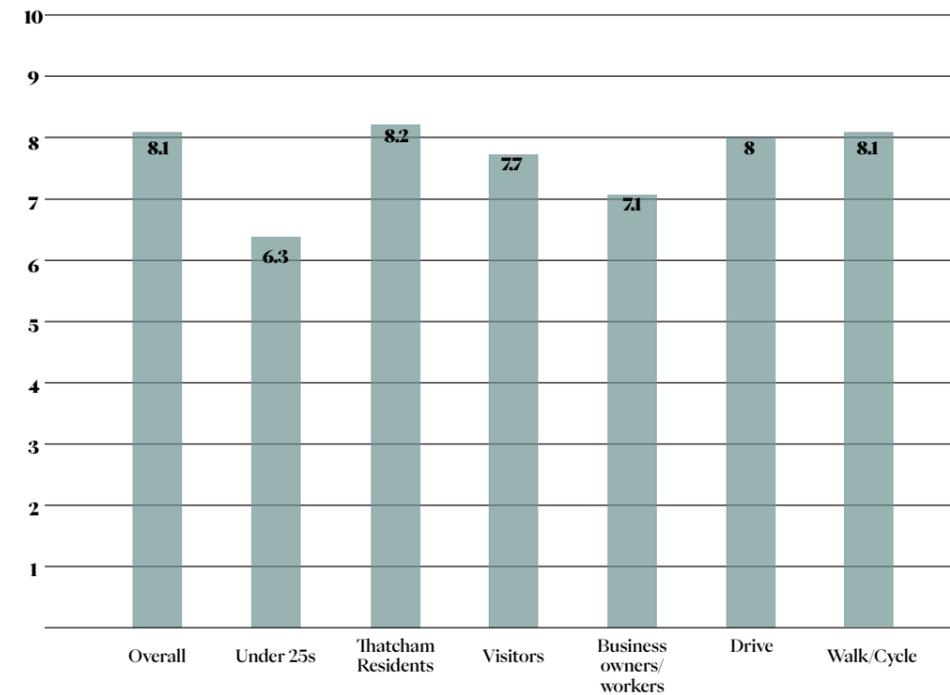
8.5
Average rating

Encouraging shoppers to visit Broadway and High Street – not just the Kingsland Centre



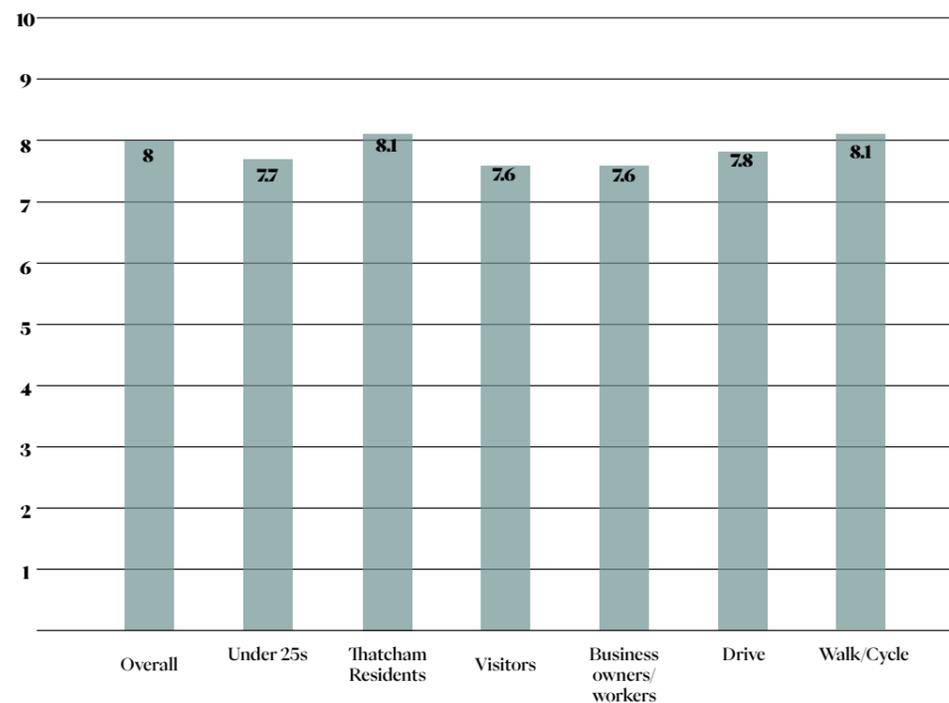
8.4
Average rating

Creating a 'village centre like' quality at The Broadway



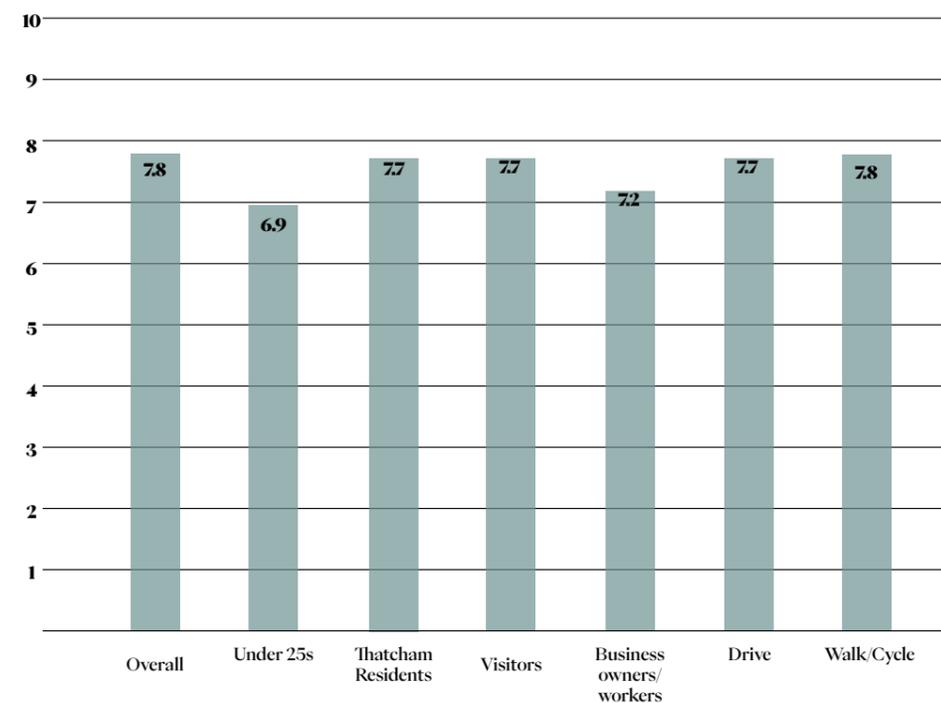
8.1
Average rating

Providing better community facilities in the town centre



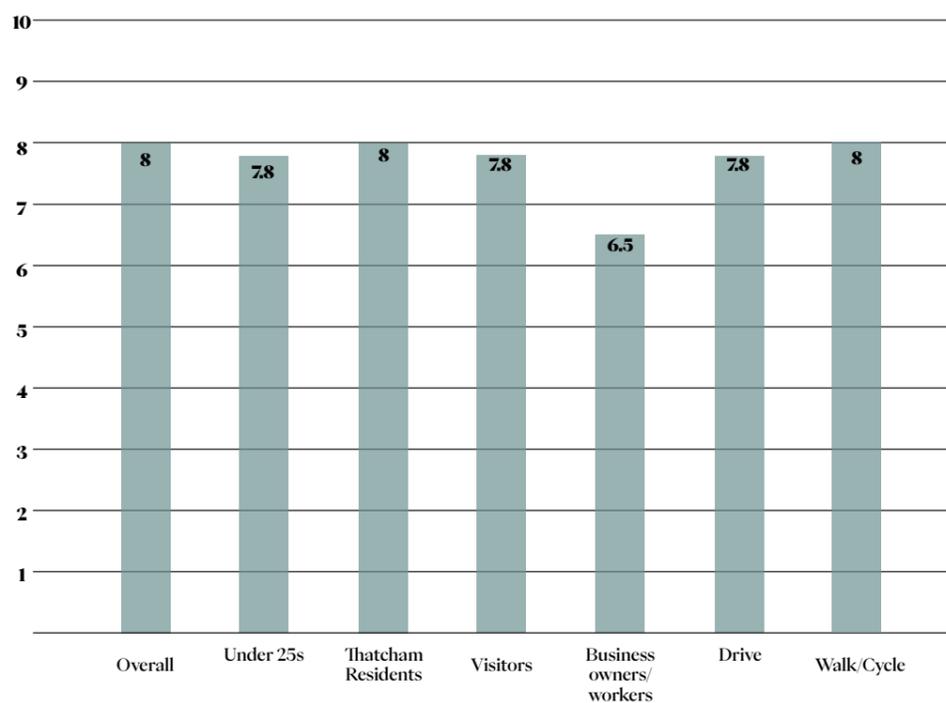
8.0
Average rating

Encouraging people to stay longer in the town centre



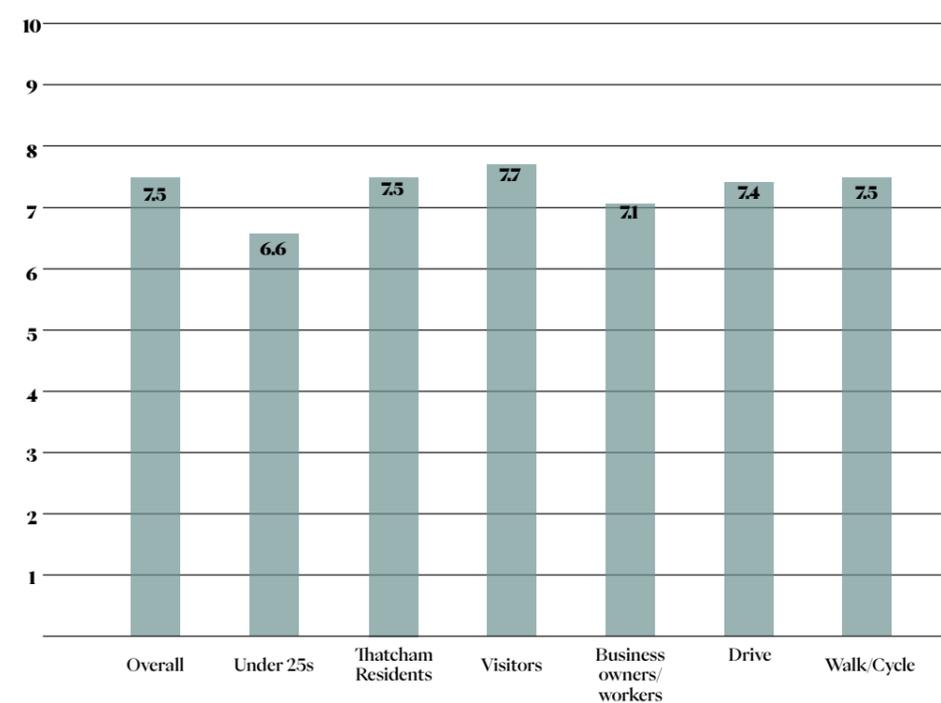
7.8
Average rating

Improving the parks and green spaces



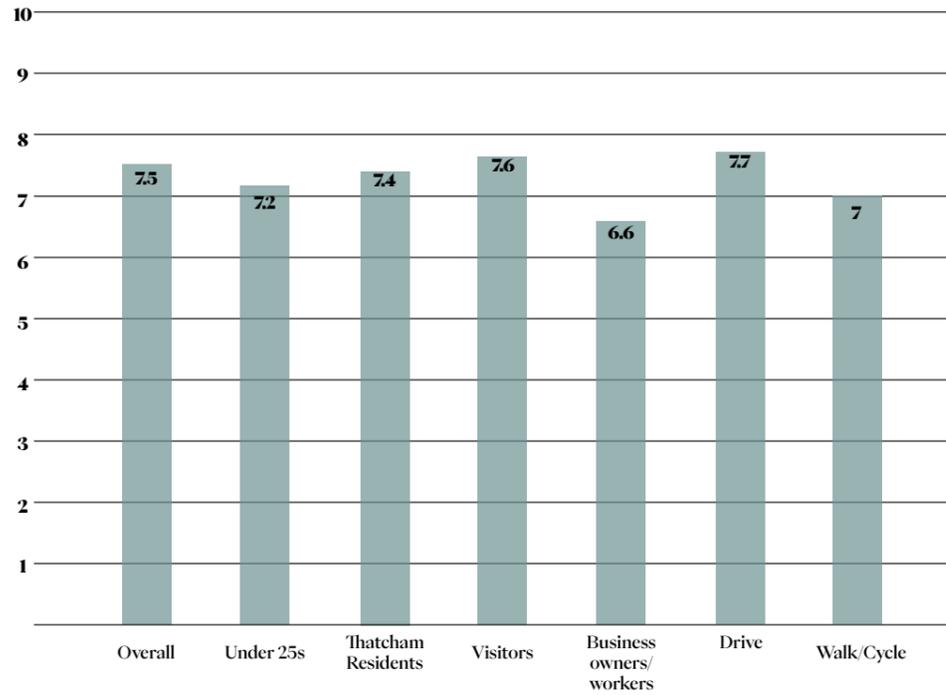
8.0
Average rating

Creating a dedicated space for markets and events



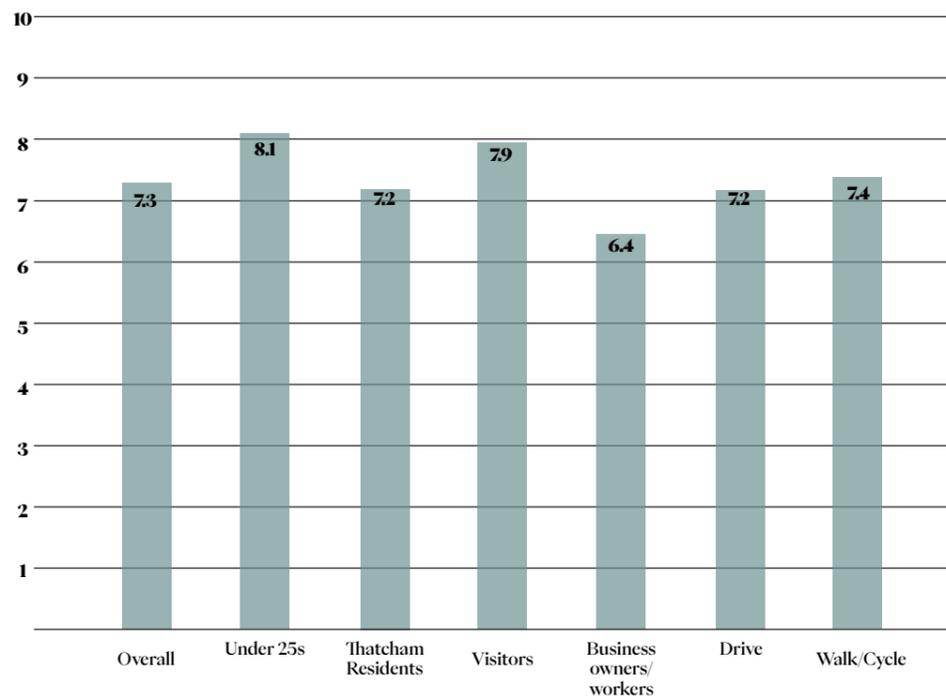
7.5
Average rating

Making car parking less confusing



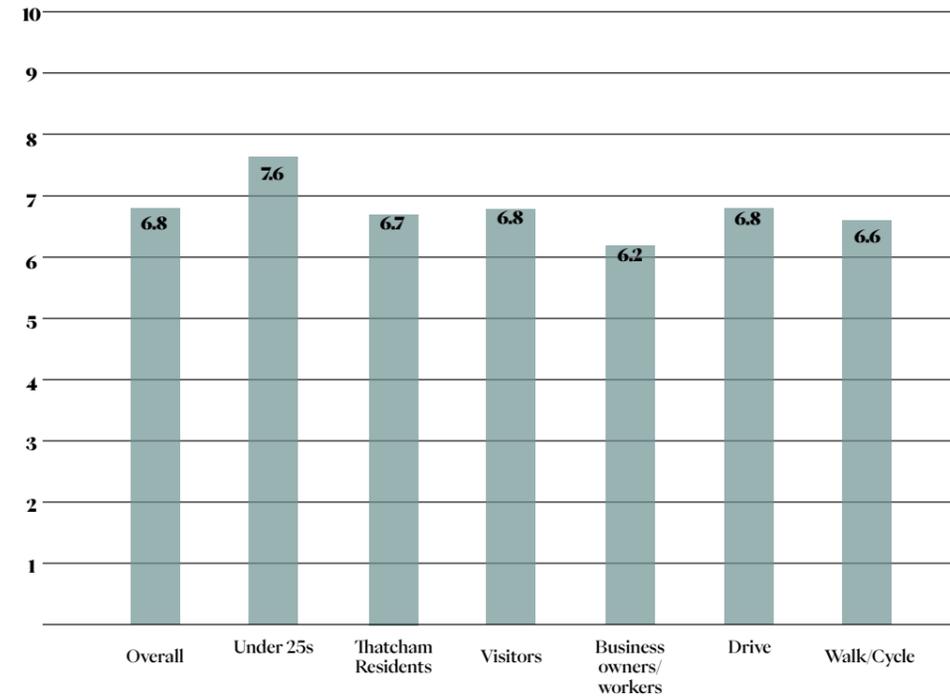
7.5
Average rating

Attracting more cafés, restaurants & independent retail



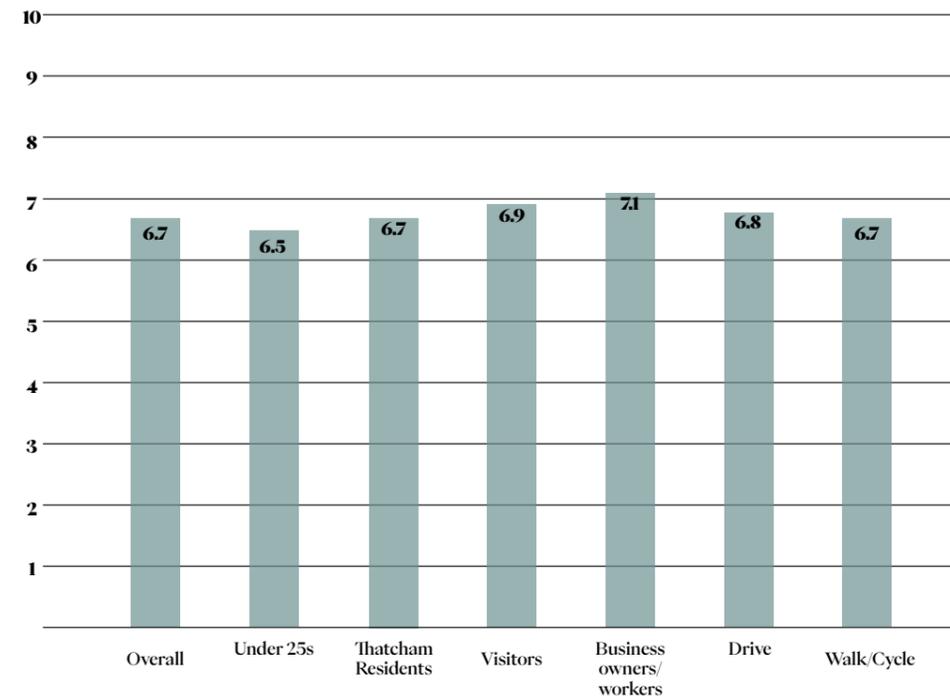
7.3
Average rating

Having more activity in the evening



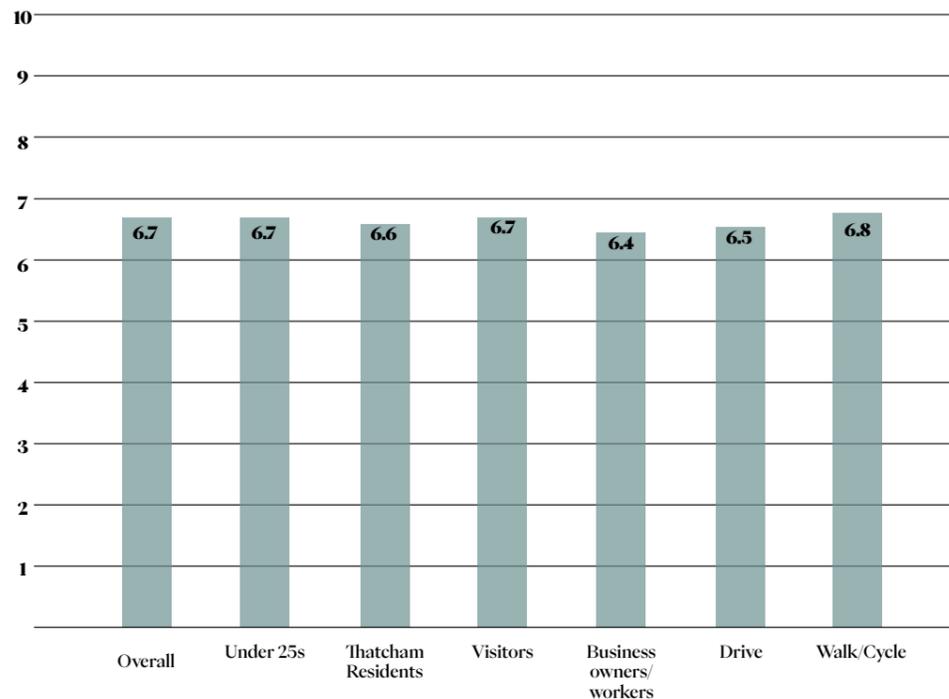
6.8
Average rating

Making traffic on the A4 more aware of Thatcham town centre



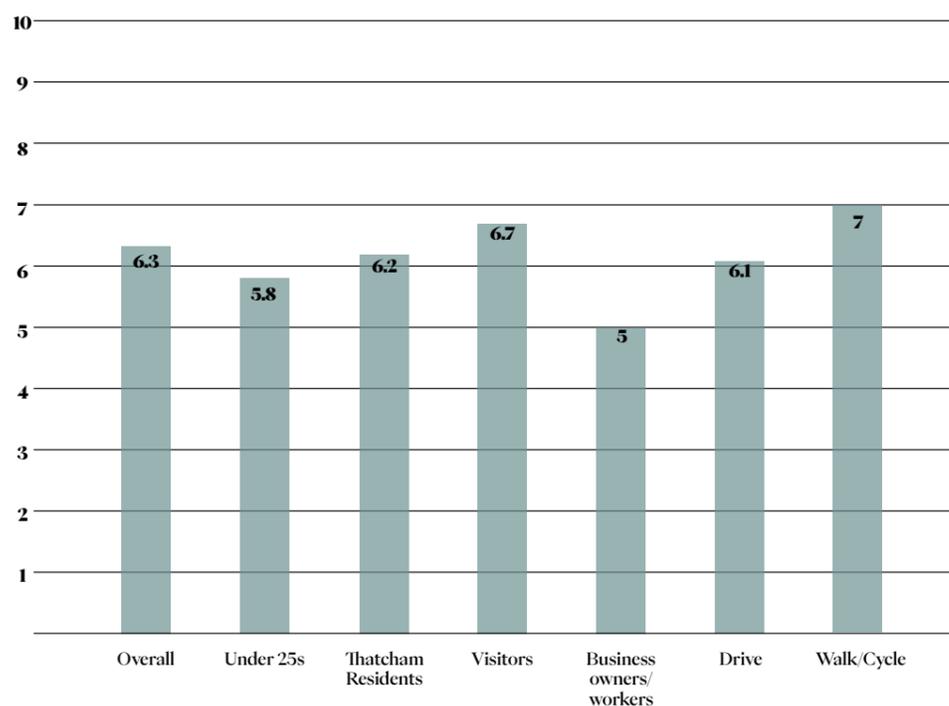
6.8
Average rating

Reducing the impact of A4 and making it safer for people to cross by altering traffic flow, and improving the street scene



6.7
Average rating

Reducing noise and pollution of traffic circulation at the Broadway



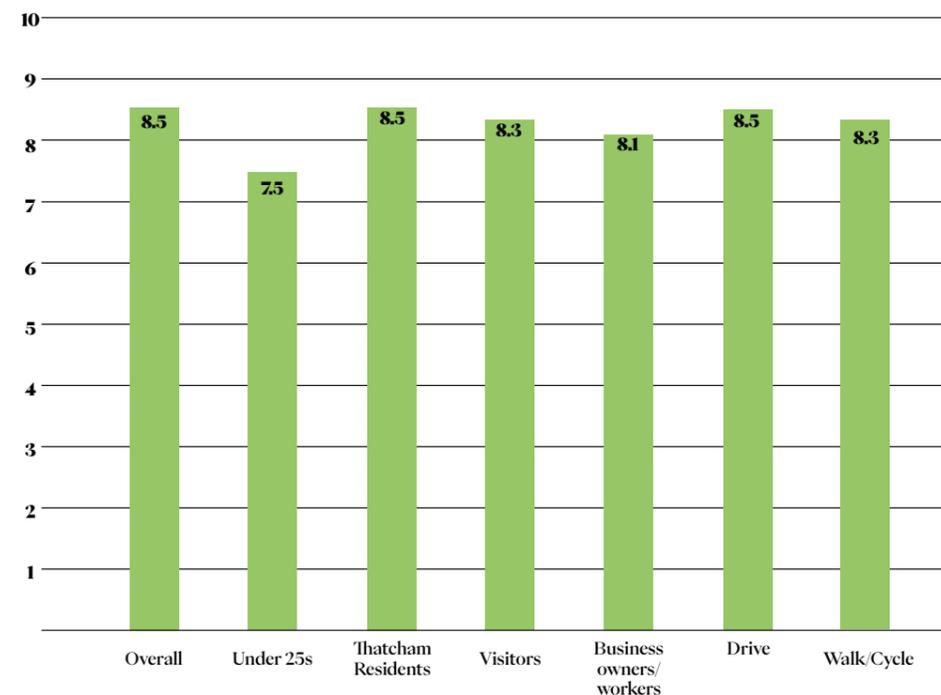
6.3
Average rating

Improvements

At the first stakeholder workshop, attendees were asked to consider ways in which the town centre could be improved. A series of potential improvements were agreed for testing with the wider community via the online survey.

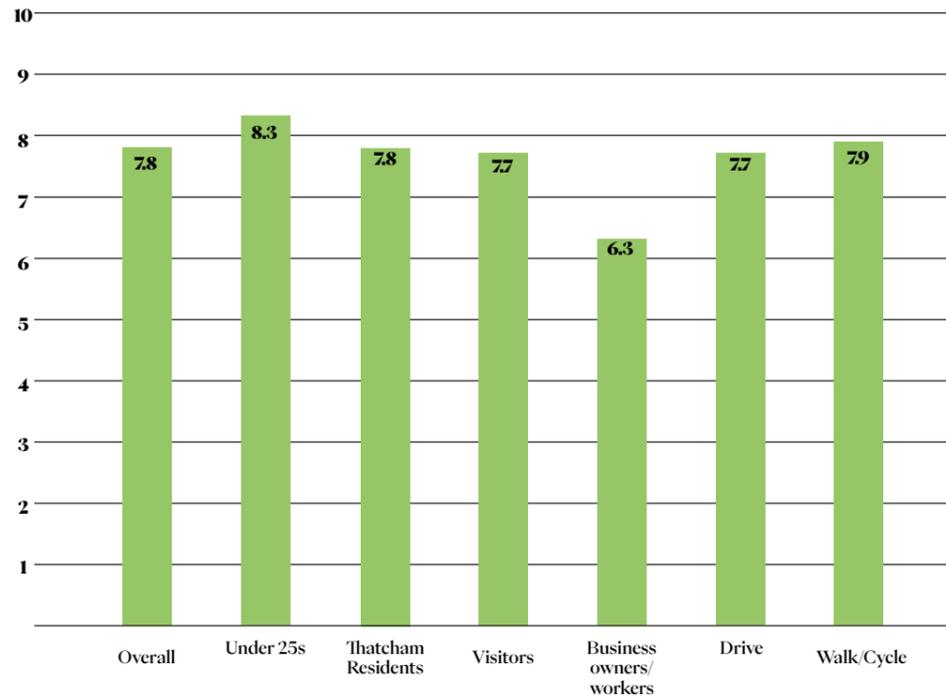
Survey respondents were asked to rate the importance of these improvements, from 1 (unimportant) to 10 (vital). The responses are shown here, with the highest scoring issues listed first.

Consider a single tier parking policy across all car parks to reduce pressure to park in The Broadway e.g. could include 1 hour free parking period in every car park



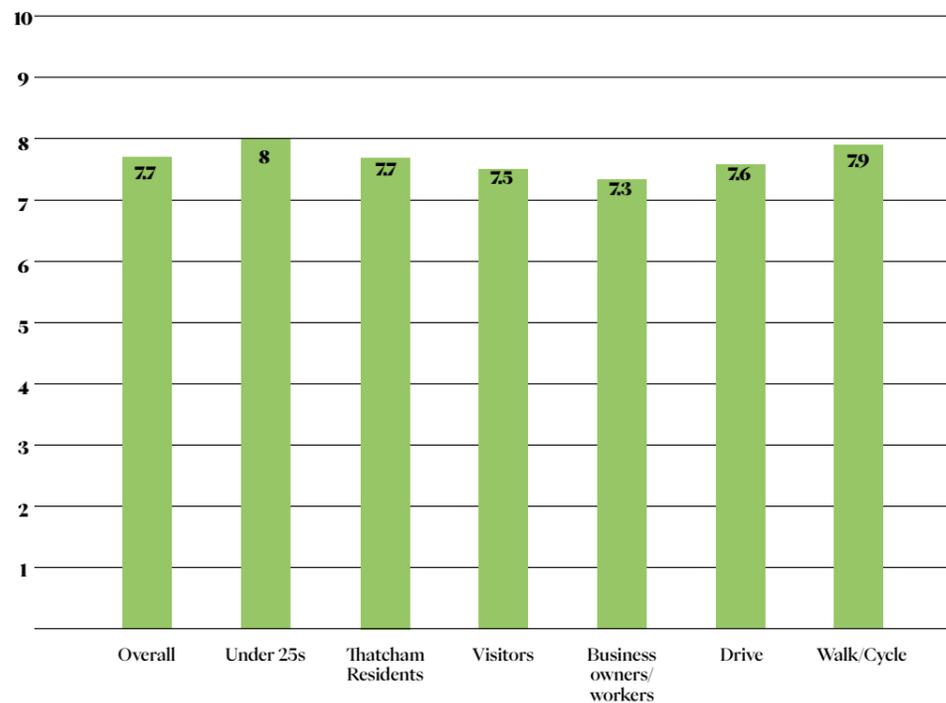
8.5
Average rating

Improve the appearance of Crown Mead shopping area



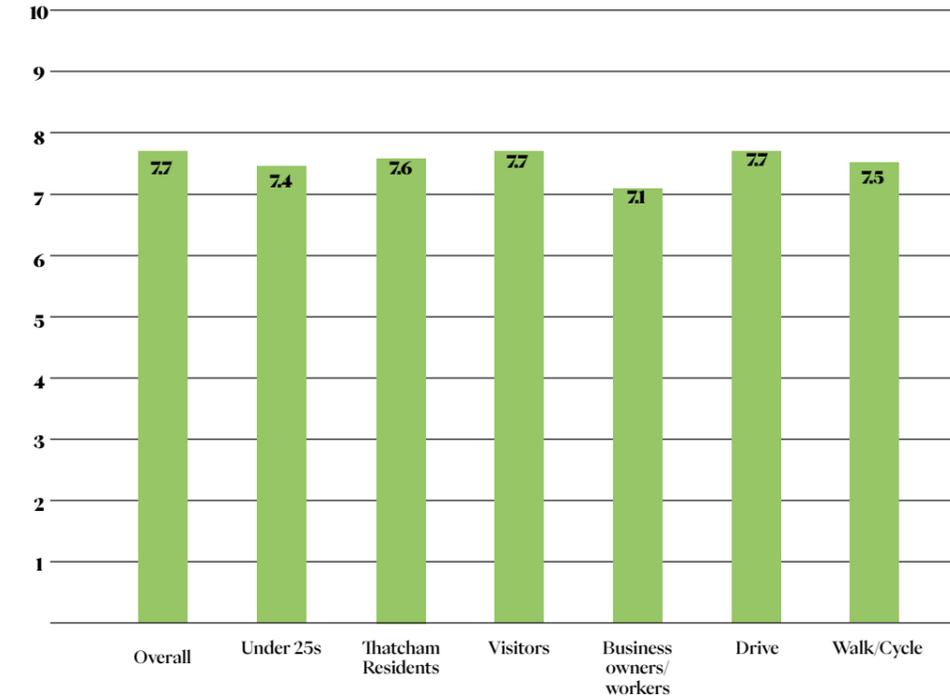
7.8
Average rating

Provide a new community facility with new library, health facilities, arts space, meeting space and café



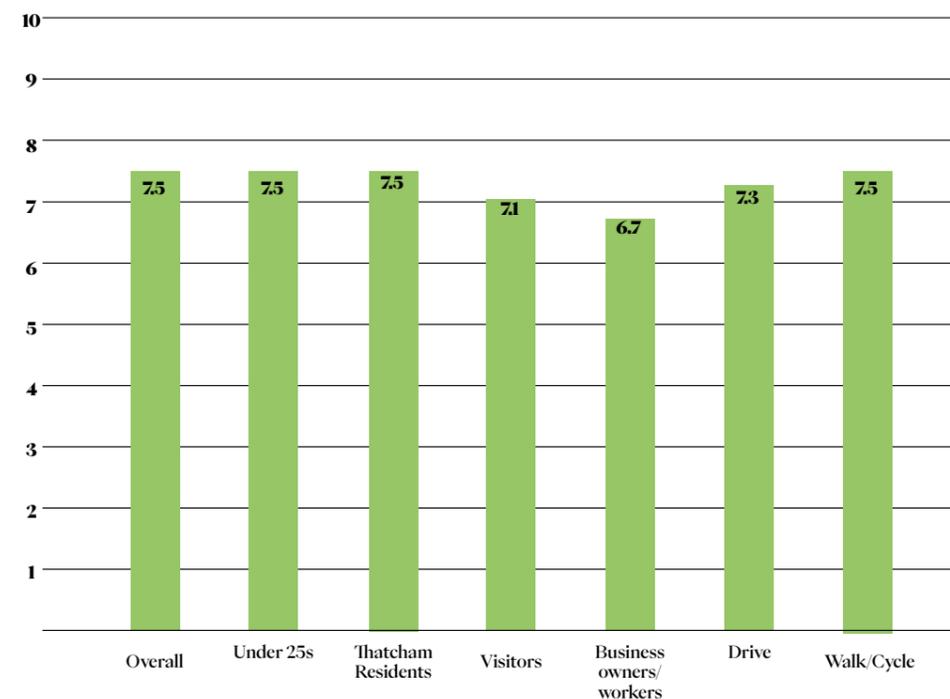
7.7
Average rating

Encourage greater use of Co-op car park with better signage and pedestrian connections to High Street and Broadway



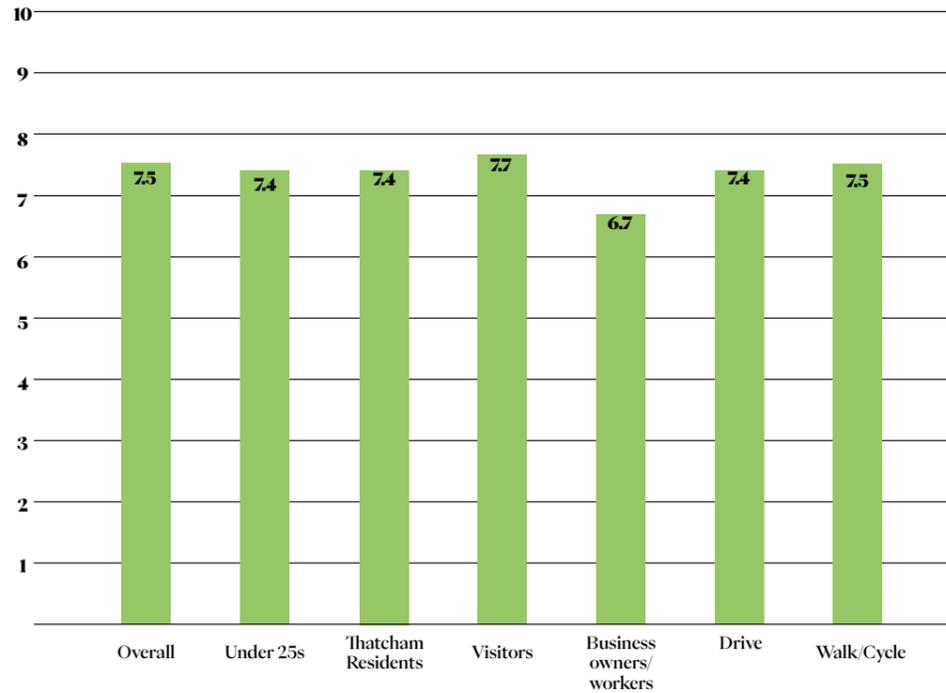
7.7
Average rating

Improve sports, recreation, and community facilities around Memorial Field and Brownsfield Cricket Ground

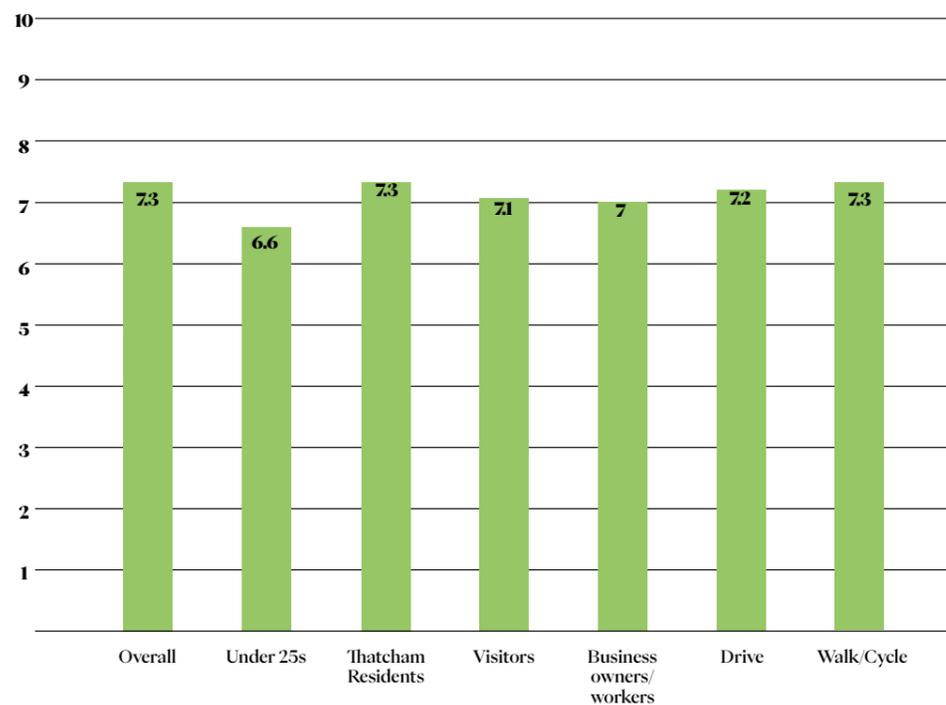


7.5
Average rating

Improve the areas alongside the A4 (increasing planting/ greenery, surfacing enhancements, new wayfinding& lighting) to provide a more appropriate setting for Thatcham's historic buildings and highlight town centre facilities

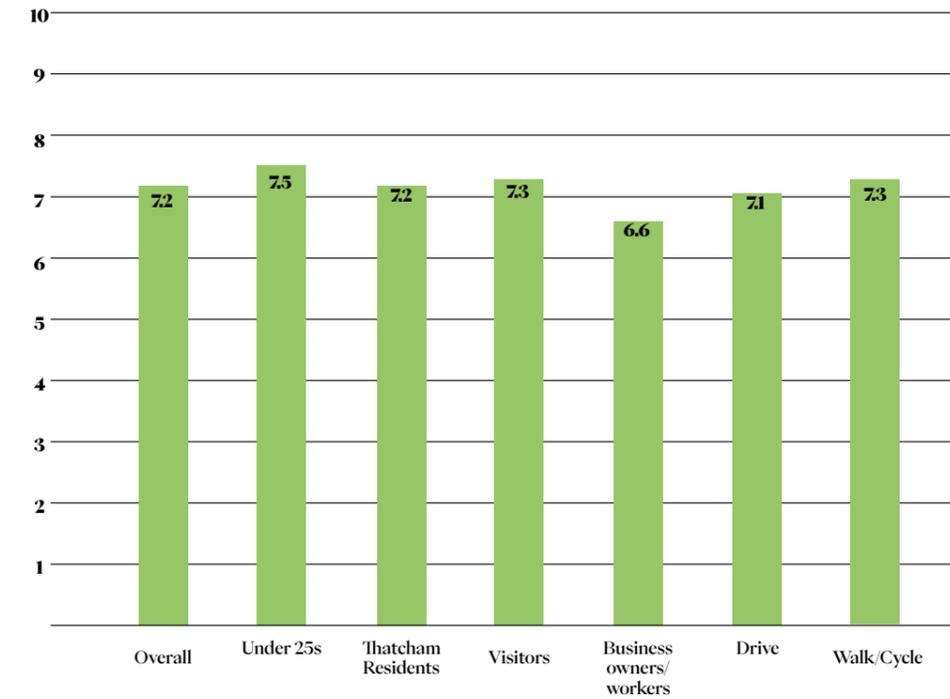


Encourage use of Brownsfield Road and Memorial Hall car parks with improved signage and better walking links to High Street



7.5
Average rating

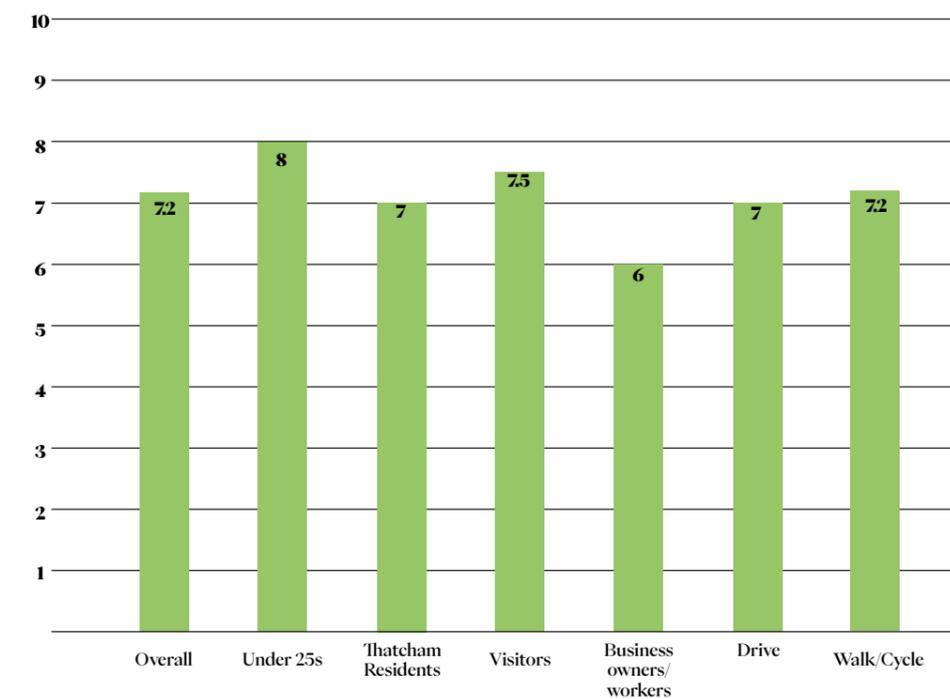
Create a meeting place in the town centre specifically for young people



7.2
Average rating

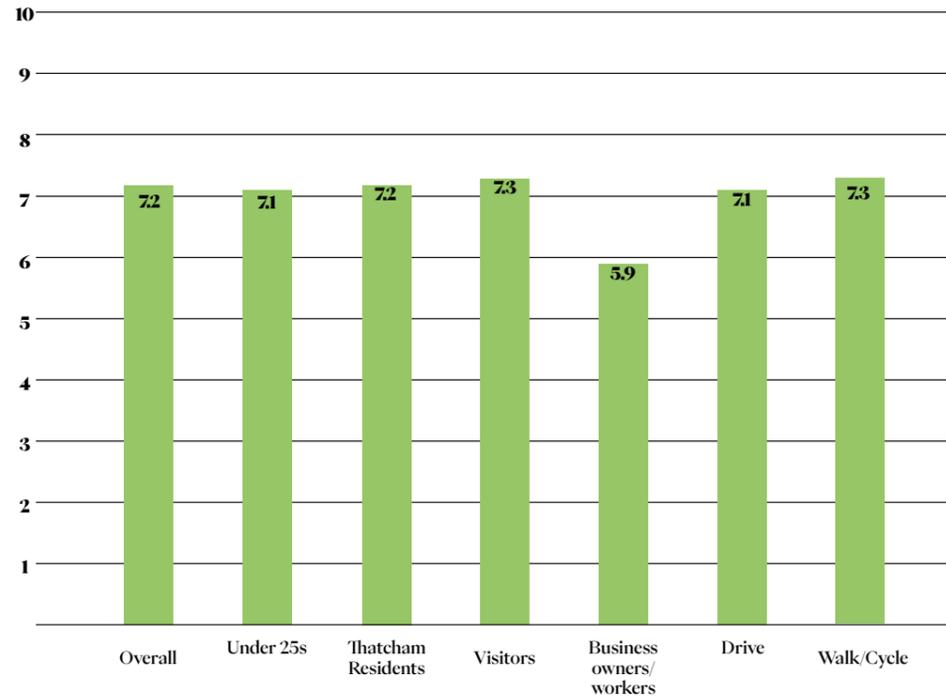
7.3
Average rating

Create more space in Broadway for cafés, markets, seating, and events



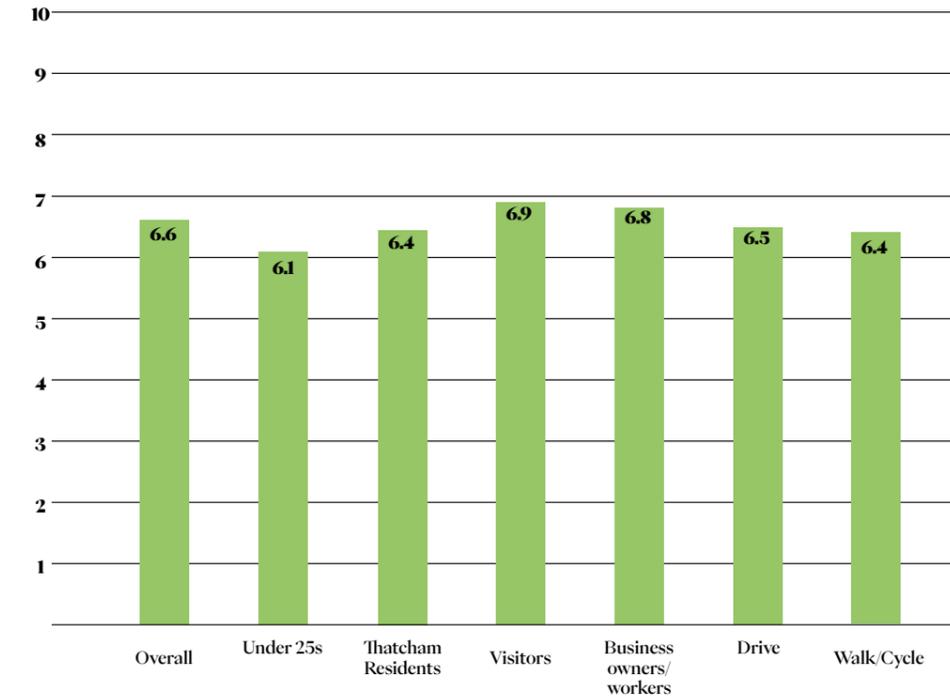
7.2
Average rating

Create a 'village green like' quality in The Broadway with more planting and green space



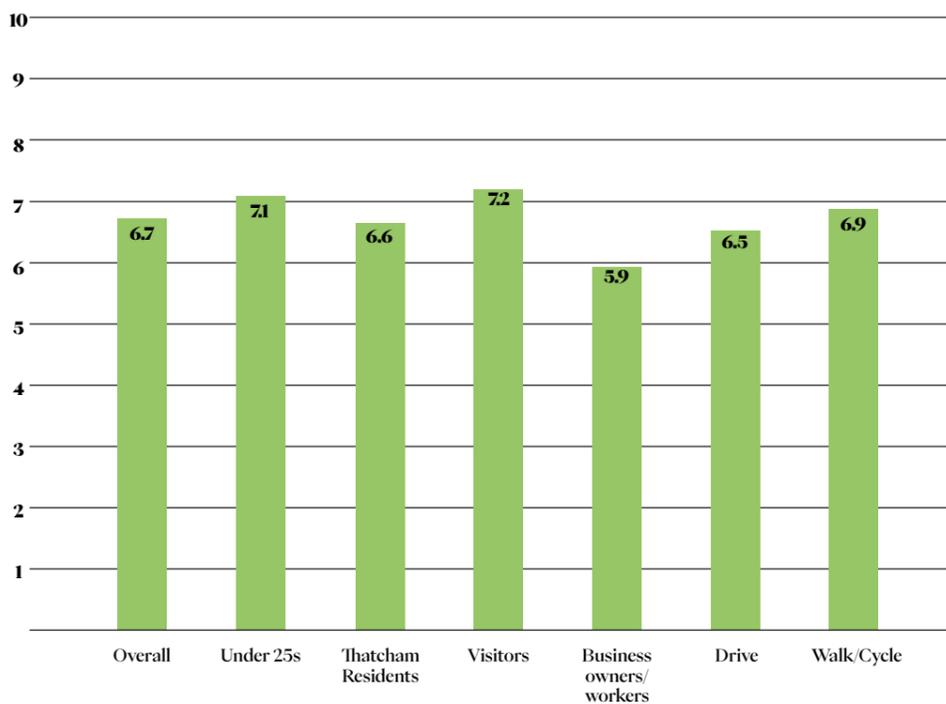
7.2
Average rating

Improve the junction of the A4/High Street ('The Beach')



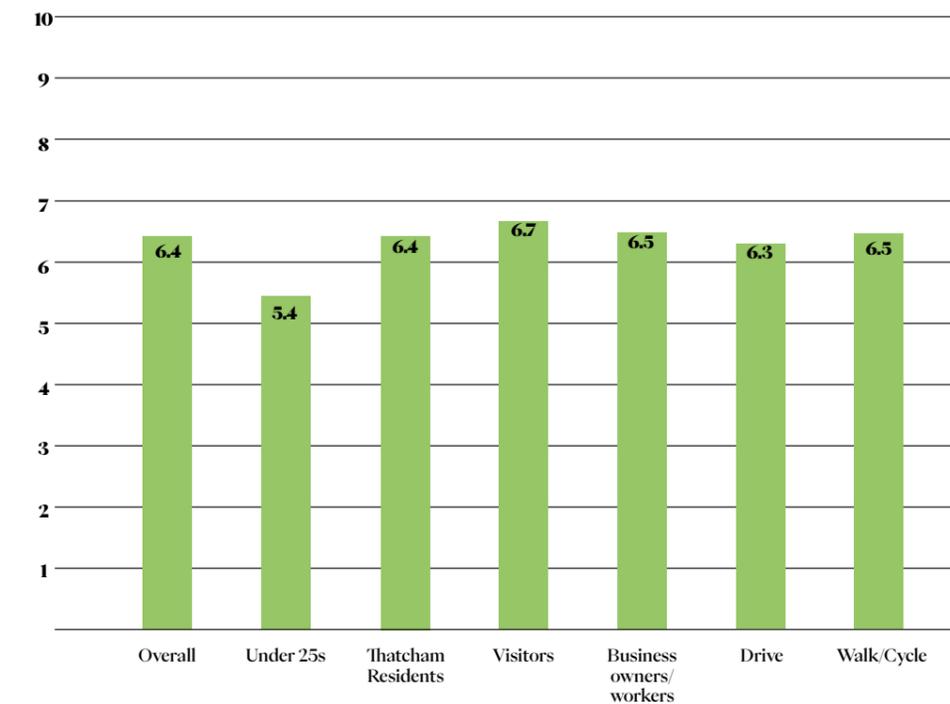
6.6
Average rating

Widen pavements for shoppers and to create more outdoor space for cafés and businesses



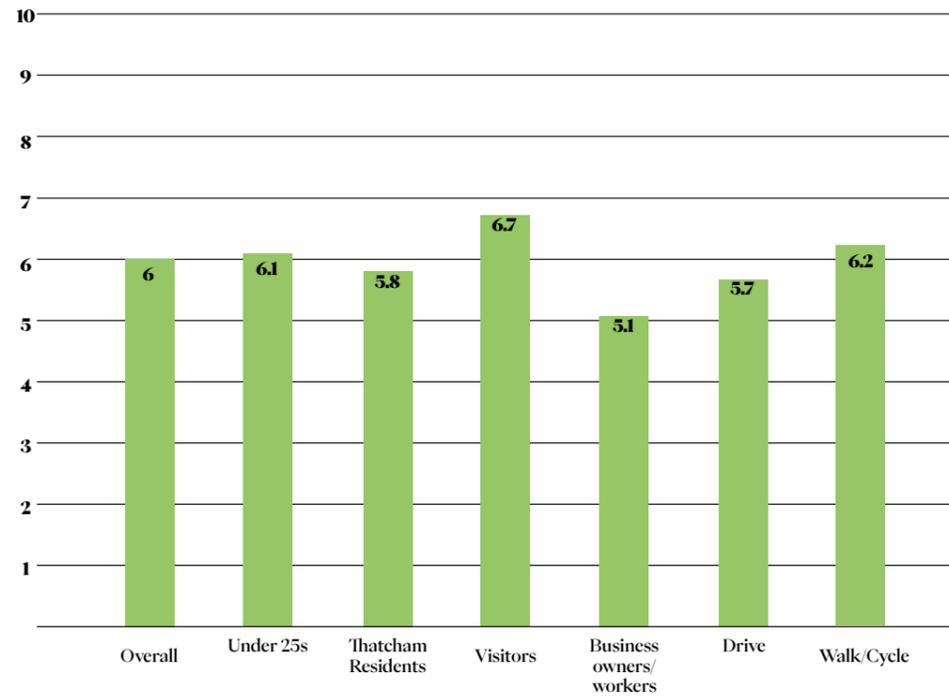
6.7
Average rating

Introduce 20mph zones to create safer crossing of A4 for shoppers and schoolchildren



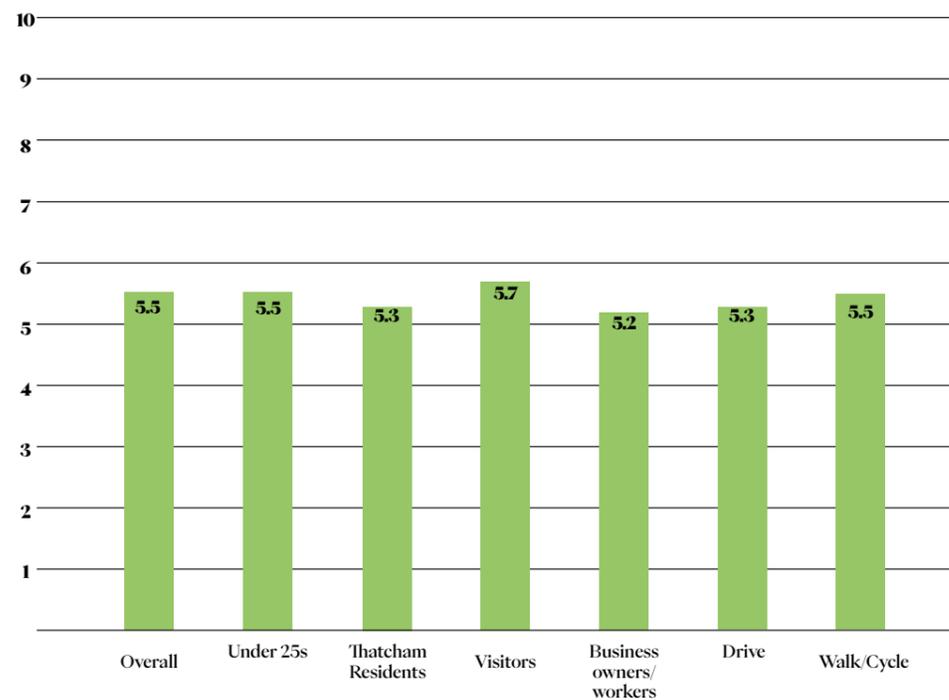
6.4
Average rating

Reduce traffic circulation at the Broadway to reduce noise and pollution



6.0
Average rating

Improve connections into Turnfields Park



5.5
Average rating

When asked if there are any other issues respondents think should be addressed or improvements required common themes include:

- More, and better quality events
- Free Parking
- Fewer empty shop units
- Wider variety of shops, particularly independent businesses
- Bank/banking hub & pharmacy
- Activities / facilities for young families
- Facilities for teenagers and young adults
- More greenery and planting for biodiversity and to address the climate crisis
- Safety / Antisocial behaviour
- More independent retail including pop-ups
- Location of Library - relocate to centre of the town
- Improved access by public transport
- Shopfront improvements
- Improved cycle infrastructure
- More green public space
- Areas of pedestrianisation
- More/better EV infrastructure

Stakeholder Workshop



Following the initial Stakeholder workshop held in November 2022 and completion of the public survey a follow-up workshop was organised with the help of Thatcham Town Council. This was held on the evening of January 24th, 2023 at the Town Council offices.

The purpose was to present the findings from the recent survey and to have the invited guests discuss in a workshop session how the priorities for Thatcham could be developed as projects and ideas.

At the end of the workshop each group gave feedback to the larger audience to share their discussion points. Overall feedback from the group discussion was that the proposals should be 'ambitious'. It should recognise the level of population growth planned for Thatcham and the demand for services and potential CIL funding) that comes with it.

There was a desire to be ambitious in the plans for traffic in The Broadway and along the A4. To examine opportunities to remove as much traffic and car parking as possible from the Broadway, and to slow traffic down on the A4 with a 20mph zone to make life better for pedestrians (especially young people and students).

And there was a clearly stated desire that young people should be leading the discussion on the future of the town, and the need to find ways to ensure that they are more closely involved.

This level of 'ambition' is therefore reflected in the town centre strategy and the scale of projects presented for Thatcham in the Action Plan.

Student Workshop



On February 21st, an online workshop was held with Kennet School Sixth Form students.

The purpose of the workshop was to explore the students thoughts on, and ideas for their town centre. To discuss the findings from the survey, and how young people might like to be involved in shaping projects going forward.

Discussions centred around improving the markets and event offer, leisure and recreational facilities, and the physical environment/appearance of the town centre.

Markets & Events

Participants expressed desire for the markets to include high quality street food, product by local designer-makers, pre-loved clothing including clothes exchanges, and entertainment such as live music and performance. It was discussed that young people could play a part in seeking out local traders. Participants also expressed desire for markets to take place on a weekend rather than weekday when young people are likely to be studying or working.

Participants expressed desire for more events, such as cinema screenings and live music, and suggested that these could 'pop-up' within vacant town centre retail units. Participants also stated desire for Memorial Fields to be utilised for a wider range of music and arts events.

Leisure & Recreational Facilities

Participants expressed desire for additional sports and leisure uses at Memorial Fields including, walking, running, cycling and BMX routes, multi-use games areas, as well as more seating, tables, and socialising opportunities.

Ideas for utilising vacant town centre unites for pop-up activity such as table tennis clubs were also discussed

Participants stated desire for more independent retail, cafés and restaurants in the town centre and stated that an independent café with work, study and social space, that remained open in to the evening, would be popular amongst young residents.

Physical Environment

Participants expressed desire for less car parking and traffic circulation in the town centre, more greenery, seating and tables to create a more inviting environment to get together with friends and hang out.

Improving pedestrian routes/connections to and through the town centre, and addressing the impact of the A4 were also stated as key priorities.

Participants suggested that students at the Kennet School may like to be involved in producing artwork such as graphic wall murals and wayfinding signage to promote the town centre.

04

Strategy

Projects:

1. The Broadway
2. The Broadway & The Market
3. Parking Strategy
4. Kingsland Centre
5. Co-op Building & Car Park
6. Community Hub
7. Crown Mead
8. High Street & The Beach
9. A4 Corridor

To reflect the clear views from the stakeholders present at the workshops, and the support for projects shown in the survey responses, and the level of population growth anticipated in the Local Plan, this study sets an ambitious strategy for Thatcham town centre.

The strategy seeks to achieve this ambition whilst reinforcing the 'village' qualities of Thatcham town centre, creating a more sociable, walkable and 'people-focused' place. This reflects our own engagement findings and the conclusion of Thatcham Vision 2015.

It recognises the need to promote local and independent retailers, as well as health, community, leisure, business, residential and recreation uses to create a vibrant town centre. It understands that some people will need to travel by car and looks to make car parking arrangements as straightforward as possible whilst minimising the visual and environmental impact of traffic and parking.

The Broadway

Starting at the centre, there is a clear desire to reduce the impact of traffic and car parking at The Broadway. Options are therefore outlined for removing parking and reducing through traffic, creating more space and a healthier environment for eating, drinking, markets, events and socialising in the heart of the town centre.

The free, on-street parking in the centre of The Broadway, and around its edge, has been identified by local residents as creating a number of problems. Visitors by car are encouraged to look for the free spaces at The Broadway, rather than pay to use the car parks on the edge of the town centre. The street layout means the car parking is highly accessible to motorists, but when the car park is full it also encourages circulation around the Broadway as visitors wait for a space to become available.

The amount of on-street parking limits the space available for businesses and people, whilst the vehicle circulation means that the space that does exist can be dominated by vehicle noise and fumes. The proposals consider a series of options for removing traffic from The Broadway, gradually increasing in scope and ambition.

Reducing the amount of on-street parking at The Broadway is considered possible because the parking data which exists for the town centre suggests that there is always capacity at other town centre car parks, even on market days when the Broadway central parking is not available.

The 2009 Design Appraisal identified a total of 500 car parking spaces in five car parks serving the town. Almost half of these spaces were in The Moors and Kingsland Centre (Waitrose) car park, highlighting the importance of this popular car park to the town centre. The 2009 report concluded:

“Whilst stakeholder consultation identified a lack of car parking in Thatcham as a common concern, we consider that there are plenty of car parking spaces to meet the current range of facilities in the town centre.”

Thatcham Vision report reinforced this point, stating:

“The town centre is served by several car parks but inadequate car parking remains a common complaint. There are spaces in several locations close to (within 100-200 metres) of the centre and car parks are rarely full during the week. There is anecdotal evidence to suggest that the lack of parking is more than often not related to driver perception and behaviour (including unwillingness to pay to use the main car park) rather than lack of parking”. Thatcham Vision 2015

No formal surveys of car parking have been undertaken for this study, but our visits and visual surveys reinforce the conclusion that free on-street spaces in Broadway are very popular, as is the Waitrose/Moors car park, but other car parks, including the Co-op car park are much less busy.

Any removal of parking from The Broadway should however be coordinated with improvements to the other car parks in terms of signage and pedestrian connections (see page 58).



Before



Before



After

Precedent / Romsey Market Place

As part of an overall enhancement project for Romsey town centre, improvements have been made to Market Place. The scheme has been designed to create a safer environment for pedestrians and cyclists, provide a new space for public events and markets.



After

Precedent / The Square, Wimborne

Enhancements to The Square in Wimborne Minster have seen alterations to the traffic flow to create more pedestrian areas and an attractive ‘centrepiece’ for the town to host markets, events and cafe spill-out.

Option 1: Widening Pavements

This option is very limited in its scope. It seeks solely to remove the parking on the eastern edge of The Broadway, along the edge of The Kingsland Centre. This would allow pavements to be widened outside the Kingsland Centre, creating space for cafés and other businesses to spill out onto this side of the street that is more likely to get afternoon and evening sun due to its southern and westerly aspect. It would reduce the barrier between the Kingsland Centre and The Broadway, encouraging visitors to Waitrose to visit the rest of the town centre.

This option could also remove parking on the western edge, which would require relocation of the taxi rank. It provides more potential for the businesses on this edge of the Broadway (including restaurants, and the butchers/bakers) to provide seating on the pavement and to promote their businesses, particularly given that the footways on this side of The Broadway are narrower than on the eastern side.

This option brings some benefits to The Broadway as outlined above but does not remove the vast majority of the free parking available in the Broadway, and does not therefore address the environmental impact of the traffic circulation. It is not considered to be an ‘ambitious’ option.

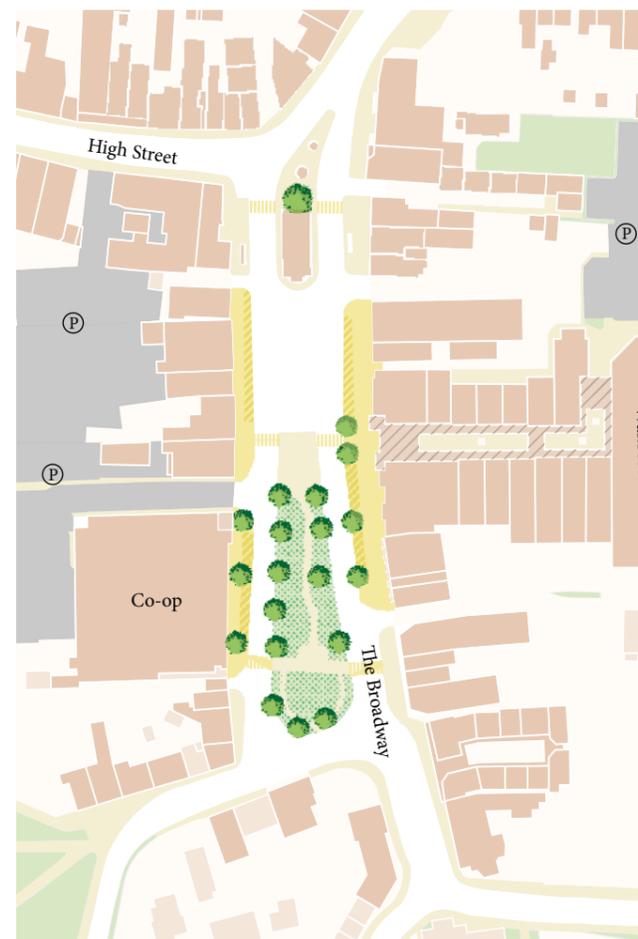
Option 2: Permanent space for market and events and events

This option is more ambitious as it removes the 16 spaces in the central area of The Broadway. These are the spaces that are used for the Friday market, and which are therefore already unavailable on one of the busier shopping days of the week for Thatcham.

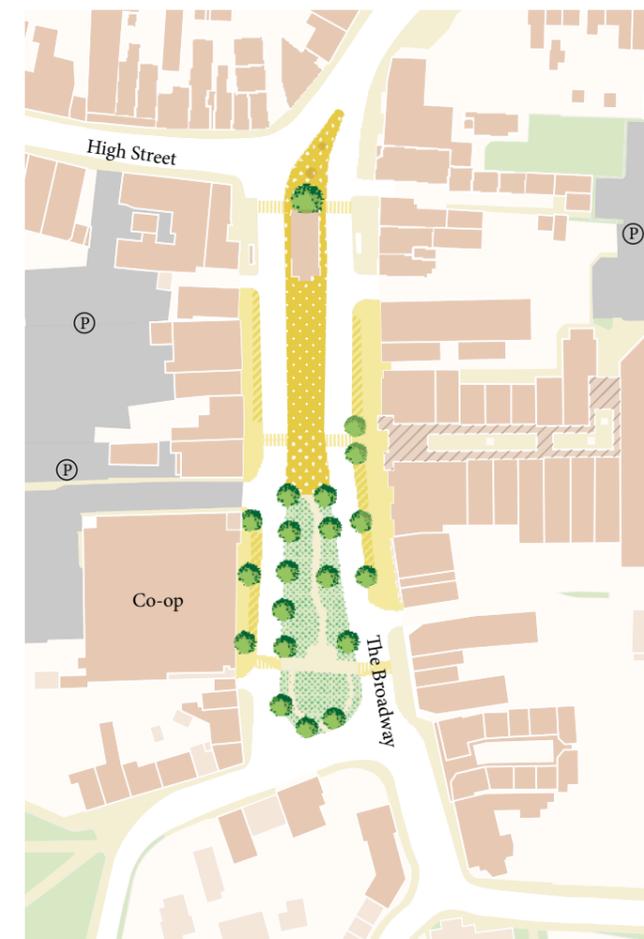
To make the most of the benefits it should be combined with removing the on-street parking on the eastern side of The Broadway. This allows for a permanent social/event/market space to be created in the centre of the town, with a high quality ‘village square’ complementing an upgraded green space.

Reducing the number of available spaces in The Broadway will encourage use of other car parks and reduce traffic circulation in the heart of the town centre, creating a healthier, and more attractive, space for people to spend time.

Under the current pricing strategy, free parking for 30 minutes or 1 hour would still be available at the Co-op Car Park or The High Street (as it is on market days when the central parking area is occupied by market stalls). Any strategy to reduce spaces in The Broadway should be combined with measures to improve signage and directions to other car parks and to improve the pedestrian links from those car parks to The Broadway and High Street (see below).



Option 1 / Widening Pavements



Option 2 / Permanent space for market and events

-  Potential areas to widen pavements by reducing on-street parking
-  Permanent space for market and events by removing central parking area

Option 3: 'Partial Pedestrianisation'

This option is much more ambitious. As well as removing on-street parking it also restricts through traffic on the eastern edge between the access points to the two private car parks and service areas.

Restricting through traffic allows for a much stronger connection to be made between the Kingsland Centre and The Broadway, allowing for more green space, more planting. It would allow the market and other events to be better integrated with the Kingsland Centre and encourage pedestrian flow from the Arcade to the rest of the town centre.

Reducing traffic movements around the Broadway also opens up the opportunity to rethink the Broadway/A4 junction, potentially reducing the amount of carriageway, creating more space for people and improving the sense of arrival along the A4.

By breaking the vehicular connection on the eastern edge of Broadway it will remove the opportunity to circulate around The Broadway seeking a parking space. As under option 2, free parking for 30 minutes or 1 hour would still be available at the Co-op Car Park or The High Street.

Retaining traffic on the western edge gives access to the Co-op car park and allows on-street parking to be retained on the western edge (if considered preferable). It also brings an increased level of activity to The Broadway in the evening. The partial pedestrianisation could be considered for the western edge rather than the eastern edge but would need to address access to the Co-op car park and servicing area (see under Option 4).

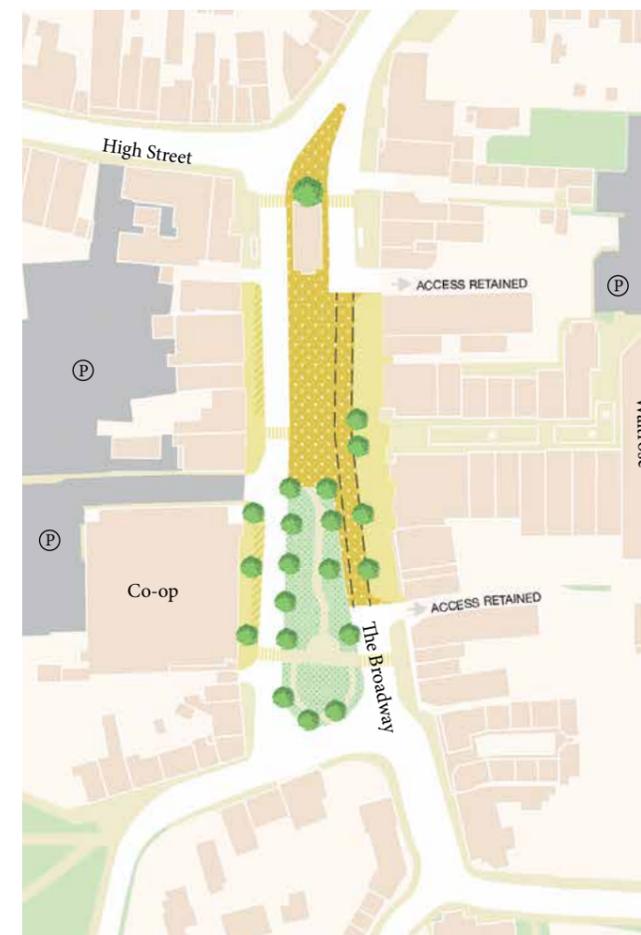
There are clearly implications for bus services which would need to be discussed with the operators. The option could allow for occasional bus movements to continue along the eastern edge, although this would limit the scale of planting and pedestrian space that could be provided. Alternatively, consideration could be given to moving the bus stop closer to the A4.

Option 4: 'Full Pedestrianisation'

This option is the most ambitious, restricting through traffic on both sides of the Broadway and was proposed by a number of stakeholders at the January workshop. This allows a much stronger pedestrian connection to be made between the Kingsland Centre, The Broadway and the High Street, allowing for more green space, more event space and more spill-out space for businesses. Removing all through traffic will also have a more significant impact in reducing noise and fumes in the area.

This option raises complex access and servicing issues which this study has not had time to consider and resolve. The most obvious issues are the need to reroute bus services and the need to retain access to the Co-op car park (for public parking, private parking and servicing to the Co-op and other businesses).

Closure of the western edge (north of the Co-op car park entrance) would require an alternative exit from the car park. This could potentially be created adjacent to the public house but would require reconfiguration of the car park and agreement of third-party landowners. Closure of the whole western edge would require a new access and exit from the car park and no obvious solution has been put forward to address this issue.



Option 3 / Partial Pedestrianisation



Option 4 / Full pedestrianisation

- Potential areas to widen pavements by reducing on-street parking
- Permanent space for market and events by removing central parking area
- Optional carriageway retained to allow for buses or emergency vehicles

The Broadway & The Market

The central parking area on The Broadway is used for the Friday market, and other events. Removing the central parking area creates a space where complementary markets and events can be held at other times. Full or partial pedestrianisation of Broadway creates a larger space for expansion of the market and for larger events. It also allows for these to be extended into adjacent areas, such as the Kingsland Centre Arcade.

Extending the market offer into adjacent areas can help encourage pedestrian flow around the town and is closely linked to other potential projects below. Reducing clutter in the Kingsland Centre Arcade could allow market stalls to be extended into the shopping centre, or to be connected with pop up activities in the vacant units. Improving the physical environment in the Co-op car park could create opportunities for street vendors, markets or music events to complement the Broadway market, encourage use of that car park and draw visitors towards the High Street.

The survey highlights that creating more space in The Broadway for markets and events, is a priority for young people. Whilst the market runs successfully on a Friday, Thatcham Town Council may wish to consider the timings of the markets so that more of the local (and visiting) community, including young people, who are likely to be attending school, college or at work at this time, are able to participate.

In order to have the best possible impact, the markets must be carefully curated and rooted in the character and identity of Thatcham. There's no one size fits all template for a successful market – the very fact that no two markets are exactly the same is one of the reasons why they're so popular. But there are some key elements that come together to form the foundations of a successful, thriving market event that appeals to all ages:

- Retail: Showcasing local independent designer-makers, artists, and craftspeople,
- Food & Drink: Fresh, local, and sustainable produce and an evolving street food offer,
- Entertainment: Live music & street performance,
- Workshops and/or interactive elements: E.g. hands-on, creative, and participatory workshops that engage the local community, and add an element of surprise that keeps visitors coming back.

The branding and promotion of a market is as important as the curation and it is important that all these areas are consistent in developing a strong visual identity and in their promotion on social media with high quality photography.



Precedent / Second Sundays Andover

Second Sundays is a new curated street market showcasing Andover's best local talent. Second Sundays brings together some of the best local producers, designer-makers, and artists in the region, alongside street food, live DJs, and free creative workshops, on the second Sunday of every month in Andover town centre.



Precedent / Holt Sunday Market

Holt Sunday Market is a curated monthly market, whereby on the first Sunday of each month April-Dec (every Sunday during July & August) the town centre is closed to vehicles for a day of Norfolk's best independent, makers and street food traders, alongside communal dining & performances.



Precedent / First Friday Margate

First Friday is a free, monthly celebration of creativity and community in Margate. The market partners with local independent shops, pubs, galleries and cafés, with many extending their opening hours to put on other events for the community and benefit from increased footfall. The markets' Instagram page doubles up as a useful community resource, listing creative events happening in and around the town.

Parking Strategy

The priority from an ‘active travel’ and sustainability perspective is to increase the number of people walking and cycling into Thatcham town centre. Reducing on-street parking in The Broadway is one important element in this strategy.

A key part of relocating on-street parking from The Broadway will be to ensure parking in other car parks is as attractive as possible to those needing to travel to Thatcham town centre by car. There are a number of aspects to this which need to be addressed:

1. Car parks need to be clearly signed as town centre parking, particularly from the A4, but also from the south,
2. Signage needs to promote a consistent town centre ‘brand’ for all car parks,
3. Pricing needs to be consistent,
4. Payment methods need to be as consistent as possible across all the car parks, and
5. Pedestrian routes to The Broadway and High Street need to be attractive, safe and clearly signed.

Delivering a coordinated pricing strategy and payment strategy within the car parks was the highest priority for local residents, but cannot be delivered by West Berkshire Council on its own and would require coordination across a number of different landowners/operators.

It is recommended that a preferred pricing approach be developed by West Berkshire Council for discussion with other landowners. This strategy should seek to agree consistent approaches to parking and pricing in the town centre which would include agreement

on any free parking provision and be considered in the context of the desire to reduce car journeys and promote active travel. It is not recommended that any changes be made to the parking and pricing strategy for Thatcham High Street as the coordinated strategy would only apply to off-street car parking.

Improved signage, and coordinated signage can potentially be delivered by West Berkshire Council. Waitrose car park and Memorial Fields car park should be clearly identified as town centre car parks (e.g. rather than supermarket car park). Improving arrival to the Waitrose car park, and creating a sense of ‘town centre arrival’ needs to be coordinated with improvements to the A4 and to Turnfields Play Area (see separate project). Improving arrival to the Memorial Fields car park, and creating a ‘town centre gateway’ needs to be coordinated with improvements to the A4 and to Crown Meads shopping area (see separate project).

The final ingredient in encouraging use of these car parks is to make the pedestrian routes to The Broadway and High Street as obvious and attractive as possible. The key routes are indicated on the diagram below. Improvements to the Memorial Fields car park are considered under the Community Hub project. Improvements to the Waitrose car park route are considered under Kingsland Centre improvements. Improvements to the Co-op car park route are considered as part of a separate project to improve the wider environment of that area of town.



 Improved signage directing visitors to town centre car parks

Kingsland Centre

As noted in the Key Issues, Waitrose is a key anchor destination but the connection from Waitrose (and its car park) to The Broadway is suffering from a number of vacant units and is in need of environmental improvement. The ‘public realm’ in the arcade is cluttered and of varying quality. It creates a substantial visual and physical barrier which will deter some Waitrose shoppers from visiting The Broadway.

A key objective therefore is to improve the physical environment of the Kingsland Centre, to encourage stronger pedestrian flow into Broadway from the Kingsland Centre and Waitrose car park, and along High Street from The Broadway (and from the Co-op car park).

The opportunity could be taken to improve the blank edges of the Waitrose store. The rear (eastern) elevation dominates the arrival from The Moors, and improved signage/mural welcoming visitors to the Kingsland Centre and to Thatcham would help address this. The side elevation fronting the car park could also be improved. Many stores provide windows and stool seating for shoppers to eat their lunch, creating a more active presence and introduction to the town centre. Improving the physical environment outside Waitrose, where pallets and other elements discourage flow towards The Broadway, should be a priority, as should removing the outdated and unattractive roof structure. Reducing the bollards and bins at the entrance to the Kingsland Centre from the car park, and redesigning the planters can reduce physical barriers and clutter. All these measures would improve visual links between Waitrose and The Broadway and create stronger pedestrian connections.

Within the Kingsland Centre, creating a stronger flow together with other improvements should help to improve demand for the vacant retail units. There are four vacant units in the Kingsland Centre at the time of our study, and these are in prominent locations impacting on the eastern and western entrances into the Arcade area. Occupying these units, even with temporary or pop up uses should be a priority.

Discussions have been held with the library about potentially occupying a unit but there are physical constraints and the cost of the lease is likely to be prohibitive. Alternative funding approaches would therefore have to be found, but the principle of the library with a cafe and other complementary uses (such as indoor markets for local businesses, or the Maker Space currently west of the town centre) taking a significant amount of space on this northern side of the arcade would help create a new ‘brand’ for the centre.

Coordinating outdoor seating provision for the businesses, together with coordinated shop front designs and possibly canopies to provide some shelter, will help with a rebranding of the Kingsland Centre to create a more coherent identity.



-  Improved public realm and reduce clutter to create stronger route to The Broadway
-  Coordinated shop frontages
-  Animate Waitrose windows to car park and introduce signage/welcome mural along existing blank wall



Precedent / Coordinated shopfront improvements



Precedent / Coordinated approach to outdoor seating and street planters



Precedent / Kingland Crescent, Poole

In 2020 centre owners Legal & General committed to provide 10 retail units to start-up and independent businesses with no rent or business rates to be paid for two years.

The initiative responds to the recent changes in consumer trends and the affect these changes have had on shopping centres across the UK. Tenants now include, a coffee shop and roasters, Fishmoger, surfboard café, house-plants and homewares store, zero waste shop, and art gallery.



Precedent / The Community Works, Oxford

The Community Works is vibrant hub right in the heart of Oxford. It combines a restaurant and cafe with a number of smaller creative community spaces, within a building left empty for almost 8 years.

Today, The Community Works is a place where the community can come together to eat and drink, but to connect, collaborate and create. It has also served to drive interest and footfall in the area, diversifying the offer and giving people more reasons to visit.



Precedent / Culture Palace, Enfield

Culture Palace is a temporary creative hub, housing a performance space, museum, bookshop, café and screening room in Enfield Palace Gardens shopping centre.

The pop-up space is hosting performances, films, workshops, live music and an array of arts activities.



Precedent / The Sovereign, Weston-super-Mare

In Weston-super-Mare, The Sovereign shopping centre, have transformed two vacant retail units into 30 mixed size studio spaces, meeting rooms and coworking workspace for local entrepreneurs, start-ups and small businesses.

Co-op Building & Car Park

The Co-op is a prominent building on The Broadway and an important use for the town centre. Unfortunately, the building's long frontage to The Broadway does little to animate the street, and the blank side elevation creates an unattractive route to the car park to the rear. This is reinforced by the very narrow pavement for pedestrians and the tendency for the route to flood.

The potential should be investigated for the Co-op building to be more intensively used, possibly consolidating the foodstore element into a smaller, more efficient footprint and enabling other uses to create more life on to The Broadway. A smaller foodstore, and use of upper floors, may allow opportunities for an indoor 'market' for small traders, for the library or other community uses to relocate into the town centre or for the creation of a new community venue, ideally located for events on The Broadway or in the car park to the rear. Ideally a new use for this building would be combined with opening up stronger pedestrian connections between The Broadway and Church Lane via The Old Priory, an attractive listed building.

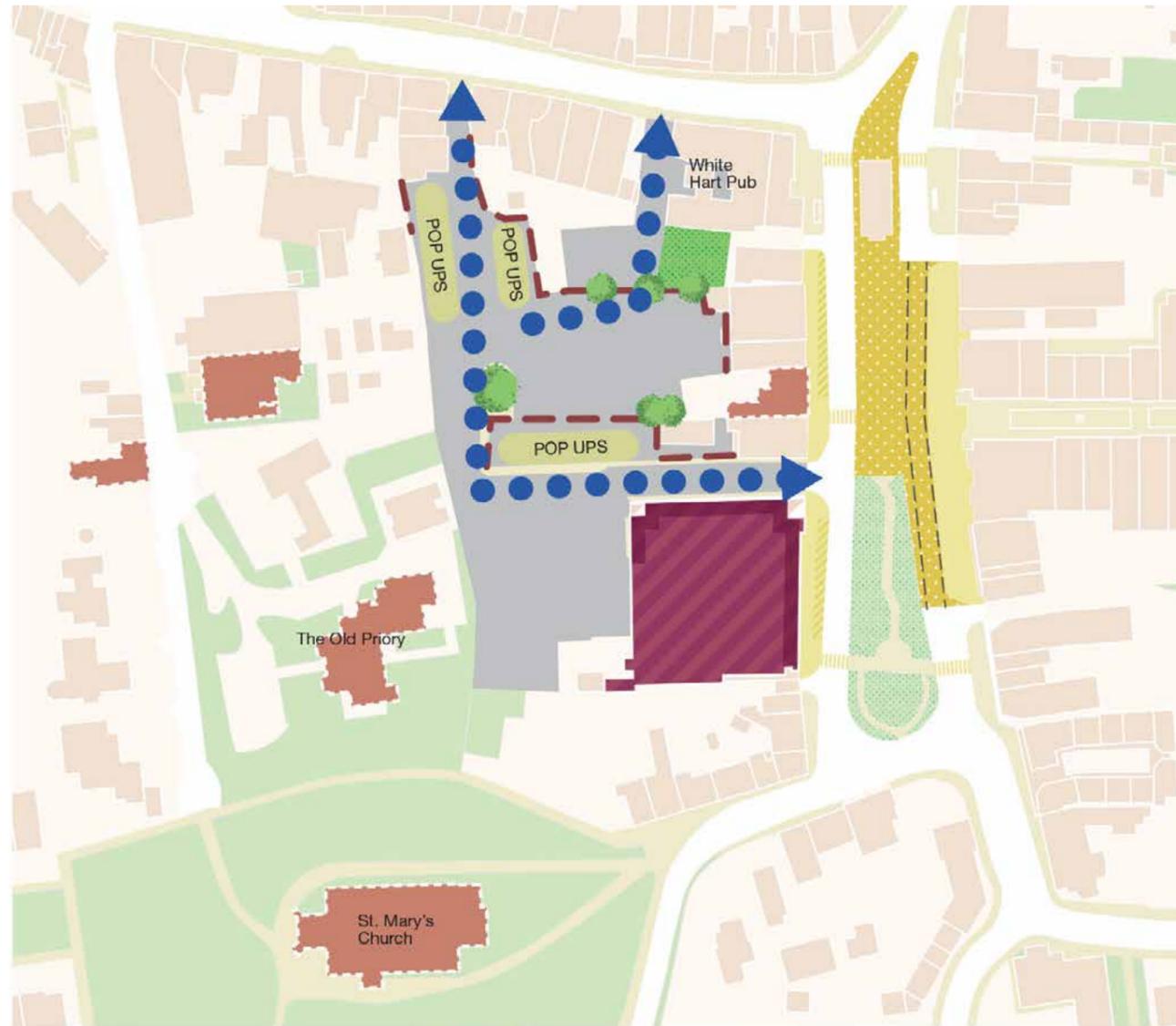
The car park to the rear is strategically well located for serving The Broadway and High Street. It has mature trees, brick walls, views to the Church and planting, and potential connections to the churchyard via The Old Priory. It is however undermined by the poorly maintained parking areas and fencing, untidy rear elevations, locations of trolley bays and the service yard of the Co-op foodstore. The layout, fencing and barriers and mix of public and private car parking can make it complicated to navigate as a visitor.

The range of private ownerships makes this a complex area to improve but if the above issues can be addressed, this strategic area to the rear of The Broadway and High Street is potentially an attractive space for Thatcham. Priority should be given to simplifying the parking layout and payment arrangements. Ideally there should also be a clear demarcation between public and private car parking areas and the private parking should not create a barrier for those visiting High Street or The Broadway.

Suggestions were made that the pedestrian alleyway between the car park and High Street (adjacent to Thatcham kebabs) could potentially be converted into a vehicle exit from the car park. Creating an alternative exit could allow the route from Broadway to become a one-way entrance only into the car park which would allow for a wider footway to create a safer and more attractive route for shoppers. However, this alleyway would be quite a narrow route and would create a difficult exit onto the High Street, undermining its role as a potentially attractive pedestrian connection to its shops and facilities.

This pedestrian route to the High Street should however be improved, currently it is not well signposted and is dominated by commercial waste bins, bollards, poorly maintained blank walls and private car parking areas. It could form an attractive alley, potentially enhanced with planters/seating and occasional pop up shops or food trucks. This would require the relocation of 5-6 private car parking spaces but would create an interesting and positive gateway to the High Street.

Consideration could be given to creating a new exit from the car park, for vehicles and pedestrians, adjacent to the White Hart public house. There is already a vehicular entrance to the small private car park, and this could potentially be extended and reconfigured to create a direct route (exit only) from the car park. An additional pedestrian connection to High Street could also boost footfall for those businesses, and could enable an attractive pub garden/café garden area to be created to the rear of the White Hart and other businesses in what would be a sunny corner of the car park with views to the Church and beyond. Creating an alternative exit from the car park would also allow the western side of The Broadway (north of the car park entrance) to be pedestrianised for market day or other events without closing the car park. It is most likely that this alternative exit could be created if the size of the Co-op store was reduced, with a corresponding reduction in the size of the service vehicles needing to access the store and exit onto High Street.



-  Frontages improved to animate routes
-  Potential for Co-op building to be more intensively used
-  Improved pedestrian routes
-  Areas with improved boundary treatment
-  Opportunity for pub garden
-  Opportunity to introduce pop up uses
-  Listed buildings



Precedent / The Branch Community Centre, Chipping Norton

A former NatWest in Chipping Norton is being transformed in to a versatile multi-purpose community space incorporating community hall & kitchen, public cafe, meeting and function rooms, rentable office space, and community garden. The project is led by The Branch Trust charity established by the local St Mary's Church.



Precedent / Frome

The monthly Frome Independent market activates the entire town centre, including town centre surface car parks, with live music, DJs, performance, creative workshops, activities, and market stalls.

Community Hub

The need for a new community facility was identified in the key issues section, and has been considered necessary for a number of years. There needs to be a comprehensive brief prepared, assessing all the potential facilities which need to be provided to cater for the increasing population of Thatcham. There are then two potential approaches for delivering such facilities:

1. to locate them in separate buildings and locations within the town centre to encourage circulation around the town, or
2. to co-locate as many services as possible within a central hub.

The two approaches offer different benefits and options for relocating the library are considered below for both the Co-op building and the vacant units in the Kingsland Centre. The clear preference expressed through the workshops however, was to develop a large hub for community, arts, health, sport and recreation focused around the existing cluster of facilities and playing fields at Brownsfield Lane/Memorial Fields. At the present time, this approach appears to be the more deliverable option given the extent of land in public ownership, the availability of the vacant care home and the need to improve the existing library, health facilities and sports pavilion. Residential use may be necessary to provide funding for the scheme but should not dominate and the priority for this key site is to meet the community and leisure needs of the growing population.

For a new hub in this location to maximise the benefit to the town as a whole, it must be seen as being part of Thatcham town centre. The car parking must be clearly signed and visitors to the hub must be willing to walk to the town centre, and vice versa. If this happens it has the potential to significantly expand the perceived extent of Thatcham town centre, integrating the shopping area with the existing sports, community and health facilities and making the High Street a more central, and less isolated, feature of the town centre.

The project details will need to be developed in partnership with a range of stakeholders, but our strategy approach is based on the following principles:

- **A mixed-use community hub.** This is likely to comprise more than one building but there should be a coherence to the delivery of community, health, leisure, sports, youth, civic and cultural uses across the site.
- **Creating a new arts/community/sports facility.** This must be able to serve all the recreation areas and sports grounds, and create a new destination for Thatcham. This building needs to be located where it can replace the existing cricket pavilion which is a priority for the cricket club. Any uses should also reflect the existence of the Family Hub on Park Lane.

- **Creating an improved health & wellbeing facility.** This should improve the medical facilities at the site, and consider how these can be integrated with complementary health activities and treatments associated with the sports and leisure facilities.

- **Creating a stronger street frontage and arrival in Thatcham.** A 'statement' building should be visible to passing motorists, and a 'town centre' use, such as a pharmacy, the library or other 'active' use, should have its frontage visible from the street. This should be coordinated with improvements to Crown Mead and the wider improvements to the A4.

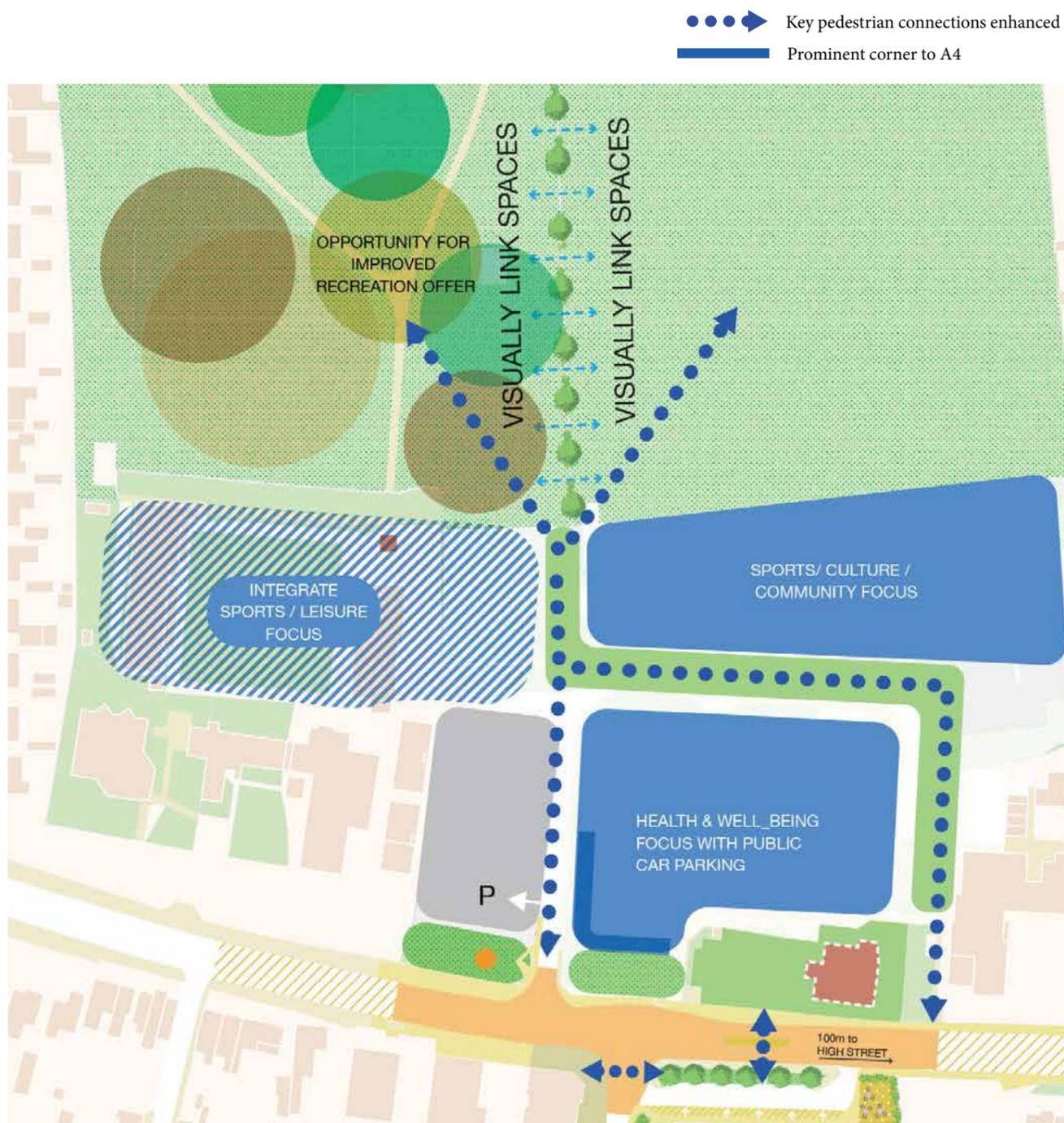
- **Enhancing the existing gardens and green setting along the A4.** The strategy therefore considers the potential for a new green space connecting the Memorial Gardens with the dental surgery walled garden as a strong arrival feature into the town. Alternatively the 'statement building' could be located on the A4 frontage.

- **Improving the town centre car parking offer.** Looking to consolidate the car park spaces, to provide parking for the new hub and for visitors to the town centre, and improve pedestrian connections between the car parks and the High Street.

- **Improving walking and cycling links through the park.** Creating better connections to the town centre from residential areas to the north and west. Encouraging residents to leave their cars at home whenever possible and improving accessibility for those without access to a car.

- **Improving the leisure and recreation facilities within the park.** Promoting the use of Memorial Fields for a more diverse range of leisure and wellbeing uses. This could include introducing a running/cycle/BMX track around the periphery, natural play and exercise features, more seating and picnic areas, as well as improving biodiversity and ecological habitats by introducing wilder areas of planting.

The precise scale and nature of the facilities to be provided as part of any proposed Community Centre are still to be determined. The example projects below illustrate a few of the approaches that have been delivered elsewhere.



Precedent / Sowerby Park, North Yorkshire

Sowerby Park is a 7.5 hectare green space at the centre of a growing community in North Yorkshire. The project includes a 1km fitness trail, a sustainable drainage system, space for three high quality sports pitches, bike trails, and allotments. The emphasis was on creating a park that became a common place for the community, supported health and wellbeing whilst establishing a matrix of new and improved ecological habitats. The process involved significant consultation with local clubs, to ensure the facility met their needs.



Precedent / The Point Youth Centre, Tadley

The Point was opened in 2016. The project was instigated by TDCA to meet the needs of the youth of the Tadley area and was supported with substantial funding from Tadley Town Council and the Turbary Allotment Charity with additional support from Local Infrastructure Fund and the Greenham Common Trust. The facility provides a safe environment for young people, with a cafe area, and a fully equipped music studio.



Precedent / The Larick Centre, Tayport

The Larick Centre has been quoted as “a building by the community, for the community”. The centre houses a large sports hall, a number of smaller halls, meeting spaces, and a café. The spaces have been designed with flexibility in mind to cater for a multitude of community uses. The main hall’s scale makes it suitable for sport, community and social events.

Crown Mead

Improving Crown Mead was identified as one of the key priorities in the survey results. This area should be seen as the western arrival into Thatcham town centre, it being less than 100m from the edge of the shops to the start of the High Street. The parade of shops serves an important local facility and is a potentially attractive terrace of properties, let down by a poor quality public realm dominated by parking, the signage and the treatment of individual shopfronts. Improving this could be a significant benefit to the town.

Any improvements to Crown Mead would of course need to be agreed with, and implemented by, the owners of the development. They would also need to be coordinated with the proposed A4 highway improvements in this area, which would potentially create better conditions for pedestrians and cyclists.

Key measures for Crown Mead could include:

- A coordinated treatment of the shopfronts to create a distinctive local identity for Crown Mead and a sense of arrival into the town centre,
- Improved planting along the boundary wall to the A4,
- Improved treatment of the public space at the eastern end with planting and seating,
- Consideration to 'chevron' style parking to create more space for pedestrians along the shops and make the shopfronts more visible,
- Coordinate improvements at the Green Lane junction, to include physical improvements to the parking and external appearance of Wiltshire Tyres premises and improved pedestrian crossings between Green Lane, Crown Mead and the Memorial Field facilities.

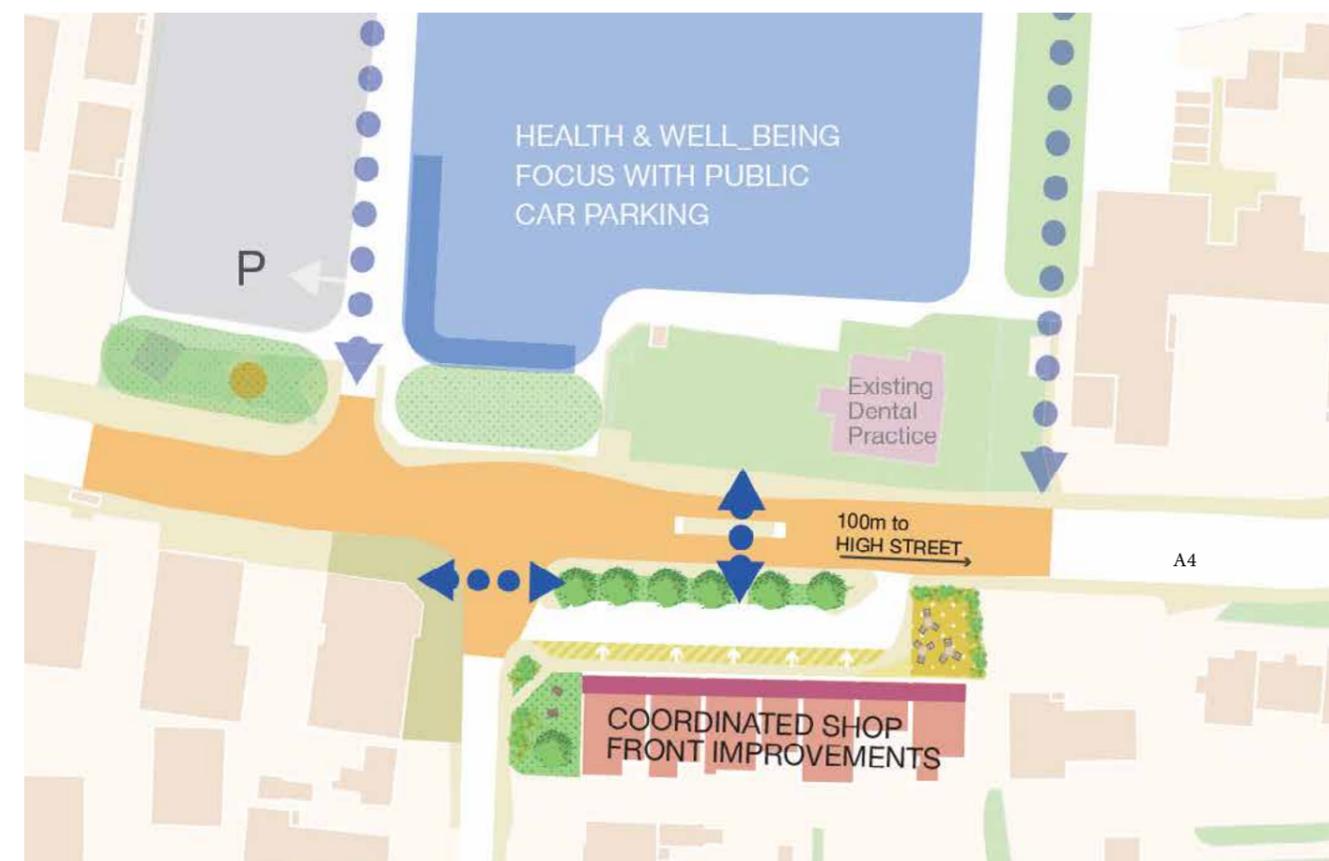


Precedent / Shopfront Improvements

Shopfront improvements have been made to 33 businesses across the 7 market towns of Dunstable, Leighton Buzzard, Ampthill, Shefford, Biggleswade, Pottton and Sandy, as part of Central Bedfordshire's Market Towns Regeneration Fund.

This town centre gateway should be marked not just by the Crown Mead shops but by the civic, sports and community facilities opposite (including the medical centre and library) and the public car parking. It should announce the quality of the community and recreation facilities available, as well as the start of the retail and leisure offer, encouraging visitors to use this car park and walk to the town centre.

To maximise the benefits of improving Crown Mead, the gateway improvements should therefore be coordinated with improvements to 'The Beach', the space at the western end of the High Street which is prominently visible to pedestrians and motorists along the A4 at this point. Unfortunately the view does not currently 'sell' Thatcham town centre, with no activity or 'life' visible to draw visitors towards the High Street. Addressing this should be a priority and is identified under a separate project.



- ← ● ● ● → Pedestrian crossings to be improved
- Coordinated building / shop front improvements
- Public realm to be improved
- Area of junction to be improved
- Improved public realm to front of shops
- Improved space for use by shops
- Improved green space & planting
- War Memorial

High Street & The Beach

The public space at the western end of High Street is known as The Beach. Although it is not an entry point for vehicles it acts as an important gateway to the town centre for pedestrians and cyclists, and will have a significant impact on the perceptions of the town centre for motorists passing through Thatcham. Improving its appearance has been identified as a priority in studies going back to 2009.

The public realm here is poor. It is an unattractive triangle in which to sit given its proximity to the A4 and the fact that it has traffic on two sides with no activity on the third side of the triangle. The planting provided to shield people from the traffic creates a space which is not overlooked and feels potentially unsafe. There is therefore very little to encourage people to spend time in this area.

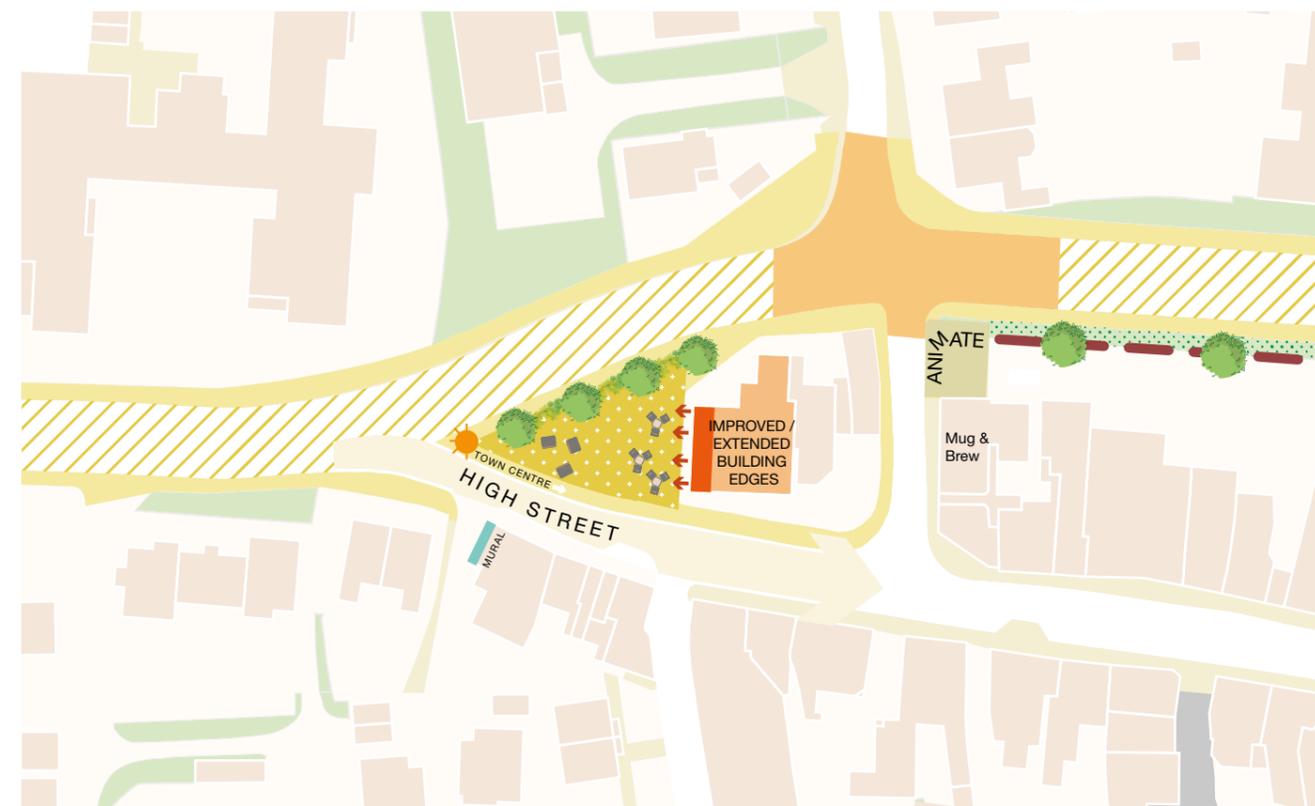
Environmental improvements are essential for this space, including a more structured and coordinated approach to signage and planting. It is considered however that more fundamental change is needed to address the structural problems of this public space.



The priority should be to ensure this space announces the High Street and encourages people to visit the town centre. Opening up the space to the restaurant behind could help achieve this. It would need to be combined with improvements to the external appearance of the restaurant building, removing some of the poor-quality single-story extensions, and considering a new glazed extension which would front the Beach and the A4. Other measures to announce the High Street would be coordinated with improvements to the A4, and new crossings as well as a mural/painted sign promoting the High Street along the blank building wall which is currently prominent on this approach.

Precedent / Settle Mural

During a series of co-design sessions young people in Settle voiced their desire for a mural in the town that respected heritage of Settle whilst also referencing a more contemporary vibe as a nod to the young people there. Created in contrasting pastel colours, the mural features four giant words 'soar', 'wandering', 'rise' and 'rolling', chosen by the young people as a reflection on their connection to their hometown.



-  Improved space / public realm
-  Opportunity for building to address space
-  Opportunity for mural to announce town centre
-  Improved signage/ wayfinding to town centre
-  Improved planting
-  Area for suggested A4 improvements (A4 projects)
-  Suggested zone for 20mph (A4 projects)
-  Public realm to be improved
-  Principle to encourage pedestrians into town centre along High Street

A4 corridor

The 2009 Design Appraisal highlighted barriers to walking and cycling into the town centre, but the largest is clearly the A4/Bath Road, which separates around half the population from the core town centre shops and services. Our engagement workshops have also highlighted the importance of creating safer crossings to schools south of the A4, and improving routes for students walking or cycling to and from school along the A4.

The Design Appraisal, and update, also noted that “the appearance of the town also affects how visitors, and those who pass through it, perceive Thatcham”, and again a priority identified through the engagement has been the need to improve perceptions along the A4. Reducing the barrier effect of the A4 must therefore be a key objective for Thatcham.

The overall aim of the A4 corridor strategy is to create the sense that motorists are passing through a town centre, and to adapt their driving behaviour accordingly. Local stakeholders, including representatives of Kennet School, would like to see motorists travelling at 20mph from Francis Baily school in the east to the Memorial Fields sports and community facilities in the west. This would assist in creating safer crossings for pedestrians and cyclists.

The details of the strategy clearly need to be developed with the West Berkshire Highways Team and with the wider community. This includes coordination with parallel initiatives to enhance the A4 for active travel users to the west of Crown Mead. A number of principles are set out below in order to guide this work:

- Physical and environmental changes to encourage lower traffic speeds
- Creating more space for pedestrians and cyclists along the A4
- Improving north-south crossings of the A4
- Creating strong gateways at the eastern and western arrival points
- Creating a series of town centre ‘spaces’ along the A4
- Improving the physical appearance of the town centre edge

At the eastern arrival a stronger ‘village green’ character can be created between Stoney Lane and Harts Hill Road, with landscape improvements and enhanced play facilities at the green, and a better setting for the historic Bluecoat School building. Slowing traffic and improving crossings here would help create safer routes to the Francis Baily school, Kennet School and leisure centre.

At the western arrival, a stronger gateway can be created around the Memorial Gardens and Crown Mead, coordinated with improvements to both these areas under separate projects.

In addition to these major gateways, a further three spaces/junctions have been identified where crossings can be improved and a stronger sense of ‘place’ could be created to promote the town centre:

- **Park Lane**

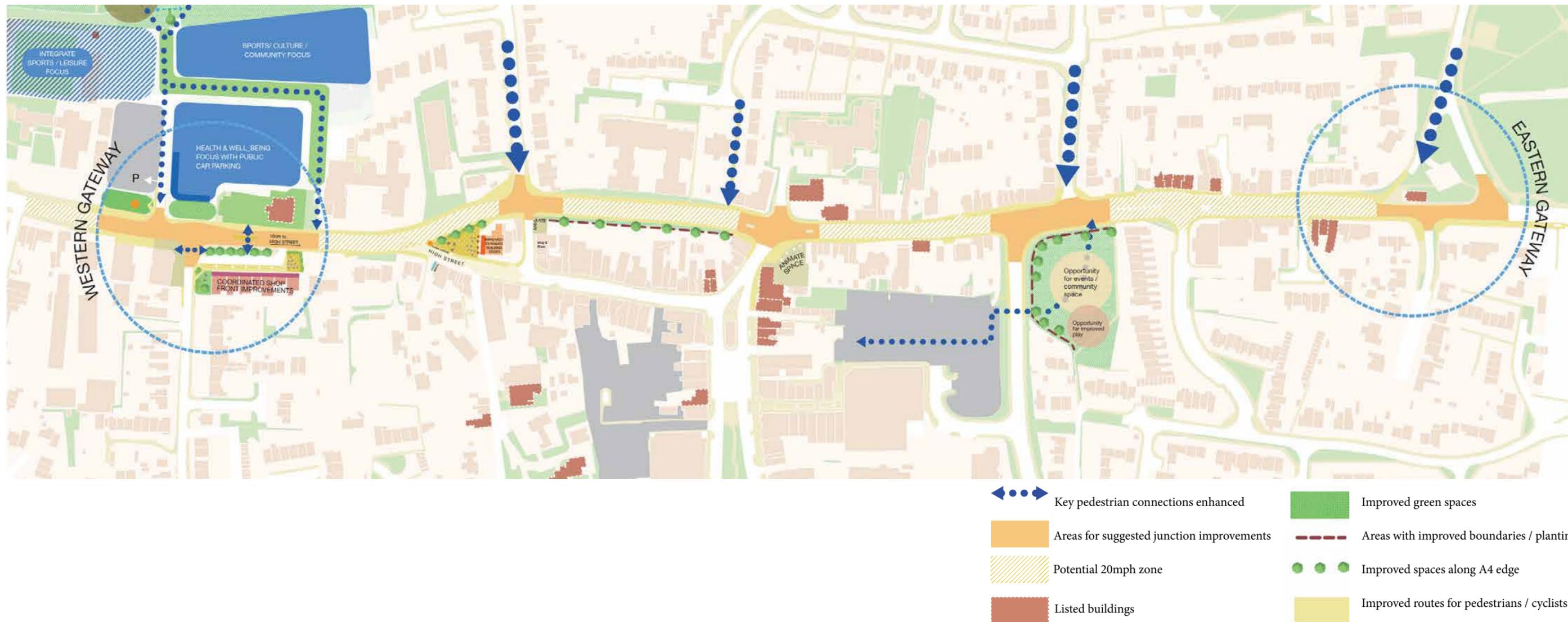
This is a pedestrian and vehicular route from the north, crossing into High Street, and with the Mug & Brew café fronting on to the A4/Chapel Street at this point. Consideration should be given to relocating the private parking which occurs in front of the Mug & Brew café, to create a better space for eating and drinking outside the café and a stronger sense of arrival from Park Lane. Other environmental improvements could include replacing the poor quality fencing, either by continuing the attractive brick wall or by introducing more planting to screen the parking and rear of the properties facing High Street. Removing some of the signage would reduce clutter along the A4/Chapel Street, and improving the side elevation and entrance into the hairdresser’s unit opposite the café would help announce High Street to motorists.

- **The Broadway junction**

Reducing traffic circulation around the Broadway could also make it easier to introduce complementary improvements at the A4 junction. Limiting traffic movements would enable some turning movements to potentially be removed, and the width of the carriageway to be reduced. This in turn allows more space for pedestrians, for cyclists, and for planting and environmental improvements, a better setting for historic buildings and a stronger town centre sense of place.

- **Park Avenue/Turnfield Play Area**

Creating a town centre sense of arrival, with improved signage to the Kingsland Centre, will encourage motorists to use the Waitrose car park when visiting the town centre from the east. Improving pedestrian crossing at the junction, and creating routes through the Play Area into the Kingsland Centre will encourage residents to walk into town from the north and east of Thatcham.



Precedent / Croydon South Public Realm

The South End High Street Public Realm project re-establishes the high street as a place of enterprise and community. Improving movement and transport networks along the street to prioritise people over cars and rebuild a sense of civic pride in the heritage and character of the Borough.

Newly planted trees helped soften gathering areas and a variety of public art and graphics along the street brought a splash of colour and life to walls and windows.



Precedent / Clapham Old Town

Clapham Old Town in Lambeth saw the creation of a number of new, small public spaces and improved pedestrian crossings, aimed at reconnecting the Old Town with the adjacent neighbourhoods, improving access to public transport and making walking and cycling more appealing. Traffic speeds were reduced by narrowing carriageways and introducing twenty mph zones making it easier and safer for pedestrians to cross.

05

Action Plan

This section outlines delivery mechanisms for the projects described in Section 4. It considers the process for working up the projects in more detail, the stakeholders that should be involved in that process, the potential timescale for design, engagement and delivery together with possible funding options that could be explored.

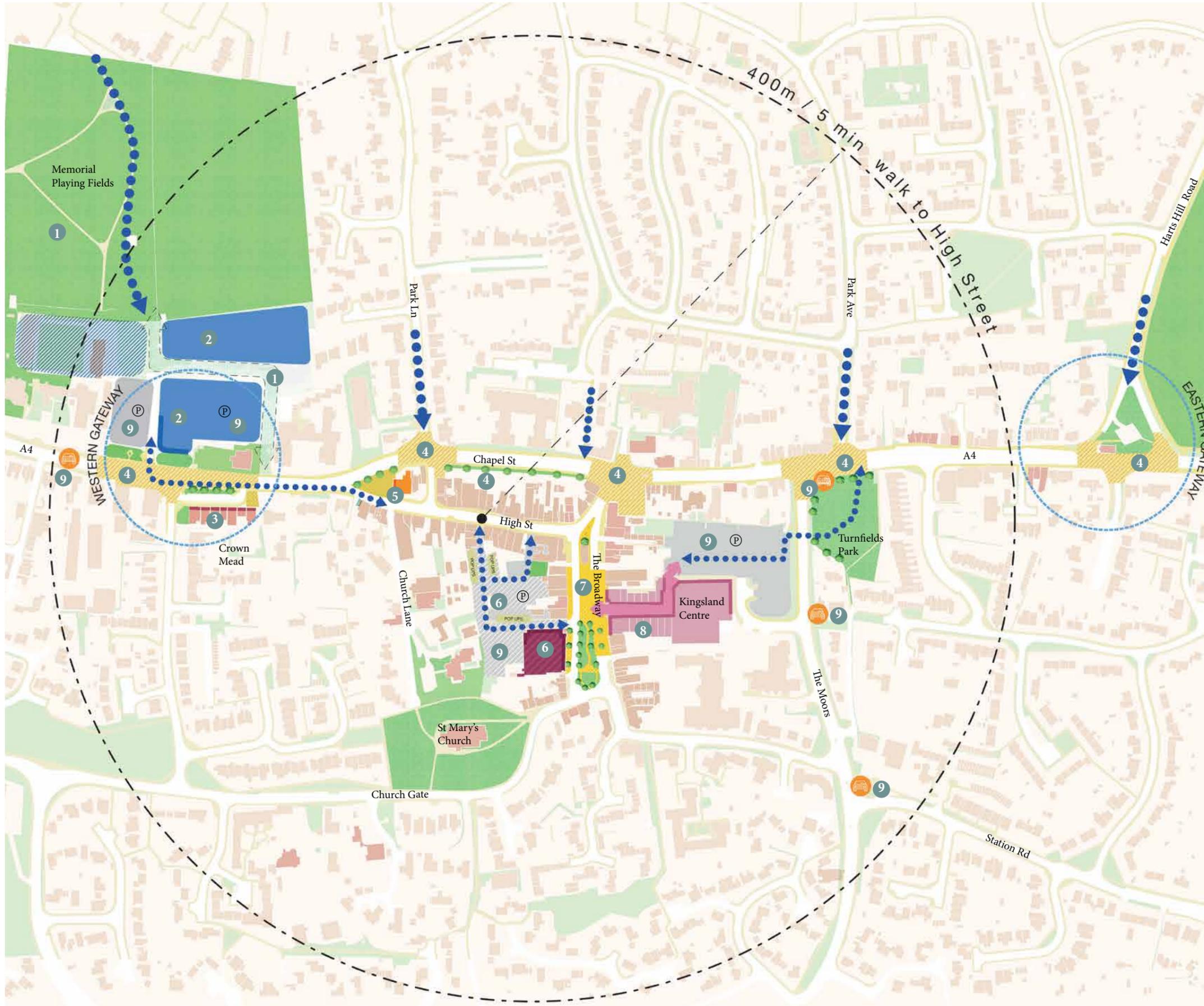
The Action Plan is designed to help West Berkshire prioritise its future capital funding programmes, to help identify priorities for allocation of CIL funds, and to support bids to external funding bodies. It is also designed to help coordinate activities within Thatcham so as to maximise value for money from the funding allocated.

A variety of projects are outlined which are considered to reflect the views expressed through the online consultation and stakeholder workshops, and which address the priority issues identified. Together they present a coherent strategy to improve Thatcham over the course of the West Berkshire Local Plan period to 2036.

It should be emphasised that this is not put forward as a 'blueprint' for Thatcham. This is an ambitious Strategy for the future of Thatcham. The Action Plan present different options as to how the projects can be taken forward, and the preferred course of action should be determined by the town itself.

The Action Plan identifies how the projects proposed meet the priorities identified by local stakeholders through the engagement process but more detailed design work is needed before these can be delivered. It is essential that this engagement continues as the projects are worked up and allows local stakeholders to shape the more detailed proposals.

The focus of the Action Plan is on short-term and medium-term proposals that can be implemented over the next 3-5 years but there are some projects that may not come forward until later in the plan period. For many projects, particularly the A4 improvements, a phased approach is likely to be necessary to reflect the availability of funding. For other projects, such as Broadway improvements, a trial approach is recommended to test the benefits of the proposals without incurring significant expenditure and allowing the detailed designs to be refined. They are therefore projects that will be delivered over both the short-term and medium-term, but which elements of the projects come forward in the short term will be determined by the local community and by the availability of funding.



Priority Areas for Change

- 1 **Memorial Field & Brownsfield Cricket Ground** - Improved sports, recreation, and community facilities as well as pedestrian connections between adjacent residential areas and town centre
- 2 **New Community Hub** Incorporating facilities for community, arts, health, sports & recreation
- 3 **Crown Mead** - Public realm and shop-front improvements
- 4 **A4 corridor improvements** - environmental changes to encourage lower speeds, improved crossings and space for pedestrians and cyclists, improved gateways, arrival points and public realm enhancements
- 5 **High Street & 'The Beach'** - Improved public realm & wayfinding to announce the High St and arrival to Thatcham Town Centre from the A4
- 6 **Co-op building & Car Park** Improvements to animate space and routes including improved building use and public realm enhancements to connect to Broadway and High St as well as exploring opportunity for new uses.
- 7 **Creating a 'village green like' quality at the Broadway** through traffic management, improved spaces for pedestrians and enhancing the space for events and community use.
- 8 **Kingsland Centre Improvements** - Shop-front, wayfinding & public realm improvements
- 9 **Parking Strategy** - improved arrival signage and consistent approaches to branding, pricing and connections to town centre.

Short Term Priority Projects

Improving existing car parks

Making car parking less confusing is a major issue for Thatcham stakeholders (scoring 7.5). Addressing this issue would have the benefit of encouraging visitors by car to use the less busy car parks and to reduce the pressure on The Broadway in particular, contributing to a reduction in the amount of circulating traffic searching for a space in the heart of the town.

Proposed measures included:

- Consistent approach to pricing, length of stay and payment across four main car parks
- Coordinated branding and signage to create clear town centre identity
- Stronger signage to Waitrose 'town centre' car park via The Moors
- Consideration of single consolidated car park at Brownsfield Road/Gilbert Court as part of redevelopment
- Improvements to quality of Co-op car park and pedestrian connections to Broadway and High Street

Improvements to the car parking at Brownsfield Road/Gilbert Court would be complemented by enhancements to the A4, particularly in terms of better pedestrian crossing.

Stakeholder Priorities

Stakeholders identified the following as priority projects, with scores from the survey results shown in brackets:

- Creating a single-tier parking policy across all car parks (8.5)
- Encouraging greater use of the Co-op car park (7.7)
- Encouraging greater use of the Brownsfield Road car parks (7.3)

Indirectly this project also supports a number of wider stakeholder objectives by reducing the amount of traffic in the Broadway.

Delivery costs and funding

Adopting a coordinated pricing strategy is not strictly a capital project and no budget is identified for this. It should however be accompanied by coordinated signage and 'branding' of the Thatcham town centre car parks, as part of the marketing of the town and welcoming visitors.

Assume 6 directional 'wayfinding' signs and a further 6 welcome/information boards at a cost of £5,000 per sign indicates a budget of around £50-60,000. Allowing a figure representing around 20% of that for design (approx. £10,000) plus a further £30-40,000 for installation gives an overall budget estimate of the order of £100,000 for signage.

Further improvements, including consolidation of the car parking and additional signage would need to be made to the Brownsfield Road car park as part of the wider Community Hub redevelopment.

Improvements to the Co-op car park would also include planters/parklets and pop up shops located to enhance the pedestrian connections to High Street and The Broadway. Pop up shops are assumed to be provided by the operators and no cost has been allowed for these. Allowing for 3-4 planters (estimated at £6,000 each) or parklets (estimated at £10,000 each) to be provided by the Council, suggests a potential budget of up to £50,000. This would require negotiation with private landowners on the potential relocation within the car park of individual parking spaces and bin stores for commercial or residential uses. These should all be capable of being relocated in the future to allow for a more comprehensive remodelling of the car park, and the possibility of a new pedestrian or vehicular access adjacent to the White Hart public house.

Consideration could be given to using CIL contributions or West Berkshire Highways Funding to fund the signage and wayfinding project as part of the wider package of improvements proposed along the A4.

Action and timescale

The objective should be to coordinate implementation of the new parking strategy with the trial of the new Broadway public realm improvements (identified for Summer 2024). Consultation on the proposed parking strategy and pricing mechanism (including the extent of any free parking periods) should also be coordinated with consultation on the options for improving The Broadway.

This project cannot be delivered by West Berkshire Council alone. A coordinated approach to pricing requires the agreement and support of a number of private landowners and car park operators. It should be a priority in the next 3-6 months to identify and contact the relevant operators and discuss the strategic benefits of a single, coherent pricing strategy as part of a wider strategy to promote the underused car parking areas. Preparation of a business plan could be beneficial, indicating how a coordinated approach could benefit these operators and bring more income in the longer term for these underused car parks.

Short Term Priority Projects

The Broadway

A series of options were presented in the Strategy section which could meet the desire of the community to redesign and improve The Broadway. The most ambitious but potentially deliverable option was considered to be Option 3, which includes:

- Removing central parking to create more social and event space
- Creating a permanent space for more frequent markets
- Restricting through traffic on eastern edge to reduce traffic circulation and fumes (potentially retaining bus access)
- Removing barriers between green space and Kingsland Centre
- Widening pavements to allow cafés to spill out into Broadway
- Improved green space, additional seating and tree planting

Stakeholder Priorities

Improving the Broadway addresses a large variety of stakeholder objectives, with scores from the survey results shown in brackets:

- Creating opportunities for independent and start-up businesses (8.5)
- Encouraging shoppers to visit Broadway and High Street (8.4)
- Creating a village centre like quality at The Broadway (8.1)
- Improving parks and green spaces (8.0)
- Encouraging people to spend longer in the town centre (7.8)
- Creating a dedicated space for markets and events (7.5)
- Attracting more cafés, restaurants & independent retail (7.3)
- Create more space in Broadway for cafés, markets, seating and events (7.2)
- Widen pavements for shoppers and create more outdoor space for cafés and businesses (6.7)
- Reducing noise and pollution of traffic (6.3)

Delivery costs and funding

The scale of a permanent scheme in the Broadway, with a dedicated market space, is comparable to the improvements delivered in Romsey town centre, Market Place, at a cost of £3m. Consideration should therefore be given to the need for a budget of at least this order of magnitude to deliver the level of improvements sought by stakeholders. If the scheme was delivered with improvements to the A4 Broadway junction then costs would be increased further.

Consideration should be given to the use of CIL funding to deliver improvements at Broadway, address the social and community needs of the growing population, the need for additional public space and the need to address the potential impact of additional traffic. Improvements at The Broadway could be coordinated with improvements to the A4 Broadway/Chapel Lane junction, potentially opening up other West Berkshire Council funding sources as well as LEP funding. The social, community, economic and cultural benefits of the project could potentially open up opportunities for funding from the Shared Prosperity Fund or from Greenham Trust.

Action and timescale

It should be a priority in the next 12 months to maintain the momentum and continue to engage with stakeholders to agree and trial a preferred option. Implementing a trial approach will enable the preferred option to be tested and refined before design costs and significant capital expenditure is incurred. A priority issue should be to consider with bus operators the implications of any redesign of the eastern side of The Broadway on bus services and to engage in discussions about any implications for taxi drivers.

The trial should last at least 8 weeks to allow time for the traffic and business impacts to be assessed. Ideally, it is recommended that the trials take place in July and August to maximise opportunities for events and activities to be held during the trial period and to maximise use of the space in the evening.

Given that local elections are being held this May, it is probably more realistic to target Summer 2024 for this trial period. This allows a period of 3-6 months to engage with the stakeholders and agree the preferred option (end of 2023), plus a further 6 months to plan and publicise a series of events.

Following the trial a period of 12 months for design refinement, tendering and construction would allow for the improvements to be completed by the end of 2025. Ideally, this timescale would also allow for completion of the Broadway improvements to be coordinated with refurbishment of the Kingsland Centre (see below). It should be noted however that delivery of additional major schemes within this timescale could also put pressure on the delivery capacity of the West Berkshire Highways teams.

Short Term Priority Projects

Kingsland Centre

A series of potential improvements were presented for the Kingsland Centre, including:

- Removing arcade roof and declutter the internal arcade to improve integration with The Broadway
- Coordinated shop fronts and street furniture design to create stronger local identity
- Promoting small and independent businesses within the arcade to reduce vacant premises
- Small business or community uses to reduce impact of vacant former Lloyds building.

Improvements were also suggested to the Waitrose store including signage or murals to enhance arrival from The Moors and glazing along the car park elevation to bring activity to this edge.

Stakeholder Priorities

Improving the Kingsland Centre potentially addresses a number of stakeholder objectives, with scores from the survey results shown in brackets:

- Creating opportunities for independent and start-up businesses (8.5)
- Encouraging shoppers to visit Broadway and High Street (8.4)
- Providing better community facilities in the town centre (8.0)
- Encouraging people to spend longer in the town centre (7.8)
- Attracting more cafés, restaurants & independent retail (7.3)
- Having more activity in the evening (7.3)

It also has the potential to create a meeting place in the town centre for young people (a proposal which scored 7.2 in the survey findings).

Delivery costs and funding

The cost, and funding, of improvements to the Kingsland Centre vary according to the level of ambition. At its most ambitious, with improvements to the public realm, shopfronts and remodelling of units to make provision for community uses, workspace, pop-ups and independent businesses, the scale of project is comparable to improvements delivered in Kingsland Crescent, Poole. The physical improvement of around 10 small units, together with rent free periods, was estimated in Property Week to cost around £600,000 with additional funding for events and activities. Additional costs may also be incurred to remove the canopy at the Kingsland Centre and consideration could also be given to refurbishment of a vacant unit for a new use, such as community café, workspace or youth venue.

The Kingsland Centre is of course in private ownership so the cost of any improvements should in the first instance be borne by the owners. However there may be beneficial conversations to be had around funding where physical improvements and new occupiers bring wider social, economic and community benefits to Thatcham. Alongside private funding from the Kingsland Centre owners, delivery of small business space, community or arts uses could open up funding opportunities from central government grant schemes or other local sources, for example Greenham Trust.

Works undertaken by the owners, and any events and activities, should ideally be complemented by WBC investment in the surrounding public realm, particularly The Broadway.

Action and timescale

It should be a priority in the next 6 months to continue the discussions with owners and managers of the Kingsland Centre to identify a strategy for occupying the vacant units, either permanently or temporarily. Clearly the prime responsibility for this, and the associated costs, lies with the owners. West Berkshire Council could however also give consideration to what uses it could potentially relocate to help fill these vacancies.

The objective should be for at least a temporary solution for occupying vacant units to be in place for Summer 2024 whilst the trial scheme is operating for The Broadway. The priority should be to ensure the vacant Lloyds bank unit is occupied with a temporary café, pop up retail or events venue which can make use of the extra space on Broadway. Discussions have been held with the Library but we understand that there are financial and logistical difficulties with taking a single unit such as the former Lloyds bank unit. A more comprehensive approach could however bring strategic benefits from a town centre location.

It should be a priority to engage with younger people in Thatcham to help determine the best temporary or longer term use of these units, building on the involvement of Kennet School.

Occupying these units should be combined with removal of the canopy and other clutter which would allow the 'Arcade' to open up onto the new space at The Broadway with more external seating for Costa Coffee. Again, ideally this should be in place for the operation of the trial scheme for the Broadway in Summer 2024.

A more comprehensive scheme should be designed in parallel with the improvements to the Broadway, and put in place before the new space opens in Summer 2025.

Short Term Priority Projects

Crown Mead and A4 gateway

Improving the appearance of Crown Mead shopping parade was seen as a priority in the survey responses, scoring 7.8. Potential measures identified in the strategy section included:

- A coordinated treatment of the shopfronts to create a distinctive local identity for Crown Mead and a sense of arrival into the town centre,
- Improved planting along the boundary wall to the A4,
- Improved treatment of the public space at the eastern end with planting and seating

Stakeholder Priorities

Improving the appearance of Crown Mead shopping parade was seen as a priority in the survey responses, scoring 7.8 overall and 8.3 with U25s. It would also help deliver a priority project of improving the A4 to highlight town centre facilities and provide a more appropriate setting for Thatcham's historic buildings. (which scored 7.5)

The project also has the potential to assist in delivering other objectives including reducing the impact of A4 and making it safer for people to cross (which scored 6.7).

Delivery costs and funding

The priority purpose is to improve the sense of arrival, and to make this area an attractive gateway into Thatcham town centre. To achieve this the improvements to Crown Mead have to be

coordinated with the wider improvements proposed to the A4 in this area. In particular it was noted that the improvements should be coordinated with improvements at the Green Lane junction, to include physical improvements to the parking and external appearance of Wiltshire Tyres premises and improved pedestrian crossings between Green Lane, Crown Mead and the Memorial Field facilities.

The cost, and funding, of the public realm elements of the project can be minimised by incorporating into the A4 improvement scheme. A more comprehensive scheme for reducing traffic speeds and improving facilities for pedestrians and cyclists in this area is already being prepared by West Berkshire Council. It is recommended therefore that this also consider the potential redesign of Crown Mead as an integrated scheme.

Crown Mead is of course in private ownership so the cost of any improvements should in the first instance be borne by the owners and occupiers. Shopfront improvement grants could however be made available to help encourage improvements to the buildings, and such grants are often in the region of £5,000 per shop.

Action and timescale

Consultation on a new design for the A4 is expected to occur later in 2023. It is recommended that the scheme should be promoted as the first stage of a comprehensive strategy to address the A4, reduce traffic speeds, improve crossings and facilities for pedestrians and cyclists, and improve perceptions of the town centre. Timescale and budget to be discussed with WBC officers.

Medium Term Projects

A4 corridor improvements

The strategic objective for the A4 corridor is to create a sense of passing through the town centre, not bypassing the town centre. The aim should be to slow traffic with a preferred speed of 20mph. A series of potential interventions are proposed at key points to help achieve these objectives:

- High Street arrival (The Beach and Park Lane),
- Broadway arrival (junction of Chapel Lane and Broadway),
- Turnfield Park arrival (junction of The Moors),
- Eastern Gateway (Stoney Lane/Harts Hill Road junctions)

Stakeholder Priorities

Improving the appearance of the A4 was a stakeholder priority project, scoring 7.5. Improving the High Street arrival (at The Beach) scored 6.6 and slowing traffic to 20mph / creating safer crossings scored 6.4.

Delivery costs and funding

The cost estimates for improvements to Crown Mead area of the A4 have been discussed with WBC Highways officers. The initial budget was around £260,000 but construction costs have increased and a budget closer to £500,000 may now be more appropriate. This might also allow wider improvements to be made to the Green Lane junction and associated public realm. The cost of the Broadway junction improvements should be considered within the wider improvements to the Broadway (see above). Other junction improvements are more likely to focus

on public realm improvements rather than junction changes, and a budget of around £250,000 should be considered for phased delivery of these improvements in partnership with private landowners.

Action and timescale

The immediate priority for West Berkshire Highways is delivery of the improvements around Crown Mead which is planned to be completed by Summer 2024. Once this is delivered consideration can be given to the delivery of other improvements along the A4 corridor.

It is recommended that the design of improvements to the Chapel Road/Broadway junction be coordinated with delivery of the preferred scheme for The Broadway. The nature of the preferred solution at The Broadway will inform the degree to which traffic movements can be limited at the Chapel Road junction and in turn inform the scale of change which can be made to the junction. The potential for improvements to this junction should therefore be considered in the next 6-9 months to inform consultation on the trial option for The Broadway. Implementation of the scheme should ideally be coordinated with delivery of improvements to The Broadway by the end of 2025.

Medium Term Projects

Brownsfield Road Community Hub

Delivery of improved community facilities has been a policy objective for Thatcham for a number of years, and remains a priority. The preferred location identified by stakeholders for such a facility is at Brownsfield Road, adjacent to the existing health facilities, library and sports facilities at Memorial Park. The brief for a new community hub needs to be defined in more detail than was possible in this study, but potential uses could include community, health, leisure, sports, civic and cultural uses.

Stakeholder Priorities

Delivering a new community hub with new library, health facilities arts space, meeting space and café was one of the top priorities in the survey responses, scoring 7.7 overall and 8.0 with U25s. Improving sports, recreation and community facilities around Memorial Field and the cricket ground was also a priority, scoring 7.5.

A comprehensive approach to a new community hub in this area can potentially also help deliver other priority projects including encouraging use of the car parks in this location (7.3) and creating a meeting place for young people (7.2).

Delivery costs and funding

The cost of delivering a Community Hub is dependent on the range of uses that it would provide and the scale of ambition for the town. A new sports pavilion and community facilities at Falkland Cricket Club (identified by the workshop as a suitable exemplar) was recently delivered at a cost of £1.5m. The Aveley Community Hub in Thurrock included a new library, café and community facilities and was delivered for around £2m. In contrast a community hub in Kings Lynn has recently been estimated at £12m – with the project described as follows:

“The hub will be a state-of-the-art fully accessible community and learning space in the centre of town. It will play host to not only the library and associated facilities, but a range of Norfolk County Council services and programming from Adult Learning and partners – curated specifically to the needs of King’s Lynn residents”.

This is a significant project for Thatcham, and should be a priority for CIL (or Section 106) funding to meet the social and community needs from long term housing growth. There should also be other West Berkshire funding streams available to deliver the range of facilities that could be needed. Other funding opportunities could include Sport England and Greenham Trust as well as wider opportunities from Shared Prosperity Fund, future Levelling Up Funding rounds or comparable opportunities. The priority for this area should be to deliver the range of facilities needed by the community, but if necessary there may also be scope for housing development to help meet some of the associated costs.

Action and timescale

Discussions on the range of uses to be delivered by the Community Hub should be undertaken with key service providers, with local stakeholders and with the wider community over the next 6-9 months. Key decisions to be made include:

- Preferred location and size of the library (discussions with officers indicate that there is a need to double the size of the existing library)
- Scale of new/improved health facilities required to serve the expanded population
- The potential for coordinating provision of health, wellbeing and sports facilities in this location
- Feasibility of new community arts/cultural space within Thatcham.

A design brief and business plan should then be prepared in the first half of 2024 that incorporates the existing health facilities, sports facilities, Town Council offices (and adjacent WBC car park), library and former care home. Discussions should also be held with the owners and operators of the Brownsfield Road car park as to whether this can or should be included.

It is anticipated that a phased delivery of the facilities may be necessary, and whilst it is a ‘hub’ it is likely to be housed in more than one building. Temporary facilities for the library and health services may be required whilst the existing facilities are redeveloped, and this could require short term use of the parking areas or demolition of the care home to create space for temporary structures.

Thatcham Town Centre Strategy