

Thatcham town centre  
Design Appraisal



February 2009

TURLEYASSOCIATES



# Thatcham town centre Design Appraisal

WEST BERKSHIRE DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK

February 2009

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Looking north up The Broadway from Broadway Green

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## Executive Summary

This Design Appraisal of Thatcham Town Centre has been prepared by Turley Associates for West Berkshire Council as part of the evidence base for a future policy framework for the town centre. The policy framework will help in meeting the objectives of the Thatcham Vision (2007), and in particular:

- reinforcing Thatcham's identity as an independent, thriving market town;
- reducing the need for residents to travel elsewhere;
- improving the look and feel of the town.

The study brief provided by the Council established a number of key objectives for the Design Appraisal:

- to examine the suitability of the Thatcham Town Centre Commercial Area;
- to conduct a health check on Thatcham town centre;
- to assess the quality of primary shopping frontages in Thatcham town centre;
- to examine and assess the streetscape of Thatcham town centre (in particular the High Street & The Broadway);
- to examine and assess accessibility issues faced by Thatcham town centre;
- to produce a prioritised list of additional infrastructure improvements for Thatcham town centre;
- to examine the feasibility of a new, centrally located community facility.

The Design Appraisal is set out in four distinct sections. These are outlined below.

### 1. Town Centre Health Check

The purpose of the health check is to provide an assessment of the vitality and viability of Thatcham's town centre. The assessment of Thatcham's vitality and viability is based on the key indicators as listed in 'Planning Policy Statement 6: Planning for Town Centres' (PPS6, 2005) and the proposed changes to PPS6 set out in 'Proposed Changes to Planning Policy Statement 6: Planning for Town Centres, Consultation, July 2008' (PPS6 Proposed Changes, 2008). Namely:

- diversity of uses;
- the amount of retail, leisure and office floorspace;
- potential capacity for growth or change;
- retailer representation;
- shopping rents;
- vacancy rates;
- commercial yields on non-domestic property;
- pedestrian flows;

- accessibility;
- customer and residents' views and behaviour;
- perception of safety and crime;
- environmental quality.

Thatcham town centre is underpinned by its convenient shopping function which is concentrated in the Waitrose and Co-operative supermarket though this function has been undermined by out of centre development.

Representation of comparison goods retailers is limited and the absence of national multiple retailers are indicative of a structural weakness in the town's retail composition. As a result, the town centre needs a greater diversity of uses in order to sustain itself and compete with out of town retail facilities in West Berkshire.

The vacancy levels in the town centre, currently at 11%, have risen in recent years and is indicative of a lack of retailer confidence in the town centre. Conversely, the vacant units offer an opportunity to accommodate new retail and other uses within the centre and provide ample space for consolidation or expansion of the town centre. Although data is limited, our research identifies that rents sought for vacant properties in the town centre are realistic, and, as expected, are considerably lower than prime rents in Newbury and Reading. We do not consider that rents sought are a barrier to incoming businesses. Vacancy levels however demonstrate that there is little demand for floorspace in Thatcham at the present time.

The town centre, due to its small size and the lack of multiple retailers is potentially less susceptible to the current downturn in market conditions than centres like Newbury and Reading which will experience an increase in vacancies due to established high street brands closing down.

Thatcham town centre does have a good range of independent and specialist traders, many of which have attractive shopfronts and signs that add to the unique character of Thatcham. This is a factor in setting it apart from larger centres which have become dominated by 'brand' retailers and multiples with corporate signing.

Critically, the proposed redevelopment of the Kingsland Shopping Centre has the potential to provide larger retail units that are necessary to attract multiple retailers to the town centre. This has the potential to add to the town centre's attractiveness and increase its vitality and viability.

The town centre has adequate levels of car parking to meet the current town centre offer.

The town centre, although not connected conveniently to the railway station is well served by public transport; including the bus service to the railway station and frequent services to other centres in West Berkshire.

Public transport infrastructure is poor, however we understand that Real Time Bus Information systems are planned to be installed this financial year. Real Time information systems, combined with new, larger, more robust, more attractive and more comfortable shelters would make the use of public transport more attractive.

Cycle parking facilities in the town centre are poor and new provision needs to be made.

Measures to improve pedestrian priority, the widening of pavements and better signs would help to increase the walkability of the centre. Widened pavements and/or an increase of pedestrian public realm will allow town centre uses to spill out onto the streets, e.g. outside dining areas and wares for sale on the street which would help to generate activity and interest.

Within the town centre pedestrian footfall is highest around Waitrose and the Kingsland Shopping Centre. Footfall levels drop noticeably away from The Broadway. Efforts should therefore be made to encourage town centre users to visit other areas of the centre and introduction of complementary town centre uses could increase the duration of visits.

The weekly market needs additional paved space to allow for its expansion. At present the market spills onto the Broadway Green, which damages the green space and can look disorganised and unsightly.

The public realm, in particular the array of street furniture is often of poor quality and surplus to requirements and many items of 'clutter' should be considered for removal.

The town centre contains many attractive buildings which add to its appeal as a destination in its own right. Equally, there are some poor buildings, shopfronts and signs that detract from the overall experience and quality of the town centre.

Discussions with key stakeholders confirms that the occurrence of crime and the perception of crime is low in the town centre. This is due mainly to the CCTV network which appears to have deflected petty crime into surrounding areas which are not covered by CCTV. We do not consider that crime levels cause undue harm to the town centre, or its relatively busy night time economy.

## 2. Town Centre Design Audit

An understanding of the historic, visual, social, economic and environmental context of the town centre is essential to be able to provide appropriate recommendations for potential future planning policy developments.

With these in mind, the urban design audit examines six key themes listed a-f:

### a. Street and Public Realm Network

During the 1960s there was fundamental restructuring of the hierarchy of the street and public realm network brought about by the High Street relief road across the back of the High Street - this relates to the 'extended' Bath Road to the north of the High Street that connects with Chapel Street to the west. This signalled a significant physical deflection along this route and shift towards vehicle priority which is still evident today. The result has been severance of pedestrian connections, the exposure of buildings which serve as the main arrival points to the town centre which were never designed to perform such a role, and a significant impact upon the overall legibility and townscape.

Key elements and some of the 'hot spots' of the street and public realm network are presented in outline below.

The area of public realm outside of The Poplars on Bath Road which includes the main controlled pedestrian crossing point between the community uses around Brownsfield Road and the town centre, provides a poor quality physical and visual environment. It is clear that vehicular movements are favoured over pedestrian links.

The triangular area at the western end of the High Street serves as a main arrival point to the town centre but does little to positively mark this key location or create clear connections. The public realm in this area would benefit from being strengthened and redefined with public art and perhaps a new development of an appropriate scale.

Equally, the significant length of properties along the High Street that back onto Bath Road fail to present a welcoming or attractive image (refer to section on Unclear Fronts and Backs page 38).

The Broadway, Broadway Green and public conveniences at the northern end of The Broadway all occupy key positions within the town centre, though the use and design of the public conveniences are questioned in such a prominent location. Visually and functionally the Broadway Green appears somewhat cramped and awkward between the vehicular routes on either side of it, and in design terms it is not a vibrant or dynamic space.

The south western corner of The Broadway also suffers from narrow pavements which make pedestrian movements difficult.

The development of the Kingsland Shopping Centre has resulted in a significant shift in the scale and location of arrival points, the distribution of the main pedestrian thoroughfares and associated levels of footfall.

### b. Movement and Connections

The street and public realm networks containing Bath Road and Chapel Street, High Street, The Broadway, Church Gate, The Moors and Station Road provide a choice of pedestrian, public transport and vehicular connections between the main town centre approaches, arrival points and the key shopping destinations. They have changed and adapted over time in response to changing markets, lifestyles and expectations. The most drastic change was the major restructuring of the highway network brought forward through the High Street relief road in the early 1960s. This gave rise to significant severance and townscape impacts upon the High Street in particular and the town centre more generally.

The way the town centre is accessed can be defined by four systems that characterise and influence the nature of the town centre. These systems are 'Arrival Points', 'Destinations' and 'Connections', together with the most significant 'Barriers' between them.

There are several key Arrival Points or gateways into the town centre which, along with the poor definition of boundaries, reinforce the lack of distinctiveness or high quality expected of a historic town centre (pages 40-41). These Arrival Points can also be considered as the outer gateways since they provide the first impressions for many on entering the town centre. These are:

Bath Road/Chapel Street (A4) - is the most significant approach and arrival point into the town centre, bringing the majority of employees, shoppers and visitors. The visual experience of both routes is mixed;

The Broadway - the northern end is characterised by fine grain historic buildings which develop a pleasant and welcoming appearance;

The Moors - the entrance to the back of the Kingsland Shopping Centre and extensive surface car park creates an unfriendly and negative edge;

Church Gate - functions as a much quieter and low key arrival point to the south west of the town centre;

Station Road - is characterised by low scale housing which give it the sense of being a housing neighbourhood rather than edge of the town centre.

### c. Building Pattern and Scale

The town centre as it stands today has a mixed urban-grain evident from the figure-ground drawing on page 48 and analysis of Historical Development (pages 8 and 9). Both the Kingsland Shopping Centre and Co-operative supermarket stand out as significantly larger building forms that sit somewhat awkwardly amongst the finer grain historic core to the north and west. The permitted redevelopment of the Kingsland Shopping Centre would, if implemented in its approval form, introduce further large building forms and care should be taken in considering any Reserved Matters proposals to ensure that adequate regard is had to minimising disruption of the urban grain, enhancing pedestrian linkages and maximising footfall throughout the centre.

### d. Design Quality, Value and Sensitivity

The quality of the townscape and architecture of some of the town centre has been recognised in the designation of the Thatcham Conservation Area which covers much of the existing town centre commercial area. Many old buildings in the town centre were demolished between the 1960s and 1980s to make way for the shops that are seen today.

The central area of The Broadway immediately around the Kingsland Shopping Centre does not currently project the welcome or quality of appearance desired for the heart of the town centre. The Kingsland Shopping Centre is a significant imposition, poorly related to its surroundings and detracting from the overall townscape quality. Similarly, the Co-operative supermarket presents an inactive and poor quality shopping frontage to The Broadway and Broadway Green.

In recognition of the need to raise the design quality of existing buildings, shopfronts and new development to provide an enhanced town centre environment and meet the expectations associated with conservation area status, the existing poor quality shopping frontages will need to be improved, if not replaced in time. There is a clear need to bring forward high quality, contemporary proposals to complement the historic assets within and adjacent to the town centre.

### e. Legibility

This quality is important in navigating within and around the town centre and is a function of several factors including visual structure and containment, location of landmarks, skyline features and definition. An accessible and legible centre is key to the town's long term success.

There is no clear all-embracing identity for the town centre with local variations evident on the palette of public realm materials and street furniture used. Signs and CCTV tend to dominate the visual appearance of the main 'Arrival Points' or gateways to the town centre. A 'whole street' approach to the public realm therefore needs to be adopted with features such as public art, planting and architectural style helping with navigation.

High quality pedestrian-friendly places, and an information system delivered where and when people need it, will encourage people to explore the town centre on foot and spend more time outdoors, supporting local businesses and creating safer streets and spaces for everyone.

#### f. Character Areas

Six indicative character areas have been identified for Thatcham town centre. The character areas are based on land use characteristics, strategic location and role within the urban fabric.

- Bath Road/Chapel Street Corridor (A4)
- The High Street
- The Broadway Core
- The Moors
- Church Gate and Church Lane
- Station Road Approach

Further details of the town centre character areas can be found on pages 62 to 65.

A summary of the key issues and opportunities facing the town centre is presented on page 67.

### 3. Outputs and Recommendations

As part of the Design Appraisal process stakeholder involvement took place to help inform the outputs and recommendations.

#### Participation in the Design Appraisal Process

Key stakeholders, including representatives from key community groups, local businesses, Ward Councillors and Town Councillors were invited to attend a stakeholder consultation event. The participants were split into three groups and went on a short guided walk around the town centre, stopping at 8 key locations. They then returned to a workshop to discuss the key issues and report back to the wider group, drawing on their experiences and observations from the walking tour.

The workshop provided an opportunity for key stakeholders to provide feedback and to advise what they felt were the positive and negative aspects of Thatcham town centre.

Feedback from the event has been used to inform the outputs and recommendations of this Design Appraisal. Further and wider public consultation will take place as the Local Development Framework programme moves forward.

#### Town Centre Commercial Area

After an evaluation of the current town centre boundary, the town centre uses that exist outside of the boundary, and the potential growth of Thatcham, we propose some modest extensions to the current town centre boundary. These proposals are made having regard to advice in PPS6 (2005) to the effect that local authorities should plan positively for centres within their areas, should encourage diversification of uses in the town centre as a whole, and should make provision for a range of sites to meet the needs of the whole community.

Further details of the proposed changes to the Town Centre Commercial Area and justification based on the findings of this Design Appraisal can be found on page 69.

#### Primary Shopping Frontage

The saved local plan policies and proposals map identifies three stretches of Primary Shopping Frontage. The plan on page 70 shows the current and recommended changes to the Primary Shopping Frontage.

We have recommended extensions to the Primary Shopping Frontage in the following locations:

- Broadway - north-west side no.'s 4-7
- Broadway - north-east side no.'s 58-59
- Broadway - south-west side no.'s 25-30
- Broadway -south-east side no. 36 and Units 1/2 and 10/11 The Courtyard
- Kingsland Shopping Centre Units 1-15 and Waitrose (part)

A reduction of the Primary Shopping Frontage is proposed on the south side of the High Street to reflect the migration of retail uses eastwards within the centre and to avoid the dilution of the town centre offer and the focus of activity along The Broadway.

#### Priority Infrastructure Tasks Project

A number of key issues and opportunities have been identified across the town centre and for each of the individual character areas. By embracing the unique potential of each character area, Thatcham town centre is likely to increase its appeal and attractiveness to retailers, investors, residents and visitors.

In view of this, the aspirations of the Design Appraisal in making recommendations which may lead to the improvement of the town centre environment are to:

- minimise the barrier effect of Bath Road and Chapel Street and improve north-south connections for pedestrians and cyclists;
- acknowledge and exploit the gateways to the town centre to ensure positive first impressions and a strong sense of identity;
- achieve a consistency and coherence in built form, shop fronts and spaces throughout the town centre, whilst maintaining the identity of the various character areas;
- improve resident and visitor comfort and convenience throughout the streets, spaces and routes of the town centre;
- underpin the economic health and vibrancy of the town centre;
- improve pedestrian linkages;
- promote a positive identity and image for Thatcham as a confident and welcoming town;
- create a safe and pleasant environment for public interaction and personal contact;
- strengthen the public realm, role and function of public open spaces within the town centre through a coordinated 'whole street' approach to street furniture, CCTV, hard and soft landscaping, and lighting - an overarching sense of quality throughout;
- protect and enhance buildings of architectural merit and their settings within the town centre and maintain the urban grain of development along the High Street and The Broadway;
- foster a sense of inspiration, respect and celebration in the day to day experience of the town.

The Design Appraisal proposes a series of town centre-wide improvement projects. These include:

- improvement to existing shopfronts;
- new development opportunities;
- public art;
- a lighting strategy;
- a wayfinding system;
- production of town centre design and development guidelines;
- undertake a Conservation Area Appraisal/Review.

Based on the findings of the audit and analysis and responses from the key stakeholder workshop, the recommended priorities for action within the town centre are set out in the table below. Descriptions and indicative costings for each of the projects identified can be found on pages 71 to 77.

**Priority Infrastructure Projects**

Reference	Project Description	Code	Priority
<b>Bath Road/Chapel Street Corridor</b>			
BRCS 1	Bath Road and Crown Mead	A B C	2
BRCS 2	Bath Road Rear of Properties	A C	1
BRCS 3	Bath Road/Chapel Street/Broadway	B D E F G	1
BRCS 4	Chapel Street South	B C D F G	5
<b>High Street</b>			
HS1	High Street West/Bath Road	A/G B C D E F	1
HS 2	High Street	B D E F G	3
HS 3	High Street North	G	4
HS 4	High Street South/Car Park	A B F	4
<b>The Broadway Heart</b>			
BH 1	The Broadway North/Millennium Cross	B C D E F G	1
BH 2	Public Toilets	A/G D E F	2
BH 3	Broadway Green	B C D E F G	1
BH 4	40-43 The Broadway	G	3
BH 5	21-29 The Broadway	A	3
BH 6	Accesses to Car Parks	A B D F	3
BH 7	The Broadway Northern Gateway	B D F G	1
<b>The Moors</b>			
TM 1	The Moors North	A B F	5
TM 2	Kingsland Centre	B C D E F G	1
TM3	Waitrose Entrance	A C D F	1
<b>Church Gate and Church Lane</b>			
CGCL 1	Church Gate and Church Lane	B D F	4
<b>Station Road Approach</b>			
SRA 1	Railway Station	E F	2
SRA 2	Station Road	F	3

Infrastructure Project Code	Description and Key	Priority
A	cosmetic/minor improvements	1-5 High to Low
B	hardscape/paving	
C	landscaping/street trees	1 High
D	lighting	2
E	street furniture	3
F	wayfinding – signs/information	4
G	major improvements/design	5 Low

**New Centrally Located Community Facility**

The Thatcham Vision First Action Plan 2007 identifies several priority projects, which seek to strengthen Thatcham as an independent and thriving market town, to provide a focus for the community and to improve the appearance of the town centre.

One of the priorities for the town is to investigate the feasibility of locating a major new community building in the town centre: this forms an element of the brief for this Design Appraisal. As part of our report, we have considered: the need for such a community facility; the form it could take and potential sites to accommodate it.

The Thatcham Vision, which was based on an element of community consultation, sets out the following requirements:

- a larger and centrally located library;
- meeting rooms for use by the community and businesses;
- offices for use by a range of community groups;
- an internet café;
- a public counter/one stop shop for local public services, including West Berkshire Council, Thatcham Town Council and the police;
- landscaped garden area;
- external spaces for events e.g. markets and performances;
- new facility must meet the highest environmental specifications to serve as an example to the wider community.

The Thatcham Vision also suggested a number of optional, but desirable features:

- a larger multi-use public space for use by community groups;
- a sound-proofed room for band practices with recording facilities;
- ancillary retail units to generate revenue.

The Key Stakeholder Consultation event held on 16 January 2009 as part of this Design Appraisal (see Participation in the Design Appraisal section), revealed that a new community facility for Thatcham was not a high priority for many of the attendees. Each of the three groups identified five or six top priorities which they felt needed to be addressed in the town centre. All three groups wanted better signs and information and unsympathetic shop fronts and signs to be removed.

A common theme amongst two of the groups was that community facilities should be improved with one group suggesting there should be a town hall and larger library facility within the town centre, possibly located at The Priory.

In our view, the provision of a modern, multi-purpose community facility located in the town centre, fronting onto, or with good connections to The Broadway or High Street would support the town centre function, increasing pedestrian footfalls, patronage and linked trips. Such an initiative would be supported by Government advice contained in PPS6 (2005) which seeks to increase the vitality and viability of town centres by locating a diverse range of town centre uses, including libraries and community facilities at the heart of town centres.

The value of such a facility to the centre will very much depend on its scale and the uses it accommodates. Our engagement with stakeholders during the Design Appraisal process suggests that there is no clear consensus on this point.

**Potential Sites**

This Design Appraisal identifies five potential sites that could accommodate a community facility. The table on page 81 sets out the advantages and disadvantages of the five sites, which are:

- Site A - Bath Road/High Street West
- Site B - The Barn and former Auto Crash Repairs
- Site C - Kingsland Shopping Centre
- Site D - The Priory and Environs
- Site E - 40 - 43 The Broadway

**Funding Sources**

Funding of any proposed community facility will be a critical item and central to the ability to deliver the facility.

As noted elsewhere, there are a variety of sites and buildings within and around Thatcham town centre. Whilst the sites themselves may not be inherently suitable for a new, multi-purpose community facility they will have a hard/economic value which could be realised and the proceeds directed to a new community facility, subject to positive decision being made in this regard by each land-owning body.

We have identified The Priory, the existing library and the Parish Hall on Chapel Street as existing buildings in public ownership where current facilities could be re-provided (in whole or in part) in a new community building. We would recommend therefore that a detailed dialogue is pursued with the owners and that a valuation exercise is undertaken to establish the alternative use value of each site. This would not commit the owners but would establish the potential revenue which could be generated from this source to fund a new facility.

Other options that need to be explored are public funds, the use of land swaps, private developer contributions from planning obligations and the dispersal of other public assets.

### **Plan for taking the Options Forward**

In our view, given the absence of consensus on either the need for a new facility or what it should provide, further detailed discussions need to be held with the key stakeholders most directly linked to the provision of a new centrally located facility to ascertain the level of commitment on their part. These stakeholders include West Berkshire Council (Library Service), West Berkshire Council (Children's Services) and Thatcham Town Council. Without a firm commitment from at least one of the stakeholders the prospect of a new multi-purpose community facility is significantly diminished.

Once the degree of commitment of these key stakeholders, their ability to commit funding and resources and their potential willingness to release value from their existing land assets is known, a more detailed assessment of existing and potential sites (including valuation) should be commissioned.

Once baseline agreement has been reached on:

- the need for a new community facility by key stakeholders;
- the composition of such a facility;
- potential sources of funding;
- a preferred site.

An architectural feasibility study would need to be prepared. This would examine the feasibility of the preferred site to accommodate the identified community uses and facilities. The study would consider land values and build costs and provide a realistic time and cost plan for delivering the facility.

We consider that further community consultation should be built in at key stages to confirm the community's aspirations for the new community facility and their views on the most suitable preferred location, based on the site(s) identified by the stakeholders, and the architectural feasibility plan.



THE KING'S HEAD

COURAGE  
KING'S HEAD

THE FAMILY BOOKSHOP  
in Thatcham

THE FAM

THE KING'S HEAD  
BED & BREAKFAST  
BAR SNACKS  
AVAILABLE

THE KING'S HEAD  
BEST TRADITIONAL  
PUB IN  
THATCHAM

Fine buildings at the northern entrance to The Broadway

# 01

## Introduction



## Introduction

This Design Appraisal of Thatcham town centre has been prepared by Turley Associates for West Berkshire Council to provide the evidence base for a future policy framework for the town centre. The policy framework will help in meeting the objectives of the Thatcham Vision which include:

- reinforcing Thatcham's identity as an independent, thriving market town for services;
- reducing the need for residents to travel elsewhere;
- improving the look and feel of the town.

The study brief provided by West Berkshire Council established a number of objectives which were:

- i. to examine the suitability of the Thatcham town centre Commercial Area;
- ii. to conduct a health check on Thatcham town centre;
- iii. to assess the quality of primary stopping frontages in Thatcham town centre;
- iv. to examine and assess the street-scape of Thatcham town centre (in particular the High Street & The Broadway);
- v. to examine and assess accessibility issues faced by Thatcham town centre;
- vi. to produce a prioritised list of additional infrastructure improvements for Thatcham town centre;
- vii. to examine the feasibility of a new, centrally located community facility.

Each of the above issues is addressed within this Design Appraisal.

West Berkshire Council and Thatcham Town Council have aspirations to improve the quality of buildings and the town centre environment. In order to give clear guidance and a positive framework for the design of new buildings, spaces and the refurbishment of existing ones, this Design Appraisal sets out an analysis of the vitality and viability of the town centre's shopping functions and the spatial framework for the enhancement of the town centre. It is a non-statutory document, which will form part of the Local Development Framework evidence base and which identifies the scope and potential for improvement of the town centre, and how all the elements fit together in an integrated way. It draws on the policies in statutory planning documents such as the West Berkshire District Local Plan Saved Policies (2007) and Shopfronts and Signs Supplementary Planning Guidance (2003) and the comprehensive baseline work undertaken and which continues with Thatcham Vision.

This Appraisal identifies and highlights the key shopping, townscape and land use issues and opportunities facing the town centre. It is also intended to inform the consideration of the potential for a new local community facility within the town centre.

Any future proposals must realise the opportunities provided by existing and emerging regeneration, policy and development projects and the ambitions and views of key stakeholders.

The Appraisal process has involved:

- understanding the history and development of the town centre;
- assessing the vitality and viability of the shopping patterns, diversity of shops in line with the methodology set out in the Government's Planning Policy Statement 6: Planning for Town Centres;
- analysing of the towns current urban form and townscape quality by means of on the ground observations, including a photographic survey, map based assessment and document review;
- assessing the significance and sensitivities of the current town centre urban fabric to help better inform potential regeneration
- assessing the Health of the town centre against a range of key indicators;
- interviews with West Berkshire Council Officer's and local key stakeholders to better understand the forces and issues acting on the town centre.

## Why Thatcham town centre is Important

Government policy from national through to the local level has reinforced the importance of town centres as the focus for social and economic life in urban areas. During the 1980s and early 1990s the huge expansion of 'out of town' retail centres was threatening the economic vitality of traditional centres. Government is now seeking to reverse this trend via a number of measures including Planning Policy Statement 6 which seeks to help sustain and nurture town centres.

The success of Thatcham town centre into the long term will be strongly influenced by the mix and diversity of uses and users, the design quality of the urban fabric, the stewardship of the historic environment and the attractiveness of the public realm. The town centre is the crucible of economic, social, civic and cultural life of the town. It is the 'shop window' for the town and wider area and as such, should be a vibrant, diverse and inclusive place, attracting shoppers, visitors and employees. It is crucial to the town's sense of identity and community, and must be at the centre of the town's strategies for regeneration.

## Approach to the Health Check

The purpose of the health check is to provide an assessment of the vitality and viability of Thatcham's town centre. In undertaking the assessment of Thatcham's vitality and viability it was necessary to examine the key indicators as listed in 'Planning Policy Statement 6: Planning for Town Centres' (PPS6, 2005) and the proposed changes to PPS6 set out in 'Proposed Changes to Planning Policy Statement 6: Planning for Town Centres, Consultation, July 2008' (PPS6 Proposed Changes).

Paragraph 4.4 of PPS6 (2005) states that: "In order to measure the vitality and viability and monitor the health of their town centres and how this is changing over time, local authorities should regularly collect information, preferably in co-operation with the private sector, on the following key indicators:

- diversity of uses;
- the amount of retail, leisure and office floorspace;
- potential capacity for growth or change;
- retailer representation;
- shopping rents;
- vacancy rates;
- commercial yields on non-domestic property;
- pedestrian flows;
- accessibility;
- customer and residents' views and behaviour;
- perception of safety and crime;
- environmental quality.

The production of this part of the Appraisal has included the collection and review of data from a number of different sources, including:

- visits to Thatcham during daylight hours (24 September, 23 & 28 October, 18 November and 5 December, 2008);
- early evening and late night visit to Thatcham (5 December, 2008);
- review of latest Experian GOAD data (April 2006);
- review of historic Experian GOAD data (1994, 1998 and 2002);
- discussions with Officers of West Berkshire and Thatcham Town Council;
- discussions with key retailers and representatives from the Thatcham market (October 2008 and January 2009);
- discussions with commercial property agents (November 2008);
- review of The Thatcham Survey 2006;
- review of the Thatcham Vision First Action Plan;
- review of pedestrian footfall data collected by PMRS (May 2008).

### Approach to the Design Audit

An understanding of the historic, visual, social, economic and environmental context of the town centre is essential to be able to provide appropriate recommendations for potential future planning policy developments.

With these in mind, the urban design audit is presented under a number key themes:

- street and public realm network;
- movement and connections;
- building pattern and scale;
- design quality, value and sensitivity;
- legibility;
- character areas.

### Structure of the Design Appraisal

The Design Appraisal is presented in four main sections:

**01 Introduction** - introduction to the nature of Thatcham town centre, setting out the relevant design and planning policy frameworks in place, as well as providing a historical context of the growth of the town to the present day.

**02 Town Centre Health Check** - assessment of the vitality and viability of the town centre.

**03 Town Centre Design Audit** - analysis of the physical condition, diversity of built form, movement network and sensitivity of the town centre to change.

**04 Outputs and Recommendations** - recommendations on the extent of the town centre commercial area and primary shopping frontages and prioritised list of infrastructure works that could improve the attractiveness of the town centre to retailers, investors, residents and visitors. The section finishes with an examination of the feasibility of a new centrally located community facility within the town centre.



The junction of the High Street and The Broadway

## The Policy Framework

Design proposals for Thatcham town centre must be developed with reference to national, regional and local design policy and guidance as these collectively set the ambitions and thresholds for retailing and design quality.

The hierarchy of design policy relevant to the town centre and a brief summary is provided below. This section focuses on the strategic national and local policy frameworks that are most relevant to this Design Appraisal. Regional policy is not covered in this section as it contains 'high level' advice. The aim of this section of the Appraisal is therefore to concentrate on key national town centre aspirations and local design matters.

One aim of the Design Appraisal is to help in achieving the key objectives identified by the Thatcham Vision (First Action Plan) for the town centre with a focus on reinforcing Thatcham's identity as an independent thriving market town, reducing the need to travel elsewhere, and improving the look and feel of the town.

## National Planning Policy

### Planning Policy Statement 1 Delivering Sustainable Development (2005)

This Planning Policy Statement (PPS) sets out the Government's objectives for the planning system. It notes that planning should facilitate and promote sustainable and inclusive patterns of urban and rural development by, inter alia, making suitable land available for development and ensuring high quality development through good and inclusive design and the efficient use of resources (paragraph 5).

Local authorities should, in preparing development plans, bring forward sufficient land of a suitable quality and in appropriate locations to meet expected needs for housing, retail and commercial development (paragraph 27 (iv)). They should also improve access for all to jobs, health, education, shops and leisure by ensuring that new development is located where everyone can access services without having to rely on the private car (paragraph 27(v)). Retail developments should be focused on existing centres to promote their vitality and viability, and more sustainable patterns of development (paragraph 27(vi)). The efficient use of land should be promoted through higher-density mixed-use development and the use of suitably located previously developed land and buildings. Planning should seek actively to bring vacant and underused previously developed land back into beneficial use (paragraph 27 (vii)).

PPS1 goes on to advise (paragraph 33) that good design is indivisible from good planning. Design which is inappropriate in its context, or which fails to take the opportunities available for improving the character and quality of an area and the way it functions should not be accepted (paragraph 34). Local authorities should not attempt to impose architectural styles or particular tastes and should not stifle innovation, originality or initiative through unsubstantiated requirements to conform to certain development forms or styles. It is however proper to seek to promote or reinforce local distinctiveness particularly where this is supported by clear plan policies or supplementary planning documents on design.

### Planning Policy Statement 6: Planning for Town Centres (2005)

This guidance note advises that the objectives of the Government are to promote the vitality and viability of town centres by planning for the growth and development of existing centres and by focusing development in such centres and encouraging a wide range of services in a good environment, accessible to all (paragraph 1.3).

Further Government objectives include, enhancing consumer choice by making provision for a range of shopping, leisure and local services, and improving accessibility (paragraph 1.4).

The Government's wider policy objectives of ensuring that deficiencies in provision in areas with poor access to facilities are remedied, and ensuring that locations are fully exploited through high-density mixed use development are also relevant (paragraph 1.5).

Local planning authorities should actively promote growth and manage change in town centres; should define a network and hierarchy of centres each performing an appropriate role to meet the needs of their catchments; and should adopt a positive approach to planning for town centres (paragraph 2.1). Wherever possible, growth should be accommodated by more efficient use of land and buildings within existing centres (paragraph 2.4). Local authorities should seek to ensure that the number and size of sites identified for development or redevelopment are sufficient to meet the scale and type of need identified.

Where existing centres are in decline, local planning authorities should assess the scope for consolidating and strengthening these centres (paragraph 2.8).

In promoting and enhancing existing centres, local authorities should consider the network of centres and plan carefully how best to distribute any identified growth. They should consider that there is a more even distribution of town centre uses and that people's everyday needs are met at the local level (paragraph 2.9).

The importance of high quality design and efficient use of land is highlighted (paragraphs 2.19 to 2.22) to improve the quality and character of the area and the way it functions. Mixed-use development is encouraged.

In selecting sites for development local authorities should:

- assess the need for development (placing greater weight on "quantitative" need");
- identify the appropriate scale of development;
- apply the sequential approach to site selection;
- assess the impact of development on existing centres;
- ensure that locations are accessible and well-served by a choice of means of transport (paragraph 2.28).

The scale of development should relate to the role and function of the centre within the wider hierarchy and the catchment serviced (paragraph 2.41). The aim should be to locate the appropriate type and scale of development in the right type of centre to ensure that it fits into the centre and that it compliments its role and function. Given their characteristics, local centres will generally be inappropriate locations for large scale new development even when a flexible approach is adopted. Local planning authorities should consider setting an upper limit for the scale of development likely to be permissible in different types of centres (paragraph 2.42).

### PPS6 Revision (Consultation Draft 2008)

The Consultation Draft of PPS6 highlights, in the Ministerial Foreword, that "local shops are an essential part of what makes somewhere a great place to live, we all find it convenient to be able to pop down the street and buy groceries, pick up a prescription, get a haircut".

The objectives of the suggested revision to PPS6 are twofold. First, to support town centre investment which contributes to economic prosperity and social and environmental goals. Second, to ensure that planning promotes competition and consumer choice and does not unduly or disproportionately constrain the market. It is therefore proposed to refine the policy approach to planning for town centres, particularly in relation to the assessment of planning applications.

The requirement for applicants to demonstrate "need" for a proposal in an edge or out of centre location is proposed to be removed, however the Consultation Draft requires consideration be given to the wider impacts of proposed developments including: impacts on planned investment; whether the proposal is of appropriate scale; accessibility and sustainable transport; how the proposal will make efficient and effective use of land. "Where there are likely to be some adverse impacts but these are likely to be outweighed by significant wider benefits arising from the proposal, the proposal should normally be approved".

### Planning Policy Guidance 13: Transport (2008)

Paragraph 4 of the Planning Policy Guidance (PPG) 13 sets out the Government's objectives in relation to transport planning. These are to integrate planning and transport at the national, regional and local level in order to promote more sustainable transport choices; to promote accessibility to jobs, shopping, leisure facilities and services by public transport, walking and cycling, and to reduce the need to travel, especially by car.

In relation specifically to retail and leisure development, PPG13 reinforces advice in PPG6 (now superseded by PPS6, 2005). Paragraph 35 notes that policies for retail and leisure should seek to promote the vitality and viability of existing town centres, which are the preferred locations for the new retail and leisure development.

Paragraph 6 of PPG13 sets out guidance for local authorities in the preparation of development plans and in considering planning applications. Of particular relevance to town centres are:

- the need to locate major generators of travel in city, town and district centres and near to major public transport interchanges;
- the need to locate day to day facilities to be near to their clients in local centres so that they are accessible by walking and cycling;
- the need to ensure that developments comprising jobs, shopping, leisure and services offers a choice of access by public transport, walking and cycling.

Evidence demonstrates that retailers and developers have adapted their development ambitions to take account of Government planning guidance on town centres in PPS1, PPS6 and PPG13 all of which are fundamental elements of the Government's sustainable development strategy. All three documents seek to determine behaviour, rather than manage/control market forces. The "sequential approach" to new retail development is having major implications for out of centre retailing and the expanding leisure industry.

### Local Planning Policies

#### West Berkshire District Local Plan 1991-2006 – Saved Policies

The West Berkshire Local Plan was adopted in 2002 and all policies were in effect until 27 September 2007. After this date, the adopted policies were deemed to have expired, unless they had been 'saved' by the Secretary of State to cover the interim period until adoption of the Core Strategy and associated Development Plan Documents. The following is a review which considers only the saved policies which still have weight in planning decisions.

This review will conclude with a short appraisal of the policies and whether they are appropriate for retention, modification or replacement with regard to their effect and impact upon Thatcham town centre.

Policy ENV.31 relates to the protection and enhancement of important open space areas. The policy does not permit development within settlements that would result in significant harm to or the loss of important open space area which have a special historic, wildlife, visual or amenity importance.

Policy ENV.32 is permissive of proposals affecting a listing building only if they preserve and enhance the character, historical or architectural integrity and setting of the building. Materials and design details should be used which complement the listed building and its setting.

Development in conservation areas is covered by policy ENV.33 which states that development which would harm or prejudice the special character or appearance of a conservation area will not be permitted. A large part of the designated Thatcham town centre, including the High Street and Broadway, falls within the conservation area.

Policy HSG.13 is permissive of the residential use of the upper floors of appropriate premises in town centres, provided they have self contained access. The policy also states that in appropriate cases the normal requirement for car parking provision and private amenity space may be reduced or waived.

Policy ECON.5 relates to Town Centre Commercial Areas. The policy is permissive of proposals for business development within the defined commercial areas of Thatcham town centre, subject to a number of criteria:

- development does not give rise to transport, parking or infrastructure problems;
- does not harm the physical or visual character of the area, the amenities of adjoining land uses or the relationship between existing development and the surrounding open space areas;
- does not unduly prejudice the prime shopping frontages;
- makes provision for a reasonable variety and scale of business development appropriate to the nature and character of the centre;
- does not give rise to pressures for housing development additional to the provision made in the Local Plan.

In relation to shopping, the relevant Local Plan key aims, set out in Chapter 5, are to:

- "maintain and where possible enhance the vitality and viability of shopping provision in West Berkshire by promoting new shopping development, assisting the refurbishment of centres and applying policies that protect the character of centres;

- improve accessibility to shopping centres for all members of the community;
- improve security for both retailers and shoppers;
- support the existing open market at Thatcham."

Policy SHOP.1 states that within the designated primary shopping frontages permission will be refused for the change of use from class A1 retail uses to other purposes, where it would result in a concentration of non-retail uses, which would be harmful to the vitality of the shopping centre.

Policy OVS.2 seeks a high standard of design and landscape treatment from new development and states that new development will be permitted where the proposals improve the quality of the environment in line with a number of criteria set out within the policy.

With regard to planning obligations, Policy OVS.3 requires that the Council are satisfied that the infrastructure, services and amenities made necessary by the development are provided to ensure the proper planning of the area. In addition, opportunities will also be sought for securing environmental improvements and community benefits.

#### West Berkshire Planning Strategy, Preferred Options, (February 2006)

The West Berkshire Planning Strategy was submitted to the Secretary of State for formal examination on 22 September 2006. Following guidance indicating the need for the document to be more detailed and specific over locations for growth, the Council resolved to withdraw this original Strategy.

Following the withdrawal of the original West Berkshire Planning Strategy, the Council is currently in the process of producing a revised document which aims to build upon the principles of the previous submitted version. This is currently at the evidence gathering stage prior to the formal Preferred Options document being produced.

It is worth noting that the spatial vision of the original (but now withdrawn) preferred strategy sought to build upon the existing settlement pattern and to shape the scale and intensity of development in ways which build sustainable communities. It aimed to secure a spatial strategy which focused the most development on urban areas and directed intensively used developments to those areas which contain the infrastructure, services and facilities best able to support them.

The existing policy framework provided by the saved policies is broad and whilst offers guidance it does not actively encourage specific forms and types of development.

Government guidance contained within Planning Policy Statement 6 (PPS6) states that local planning authorities should adopt a positive and proactive approach to planning for the future of their centres through the production of Development Plan Documents.

We have examined the current policy framework provided by the 'saved' local plan policies. Whilst these saved policies do provide clear guidance for town centre development, including Thatcham, they are broad brush policies that in isolation of any supplementary planning documents do not provide a pro-active approach to the development of Thatcham town centre. No sites are identified for redevelopment and the town centre boundary, primary shopping frontages and conservation area boundaries were all established more than ten years ago.

We recommend that site specific policies are formulated for Thatcham in line with the opportunity sites we have identified and the need to review the extent of primary shopping frontages, the town centre boundary and the conservation area boundary. We also recommend that shopfronts and signs guidance be produced for Thatcham.

**Quality Design West Berkshire Supplementary Planning Document (SPD, 2006) Series Part 1 – Achieving Design Quality**

This SPD guidance sets out general urban design principles relevant to all new development and a design and sustainability checklist. The goal is to raise the design quality and sustainability performance of development schemes by creating places of high quality which are sustainable, secure and accessible to all.

**Part 3 – Residential Character Framework**

The framework identifies the variety of housing character types across Thatcham. While the town centre is not assessed within the framework, analysis of the surrounding neighbourhoods and interfaces between the different development periods and styles has been carried out. The built footprint of Thatcham is now characterised by significant inter-war, post-war and late 20th century developments that enclose the historic, more compact core.

**Area Design Focus, Bath Road, Thatcham**

This document seeks to ensure that the cumulative effects of infill development do not erode the quality of housing neighbourhoods that have evolved along the key Bath Road corridor. Key defining characteristics are identified which acknowledge that the character changes along its length. The study area does not cover the town centre but instead ends at the war memorial and health centre to the west.

However, this particular location is recognised as a key design area (4) which would benefit from improved landscaping and street lighting and the potential formalisation of the car park.

**Shopfronts and Signs Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG, 2003)**

The Shopfronts and Signs document was adopted as Supplementary Planning Guidance on 3 July 2003. The guidance aims to create 'good quality commercial environments which make a positive contribution to the character of West Berkshire's towns and villages'.

The guidance applies throughout West Berkshire but is especially important in conservation areas and where listed buildings are affected. The commercial core of Thatcham is largely within a designated Conservation Area. Wherever historic shopfronts of merit survive, the SPG states that they should be retained, renovated and restored. There should always be a presumption in favour of repair rather than replacement, especially on listed buildings and in conservation areas. Where original features have already been replaced by inappropriate design, replacement with a sympathetic design will be encouraged. Commercial interests who have a 'corporate image' are expected to use discretion with regard to the use of their standardised shopfront designs and corporate colours.

The SPG provides a robust piece of policy in relation to shopfront and signs, emphasising the traditional elements which are of particular importance to historic centres and conservation areas. In spite of this many of the shopfronts within town centre and conservation area fall short of the standards and aspirations contained within the guidance.

The policies to be applied in this instance area set out opposite (top).

**Thatcham Vision First Action Plan – Thatcham town centre (2006)**

This detailed Parish Plan forms part of the Thatcham Vision First Action Plan produced by Thatcham Vision on behalf of Thatcham Town Council. Again a material consideration, the town centre is highlighted as being vital to the community and image of Thatcham. Making the town centre better for local businesses and people who use it is also identified as a major priority.

The objectives and set of goals relevant to this Design Appraisal are set out opposite (bottom).

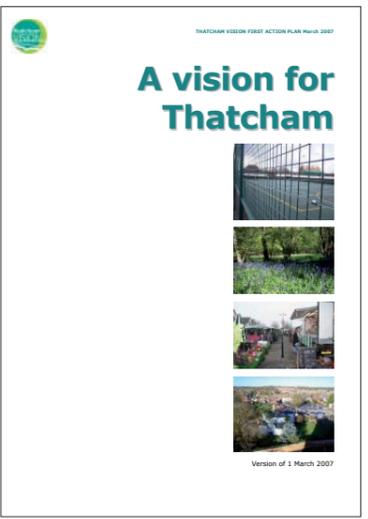
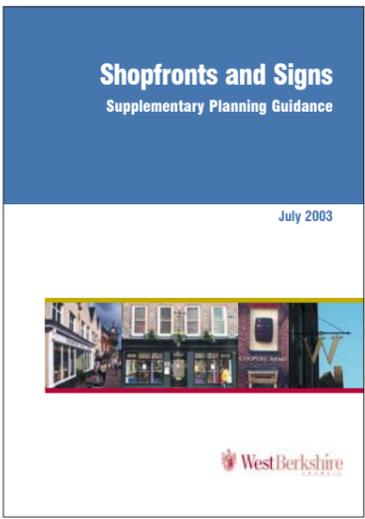
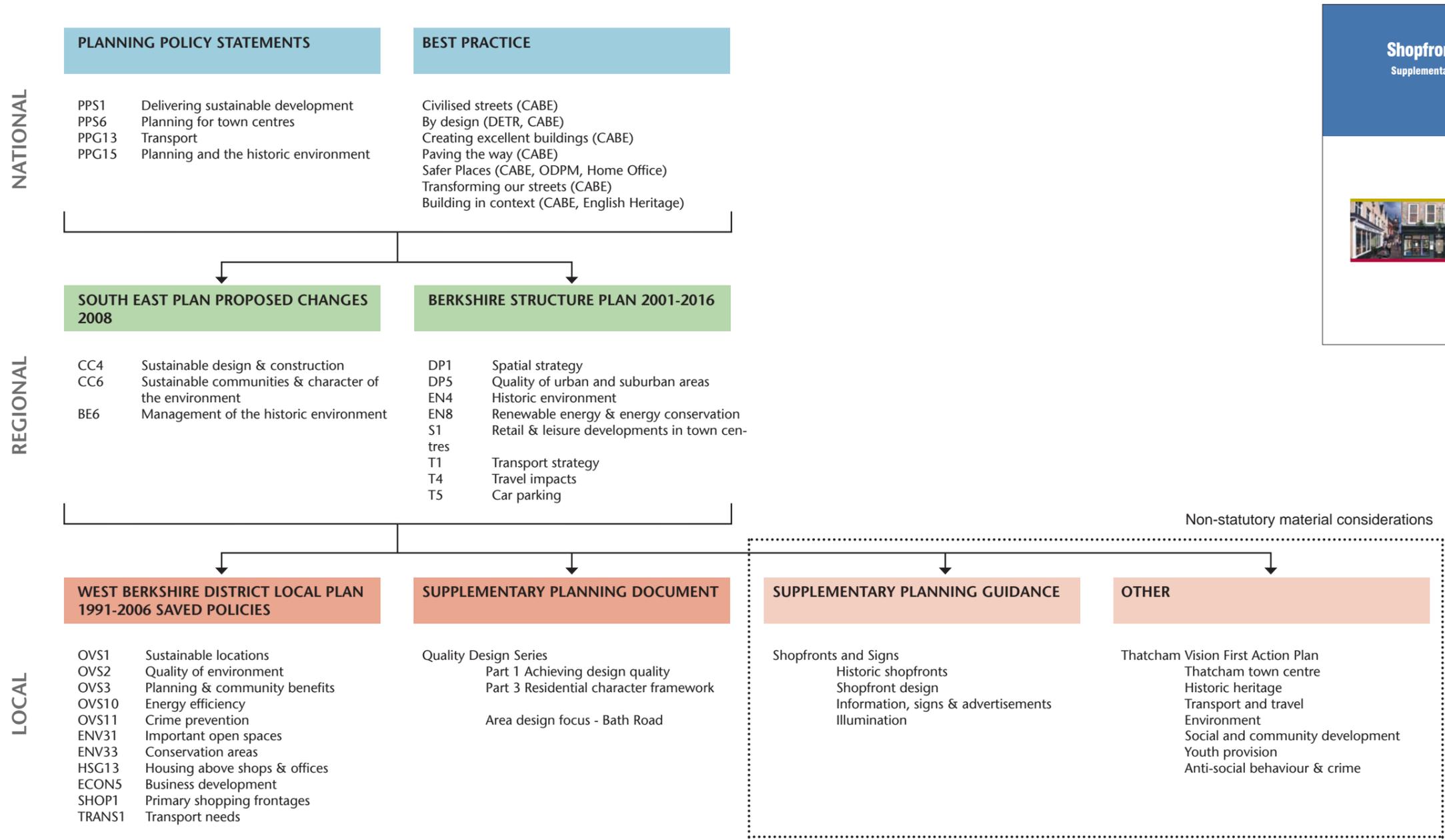
Adapted from Shopfronts and Signs SPG, Turley Associates 2008

Shopfront Design		Information, Signs and Advertisements	
(a)	New shopfronts and alterations to existing shopfronts should be appropriate and sympathetic in character, design, construction and materials to the buildings of which they form a part, and to the street scene	(a)	Signs should usually be limited to a fascia sign with the name of the shop or business indicated not more than once on each elevation
(b)	When an existing shopfront is replaced, the Council will look for a reduction in the depth of the fascia where this is considered to be excessive and detrimental to the appearance of the building	(b)	The Council will seek the removal of lurid and oversized signage from buildings and shopfronts wherever the opportunity arises
(c)	Applications for the enlargement of existing windows to ground floor will be resisted	(c)	The Council will expect commercial interests who have adopted a 'corporate image' to use discretion with regard to the use of standardised shop signage and corporate colours
(d)	Where a number of shops occupy a single large building, applications for new shopfronts will not be considered acceptable if they would create separate architectural identities within the building	(d)	Fascias and signs should normally consist of traditional materials, avoiding lurid colours and shiny or reflective surfaces
(e)	Applications for shopfronts will not be considered acceptable if they link two or more buildings that have separate architectural identities, unless the design respects these separate architectural identities	(e)	All lettering should be of a good design, appropriate to the architectural character of the building involved
(f)	West Berkshire Council will expect commercial interests who have adopted a 'corporate image' to use discretion with regard to the use of their standardised shopfront designs and corporate colours. Where considered necessary, one-off designs will be pursued	(f)	Historic signs and lettering, which impart character to the local area should be retained even where there is a change of uses
<b>Lighting</b>			
	Should be used sparingly and only where it will not have an inappropriate effect on the appearance of an area or building. Internally lighted box signs, fascias and individual signs, neon and fluorescent signs will not normally be permitted in conservation areas or other areas of significant amenity value		

Adapted from Thatcham Vision, Turley Associates 2008

Objectives for Town Centre	Goals for Town Centre	
Reinforce Thatcham's identity as an independent thriving market town and reduce the need to travel elsewhere	TC1	Maintain the village atmosphere while developing Thatcham into a thriving, modern market town
Improve the look and feel of the town	TC2	Ensure that Thatcham has a safe town centre for people, premises and property
Further develop and reinforce a sense of community and social cohesion among residents	TC3	Provide a pleasant but functional streetscape with pedestrian safety given priority
Protect and, where necessary, restore the natural and historic environment of the parish, and green spaces in the town	TC4	Ensure that the town centre has a mix of uses, including a vibrant retail and commercial sector, central community facilities, places for all the family to eat and some residential accommodation
	TC5	Ensure good access for customers and those working in the town including less able people, those arriving on foot, bicycle, car, mobility scooter, bus or motorbike
	TC6	Ensure that there is sufficient secure parking to meet the essential needs of users and businesses
	TC7	Provide good signposts enabling visitors to easily locate major facilities and parking
	TC8	Provide adequate service access for businesses with HGV access that does not adversely affect the amenities of town centre users and residents
	TC9	Conserve and restore the heritage of old buildings

### Design Policy Hierarchy



## Historic Development

This section of the Design Appraisal does not attempt to tell the full history of Thatcham. Rather, it is to highlight some of the major events in the evolution of the settlement that help explain the form, function and shape of the town centre as it is experienced today.

Thatcham, a parish and town in Berkshire is located 5 kilometres (3 miles) to the east of Newbury and 24 kilometres (15 miles) to the west of Reading. Thatcham has a population of approximately 25,000 inhabitants.

Thatcham has a history full of interest which spans back to almost ten thousand years. There is evidence of settlement in pre-historic, Bronze and Iron Ages. It is a historic market town, having received its Town Charter in the twelfth century. It reached the peak of its medieval prosperity around 1300. With a variety of other streets, the centre of the town was at the old market cross, the base of which still remains today on The Broadway. The town's economic prosperity after 1300 however, was hampered by the emergence of its larger neighbour Newbury. The Bath Road and The Broadway which still dominate the town centre grew from an important east west travel and trade route.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century the ribbon extents of Thatcham are clearly defined, supporting a network of buildings centred on Broad Street as it was known then, Cheap Street and Chapel Street, which remain the principle structural elements of Thatcham to this day. The Green on The Broadway was an integral feature and part of the wider urban grain characteristic at this time.

Up to the mid twentieth century Thatcham witnessed consolidation with growth limited to small scale infill development along the established east-west Bath Road and Chapel Street routes and the north south Broadway. The larger scale footprints of the Church of St Mary and The Priory stand out from the narrow, deep plots characteristic of much of the remainder of the urban fabric.

The recent and rapid growth of Thatcham's population from 5,000 inhabitants in 1951 and 7,500 inhabitants in 1961 to its current size has been achieved through the expansion of the town by the development of the surrounding countryside. This period of growth has led to the town being described as "an overgrown village" (Thatcham Vision, First Action Plan, 2007).

As in many English towns, Thatcham's historic character perhaps suffered most during the post-war period. The 1960s and 1970s undoubtedly represent a period of significant growth and re-shaping of the town. The rejection of traditional forms of architecture and planning, combined with the desire to meet modern transport and development needs, had a profound effect on the town centre, particularly the High Street. By 1962, the High Street relief road was completed (the section of road that connects Bath Road from the western end of the High Street with Chapel Street).

The result was to shift traffic away from the traditional High Street changing the approaches to the town centre and The Broadway at its northern end. Traffic now passed behind the town centre with the 'backbone' of The Broadway and High Street largely hidden from view. It also led to the exposure of the backs of properties along this part of the route which seriously compromised the public realm. A new subway sought to address pedestrian movements across the widened Chapel Street. This only served however to further undermine the importance of the public realm. To the north and south west, substantial housing enclaves had enclosed the town centre.

Next to the historic and listed Poplars on Bath Road and on the northern side of the subway on Chapel Street the large scale housing complexes of Gilbert Court and Waring House were also evident. Both failed to define the key road frontages, stepping behind the main building lines already established.

The Kingsland Shopping Centre had been delivered and opened in The Broadway by 1986. The construction of the Kingsland Centre required the clearance of several buildings along The Broadway and significant highway and car parking infrastructure – resulting in a significant impact on the town street pattern, urban form, visual structure and connections. The design ambitions were to provide a new shopping arcade and anchor foodstore with servicing and surface level car parking to the rear. These elements of the original design remain today, though proposals for changing the layout and significantly increasing the amount of shopping floorspace, together with some new housing were approved in outline form in 2007.

During the 1980s the Co-op supermarket opened at the southern end of The Broadway, resulting in the amalgamation and loss of the finer grain buildings within this part of the town centre. As part of the development, a surface car park and servicing were introduced behind the new supermarket off The Broadway.

The cumulative effect of post war and late twentieth century development has been to undermine the historic character and charms of the town centre. The late twentieth century buildings in particular are often negative features within the town centre; most being oversized and inactive pieces of architecture, whose materials have weathered poorly. None are of significant architectural worth.

The population and employment characteristics of Thatcham result in many people commuting to work outside of the Thatcham area, mainly to Newbury. This results in a habit of people travelling outside of Thatcham for shopping and leisure trips. Notably, there is a perceived habit of people linking food shopping and leisure trips to existing commuting and other trips to destinations outside Thatcham.

## Thatcham and Newbury

Thatcham, being located just 3 miles away from Newbury has a historic association with the neighbouring market town.

Thatcham had a period of prosperity and population growth in the early 1300's and during this time Thatcham's population was greater than that of neighbouring Newbury. Thatcham's population declined as a result of the bubonic plague which decimated Thatcham's population in 1348. It is widely reported that Thatcham failed to recover from this epidemic.

*"The plague came at a critical time in the development of Thatcham. Property depreciated, some houses stood empty and fell into ruins, and fields lay neglected further stifled by the commercial rivalry of Newbury, which enjoyed a more favourable geographical position as a route centre, and which benefited greatly from the enterprise and industry of its craftsmen and the efficient organisation of its Mayors and corporations." (Nick Young, Thatcham Historical Society, 2007)*

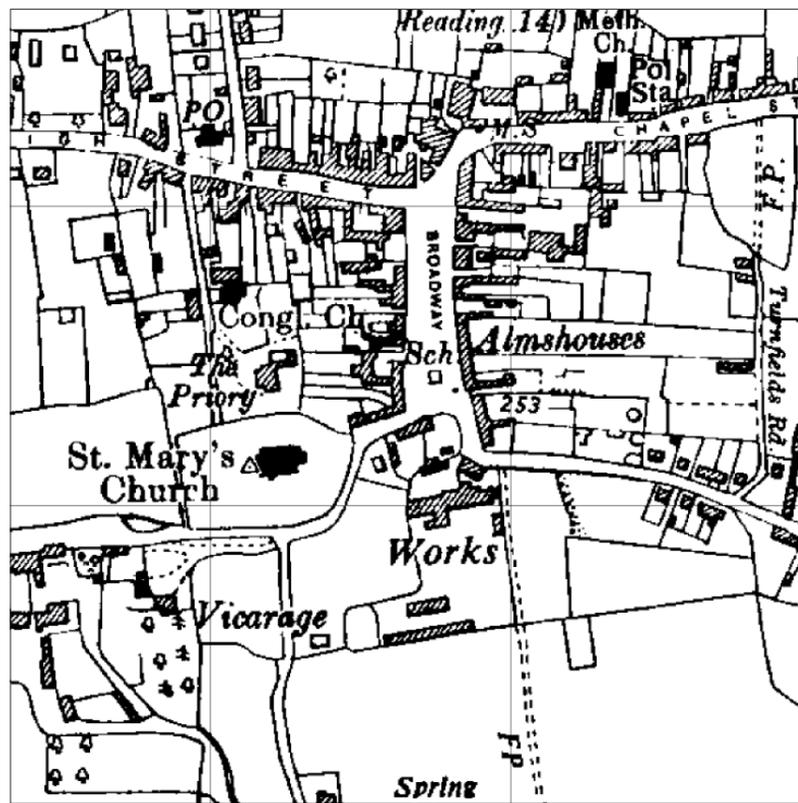
Thatcham town centre in the 1880s



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This historic 'over-shadowing' of Thatcham by Newbury remains a key factor in determining the role and function of Thatcham town centre.

Thatcham town centre in the 1960s



Thatcham town centre in the 1970s



Thatcham town centre in the 1980s



## Town Centres - Trends and National Context

Whilst this report focuses on Thatcham town centre, its users and the town centre uses within it, it is also useful to set out local characteristics and its performance within the context of national trends.

Of all of the town centre uses, retail and leisure are the most dynamic and progressive sectors; the way they continue to evolve will have important implications on Thatcham's town centre.

### Periods of Change for Retailing and Leisure

The 1980s and 1990s saw the UK retailing industry undergo a radical transformation fuelled by the availability of cheap credit and a growing volume of consumer spending; a considerable economic boom occurred. The general buoyancy and demand was correspondingly underpinned by important changes on the supply side, notably:-

- the advance of superstores and multiple retailers
- achievement of larger economies of scale
- introduction of attractive new store designs and systems of product presentation
- superior systems of stock control and replacement

During the early 1980s town centres were the preferred location for most retail and leisure activity and the high street's dominance was largely unchallenged.

At the end of the 1980s and during the early 1990s we witnessed a major shift in the geography of new retail and leisure development. The dominance of the high street was significantly challenged and town centres were no longer the first choice for shopping, leisure, entertainment and employment activities.

Between 1987 and 1996 the amount of out of centre floorspace in the UK grew by over 85%, whereas town centre floorspace grew by less than 1%. In floorspace terms virtually the whole of the net additional growth in the UK retail sector during this time was located outside town centres. However, as the main out of centre sectors migrated away from the high street it created space into which the more traditional high street retail sectors expanded.

The following section briefly sets out the rise of out of centre retailing over the last two decades, how this changed the high street and how this has affected the evolution of Thatcham town centre. It also explores how the fundamental reversal of planning policy during the mid-1990s has brought about an 'urban renaissance' and placed town centres once again at the forefront of the Government's political and policy agenda.

This commentary provides a background to the challenges faced by Thatcham as it continues to compete with other town and district centres in the West Berkshire District, notably neighbouring Newbury.

### The Retail Sector

The rise of out of centre retailing over the last twenty five years has been remarkable for the pace and scale of change.

The West Berkshire Council Retail and Leisure Study 2003, prepared by DTZ, confirms that at the beginning of the 1980s the high street accounted for over 28 million square metres of retail floorspace which equated to nearly 75% of the market share of total UK retail stock. This compared with an estimated 10,000 square metres in out of centre locations.

By the end of the 1980s the amount of high street retail space had only fallen slightly to just over 27 million square metres; which was due mainly to a loss of secondary and tertiary locations. However, the construction of vast amounts of out of centre floorspace had resulted in the market share of high street space falling sharply to 47%.

The DTZ report also references research by Verdict indicating that approximately one third of UK retail spending is occurring in out of centre locations.

This shift in investment and expenditure away from town centres to out of centre locations was driven by a combination of economic, social, demographic, lifestyle and property market trends. The key driver was the rise in consumer affluence and mobility. This resulted in people travelling increasingly longer distances to meet their retail and leisure needs in new, attractive and safe environments. It is widely reported that the retail industry responded to this insatiable demand in 'four waves' of development as detailed below:

#### First Wave

The food supermarkets pioneered the move to out of town centre locations in the early 1980s, as they sought to develop larger more profitable stores in cheaper, more accessible and typically greenfield locations with extensive areas of free car parking.

Within the last decade the grocery sector has experienced significant growth and consolidation. The result of many mergers means that the market is dominated by Tesco, Sainsbury, Asda and Morrisons. These are often referred to as 'the big four.'

The only significant entrants to the grocery sector during the last twenty years have been the European discounters, including Aldi, Lidl and Netto, which are targeted at a more price-conscious customer in locations not generally favoured by 'the big four', mainly because of their smaller and often less affluent catchments.

#### Second Wave

The second wave saw the emergence of bulky goods warehouse parks in the 1980s; this was a bold new retail format that had never before been seen on the high street. The format evolved from the first generation retail warehouse sheds, located on industrial estates, into highly sophisticated managed shopping parks in attractive strategic road locations.

Retail parks were typically occupied by a broad mix of bulky goods retailers, trading alongside more traditional high street retailers including Boots, Mothercare and Next and were often complemented by a range of leisure, food and drink uses.

#### Third Wave

The later part of the 1980s and early part of the 1990s saw a 'third wave'; the development of large scale freestanding regional shopping centres. These large format 'Cathedrals to retail' dominated the property investment market.

These regional shopping centres are consistently ranked amongst the top trading locations in the UK in terms of rent, turnover and footfall.

#### Fourth Wave

The recession of the early 1990s saw a new 'fourth wave' of retailing emerge. The factory outlet shopping centre, based on the successful American concept, was specifically marketed at price-conscious consumers and also provided an outlet for manufacturers and retailers to dispose of end-of-season stock at discounted prices. The factory outlet has been a highly successful trading concept.

### Recent trends

The confidence shown in retail markets between 1996 and 2008 has been the result of a buoyant national economy. A growth in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) combined with relatively low inflation and falling unemployment saw big improvement in rents across all property sectors. Property also witnessed a significant increase in investment from institutional investors.

Until the autumn of 2008, the principal demand for retail space was from retailers trading in the growth areas of young fashion, sportswear, multi-media and lifestyle products.

There has also been a major convergence of retailing and leisure. Both retailing and leisure have a developing synergy so that the shopping trip is now increasingly seen as a “day out” rather than a regular routine or chore. An example of this trend is the shopping trip which in itself is undertaken as a leisure activity. This is particularly well illustrated by the new breed of factory outlet centres which opened up throughout the UK, where research shows that up to 75% of visits are essentially leisure based trips and are “net additional” to regular visits made to the high street.

Segmentation has also occurred in the retailing sector with increased floorspace competition from the growing number of speciality coffee shops. There has been growing pressure and competition from cafés, sandwich bars, delicatessens, restaurants and licensed premises, responding to the trend of people choosing to eat out more regularly and contributing to the concept of the evening economy. This is inevitably putting pressure on rents in prime and secondary locations.

Whilst some town centres have experienced considerable amounts of new build over the last two decades, the overall quality of this development has generally been low quality in terms of urban design and pedestrian connectivity to a high street. Many new shopping malls have large car parks and have turned their backs on the high street. The Kingsland Centre, which despite having a pedestrian walkway which links the anchor Waitrose store through to The Broadway is essentially designed for car-borne shopping. The layout facilitates stand alone shopping trips that can take place without needing to pass through the High Street and pedestrian flow-counts confirm that such single-purpose trips are not uncommon.

Research suggests that there is not a proven causal link between new out of town retailing and the decline of town centres. It seems clear however that centres with a diverse range of retail outlets, diversity of function and an ability to attract tourism, are better placed to withstand the impact of new out of centre retailing.

Thatcham does not benefit from tourism or a good mix of leisure uses and has to rely on the Waitrose and Co-operative supermarkets to play the vital role as anchor destinations within the town centre.

### Out of Town Retailing and Leisure

Smaller store formats have been devised by a number of major food store operators and this has resulted in the movement back to town centres. Tesco, with its 'Metro' and 'Express' concepts has been a major player, but Sainsburys 'Local' and Marks and Spencer 'Simply Food' have also grown substantially. The promotion of town centre living, along with the growth in one person households and an increasingly ageing population, has created a market for in town supermarkets.

The growth in the floorspace (and market share) of the multiples has been largely at the expense of the Co-operatives and Independents. Food retailers of all sizes are now targeting towns that had previously been considered as having marginal opportunities, or even being too small.

The introduction of PPG 6, in 1996 has also had a significant impact on out of centre food retailing as it heralded a new 'tougher' planning regime with a growing impetus towards town centre sites. While still looking for out of centre opportunities, food retailers have adapted to the change in policy.

The out of town leisure park concept, anchored by a multiplex cinema and bringing together a range of leisure and restaurant uses evolved rapidly during the 1990s.

On the basis of current planning guidance, leisure is becoming an important competitor for town centre sites. Many town centre retail schemes are being planned with major leisure elements to increase the length of the shopping trip and to bolster the night time economy. A relevant example of this is the introduction of a multiplex cinema in the shopping centre extension in Newbury.

While some developers and retailers continue to pursue opportunities away from town centres, increased attention is being given to in town sites. Retailers are increasingly seeking large footprint premises which often do not exist. Accordingly, both developers and retailers are looking to local planning authorities which pledge a commitment to their town centres to use compulsory purchase powers to assist in site assembly and to improve accessibility. The involvement of local authorities in this way has become a growing trend.

### Urban Renaissance

The publication of the Final Report of the Urban Task Force 'Towards an Urban Renaissance' in 1999 brought about a sea change in government policy and provided a focus for development in sustainable and brownfield locations. Importantly, town centres were recognised as being key to the urban renaissance as places to live, as well destinations for a range of shopping, leisure, employment, cultural and entertainment activities.

The report makes many recommendations, including a vision of vibrant mixed-use urban areas characterised by thriving daytime and evening economies, with the potential to accommodate additional homes. The report criticises the privately owned and managed shopping centres that have developed over the last twenty years, and sets out a vision of a public space, where retailing and leisure businesses provide the backdrop to a thriving urban community.

To date the 'urban renaissance' has focussed on only the main towns and cities across Britain. Newbury has experienced a small scale urban renaissance. Thatcham appears to have suffered from a lack of investment as it continues to compete with larger centres and out of centre facilities, including the Newbury Leisure Park in Lower Way, Thatcham. The leisure park does not promote or encourage linked leisure or shopping trips to Thatcham town centre.

The planned opening of a new cinema in Newbury town centre will help to promote Newbury's evening activity and economy, which could potentially have an effect on the Newbury Leisure Park on the night time economy of Thatcham.

### E-tailing

The growth of broadband and mobile broadband technologies has had a profound impact on the way in which people shop, work and live.

The rise of internet based shopping has been driven by the considerable investment made by the major grocers, banks and airline companies, who have moved e-commerce away from the troubled 'unsecure' industry. E-commerce has a new respectability and consumers have become increasingly trustworthy. The advance of new technologies combined with the 'time-poor' culture we live have been key drivers of growth in e-commerce.

Retailers, however generally view the internet as a sales channel and marketing tool; an additional route to their customers, but not replacing their traditional shop formats.

A report by e-commerce group IMRG (2008), consultancy Capgemini and the British Retail Consortium reports that UK shoppers spent 17 pence in every pound online in the first half of 2008. The total internet spend was £26.5bn, up 38% on the same period in the previous year.

The report comments that rising food and fuel bills and the credit crunch have forced shoppers to seek out bargains away from the high street stores. Online sales have reached nearly 20% of total retail spending, the report said.

The report added that the credit crunch and rising inflation had dented internet sales, compared with 2007; but considered that web-based shopping would continue to out perform the High Street.

Research by the British Retail Consortium suggests that consumers are happy to purchase certain types of goods on the internet including books, perfume, lingerie, shoes, CDs, DVDs, tickets and holidays where there is a cost saving. However, where cost saving is marginal or where the purchasing is more 'sophisticated' there is a greater reluctance to make purchases at a distance from the point of sale. Many shoppers still want to visit traditional shops to browse, compare, 'touch' and 'try on' goods.

Commentators consider that the rise of internet shopping will affect UK retail property leading to lower rental growth, higher yields and lower capital values and returns, but it will not mean the death of the high street.

Out of town retail floorspace has proven to be more susceptible to impacts from e-commerce as this type of retailing is generally devoted to goods that can be easily bought over the internet including books, CDs, childrens toys, electrical and domestic appliances.

Despite the growth of internet gaming including bingo, gambling and casino sites; the internet cannot fulfil all leisure and social needs and is unlikely to threaten the future of town centres altogether.

It is widely acknowledged that it is important to plan for potential change, as the impact over the long term could be significant. A stronger, better managed and marketed town centre is less vulnerable to the growth of e-tailing. The best way to ensure against any impact is to offer a range of complementary non-retail attractions.

Thatcham, which offers a high level of convenience shopping facilities, banks and niche goods is likely to be more resilient to these technological changes. However, there has been some polarisation of prime and secondary property within Thatcham and it may need to diversify further in order to be resilient to changing future circumstances.

Due to the fact that Thatcham town centre is anchored by commercial retailing and does not currently accommodate retailers selling the classes of goods most vulnerable to e-commerce we conclude that it is not under a significant threat from e-commerce.

### **Credit Crunch and Recession**

The results of the recession at the end of the 1980s are well documented, a virtual standstill in retail sales and the rapid decline in the fortunes of high street stores was witnessed between 1989 and 1992.

High rents and low sales resulted in many retailers (multiples and independents) having a particularly difficult time. Some retailers closed down or down-sized their holdings considerably. This period also saw the growth of the "discounters" (food and non-food) as consumers became very cost conscious. In addition, charity shops proliferated as landlords tried to recoup lost income from voids arising from the downturn. This period was characterised as being very much a tenants' market as tenants had substantial negotiating clout resulting from the downturn.

It is now acknowledged that the UK has entered a period of recession and some longstanding high street names have recently collapsed at the time of writing this report. Woolworths, Zavvi, USC, and Whittards have either closed or been placed into administration.

These events are indicative of the difficult period that the traditional high street retail market is entering, and it can argued, make it all the more critical to plan positively for the future development of Thatcham town centre.

### **The Leisure Sector**

The leisure sector has been one of the fastest growing sectors of the UK property market over the last decade, although this has recently slowed down. The dynamic growth witnessed was driven by big changes in consumer lifestyles, rising affluence and increased spending on leisure, this generated increased demand for new leisure and entertainment facilities.

As witnessed during the 'four waves' of retailing, much of the new commercial leisure development that occurred since the early 1990s was constructed in out of town centres.

The growth of out of centre leisure resulted in many retail parks opting to have a leisure use as an anchor, the typical formats included bowling alleys or multiplex cinemas supported by other complementary uses, such as health clubs, restaurants and cafes.

Shopping locations are increasingly having to fulfil the role of a destination location by providing a wide range of shopping and complementary leisure facilities able to attract and retain the interest of the entire family. This results in larger catchment areas, increased pedestrian footfall, increased expenditure and shopping trips of longer duration.



## Measuring Vitality and Viability: Health Checks

This assessment of Thatcham's vitality and viability has been produced in line with Central Government Guidance and the key indicators listed in 'Planning Policy Statement 6: Planning for Town Centres' (PPS6, 2005).

This report has also considered the proposed changes to PPS6 set out in 'Proposed Changes to Planning Policy Statement 6: Planning for Town Centres, Consultation, July 2008' (PPS6 Proposed Changes).

### Planning Policy Statement 6: Planning for Town Centres' (PPS6, 2005)

Paragraph 4.4 of PPS6 (2005) states that: "In order to measure the vitality and viability and monitor the health of their town centres and how this is changing over time, local authorities should regularly collect information, preferably in co-operation with the private sector, on the following key indicators:

- diversity of main town centre uses (by number, type and amount of floorspace): the amount of space in use for different functions – such as offices; shopping; leisure, cultural and entertainment activities; pubs, cafes and restaurants; and, hotels;
- the amount of retail, leisure and office floorspace in edge-of-centre and out of centre locations;
- the potential capacity for growth or change of centres in the network: opportunities for centres to expand or consolidate, typically measured in the amount of land available for new or more intensive forms of town centre development;
- retailer representation and intentions to change representation: existence and changes in representation of types of retailer, including street markets, and the demand of retailers wanting to come into the centre, or to change their representation in the centre, or to reduce or close their representation;
- shopping rents: pattern of movement in Zone A rents within primary shopping areas (ie. the rental value for the first 6 metres depth of floorspace in retail units from the shop window);
- proportion of vacant street level property: vacancies can arise even in the strongest town centres, and this indicator must be used with care. Vacancies in secondary frontages and changes to other uses will also be useful indicators;
- commercial yields on non-domestic property (ie the capital value in relation to the expected market rental): demonstrates the confidence of investors in the long-term profitability of the centre for retail, office and other commercial developments. This indicator should be used with care;

- pedestrian flows (footfall): a key indicator of the vitality of shopping streets, measured by the numbers and movement of people on the streets, in different parts of the centre at different times of the day and evening, who are available for businesses to attract into shops, restaurants or other facilities;
- accessibility: ease and convenience of access by a choice of means of travel, including the quality, quantity and type of car parking; the frequency and quality of public transport services and the range of customer origins served; and, the quality of provision for pedestrians, cyclists and disabled people and the ease of access from main arrival points to the main attractions;
- customer and residents' views and behaviour: regular surveys will help authorities in monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of town centre improvements and in setting further priorities. Interviews in the town centre and at home can be used to establish views of both users and non-users of the centre, including the views of residents living in or close to the centre. This information could also establish the degree of linked trips;
- perception of safety and occurrence of crime: should include views and information on safety and security, and where appropriate, information for monitoring the evening and night-time economy;
- state of the town centre and environmental quality: should include information on problems (such as air pollution, noise, clutter, litter and graffiti) and positive factors (such as trees, landscaping and open spaces).

### Proposed Changes to PPS6

The proposed amendments to Chapter 4 of PPS6 (2005) acknowledge that town centre health checks should be used to inform judgements about the impact of planning policies and development proposals on town centres.

The list of key indicators is proposed to be amended to include the collection of data on:

- the length of time properties have been vacant;
- land values and the length of time key sites have remained undeveloped;
- the threat of terrorism and its impact upon the perception of safety.

## Benchmarking Thatcham

In order to evaluate the town centre offer of Thatcham, we have sought to benchmark Thatcham with another comparable town. 'Benchmarking' is a useful tool in that it allows a direct comparison to be made between towns of similar characteristics (in terms of population, size and relationship to surrounding settlements) and the range of facilities present to be compared. In terms of demographic and geodemographic profile, both Hythe and Thatcham have relatively affluent populations and similar relationships to nearby, higher-order centres.

2001 Census data confirmed that Hythe had a population of 19,599 and covered an area of 543 hectares, which is broadly comparable to Thatcham's population of 22,989 and area of 488 hectares.

	<i>Thatcham</i>	<i>Hythe</i>
Population (2001 Census)	22,989	19,599
Geographic area (hectares)	488	543
Nearest competing centre	Newbury	Southampton
Distance to competing centre (miles)	3	8 (3 via passenger ferry)

Nathaniel Lichfield and Partners (NLP, 2006) were commissioned by New Forest District Council (NFDC) to evaluate the town centre of Hythe and the other district and local centres within and around the New Forest. NLP's study confirmed that Hythe is a small town centre that primarily meets the needs of its own catchment population and a small part of the surrounding catchment area.

The NLP study confirms that Hythe has around 100 commercial properties and provides a limited range of shops and services. The consultants' study recommended that Hythe should seek to cater for bulk convenience shopping and services but aim to provide for a more limited range of comparison shopping than the four neighbouring centres of Lymington, New Milton, Ringwood and Totton.

We have undertaken our own audit of Hythe town centre (January 2009) and the uses found within it. Hythe has 90 commercial premises at ground floor level in the town centre, but only one supermarket; a Waitrose store offering approximately 850 square metres of net floorspace. The town also benefits from 2 bakers, 4 clothes shops, 2 shoe shops, 2 newsagents, 4 banks, 6 cafes/restaurants, a public house, a post office, a snooker club and a pharmacy. Hythe has a Boots pharmacy, a Superdrug store and a Julian Graves wholefoods store, these are notable 'multiple' retailers and when combined with the diversity of uses, it indicates that Hythe has a relatively vital town centre.

Table Comparing Current Land Uses between Thatcham and Hythe 2009

	A1		A2		A3		A4		A5		B1		C3		D1		D2		SG		Vacant		Total Units
<b>Thatcham</b>	48	37%	20	15%	8	6%	5	4%	6	5%	10	7%	15	12%	3	2%	0	0%	1	1%	14	11%	130
<b>Hythe</b>	56	63%	17	19%	5	6%	2	2%	2	2%	0	0%	0	0%	3	3%	1	1%	1	1%	3	3%	91

Hythe, like Thatcham has a tight urban grain (the pattern of the arrangement and size of buildings and their plots), which makes the assembly of large development sites more difficult. Hythe has undergone comprehensive redevelopment in the past. In the early 1970's, The Marsh development created 20 small retail units at ground floor level, all facing out on to the street. Although in need of modernisation this development contains only one vacant unit and is trading successfully. Hythe has only three vacant units in the town centre.

Unlike Thatcham, Hythe is constrained by the sea (Southampton Water) to the east and a railway line to the south. These constraints have served to confine the town centre.

A large Tesco supermarket was built on the edge of Hythe in the late 1980s and resulted in considerable food expenditure leaking out of Hythe town centre to the out of centre store. This has affected Hythe in the same way as the Tesco at Newbury Retail Park has affected Thatcham.

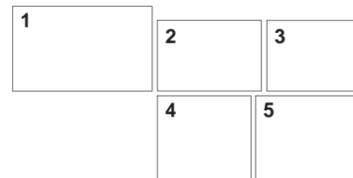
Hythe is similar to Thatcham in that it does not provide enough employment opportunities for its resident population. Accordingly there is a large population that commute to places of work outside the town. Hythe's residents, like those who live in Thatcham have developed a habit of travelling away from the town centre to meet employment, leisure and shopping needs. The geographic location of Hythe also ensures that persons travelling back to Hythe from major employment centres pass by the town centre of Totton which contains Morrisons and Asda supermarkets, and will pass by the out of town Tesco supermarket on the edge of Hythe.

Hythe, has a small element of tourism that helps to boost the town centre function. However, due to its close proximity to the more recognised tourist destinations of Lyminster, Lyndhurst and Brockenhurst, Hythe's main focus is on meeting the local shopping needs of its inhabitants.

Importantly in considering the feasibility of a new centrally located community facility within the town centre of Thatcham, Hythe has a new library facility in the town centre, situated adjacent to a shopping precinct. The library, built on the site of the old library was opened in May 1999 at a build cost of £574,000 and provides a useful community facility offering a venue for school breakfast clubs and after school home work clubs.

Hythe does not have a train station. Like Thatcham, it relies on buses to provide a convenient alternative to the private motor car.

On an initial evaluation however it is clear that notwithstanding its lower population (2001 Census) Hythe town centre performs better than Thatcham against a number of recognised indicators of town centre health.



**Shops within Hythe town centre**

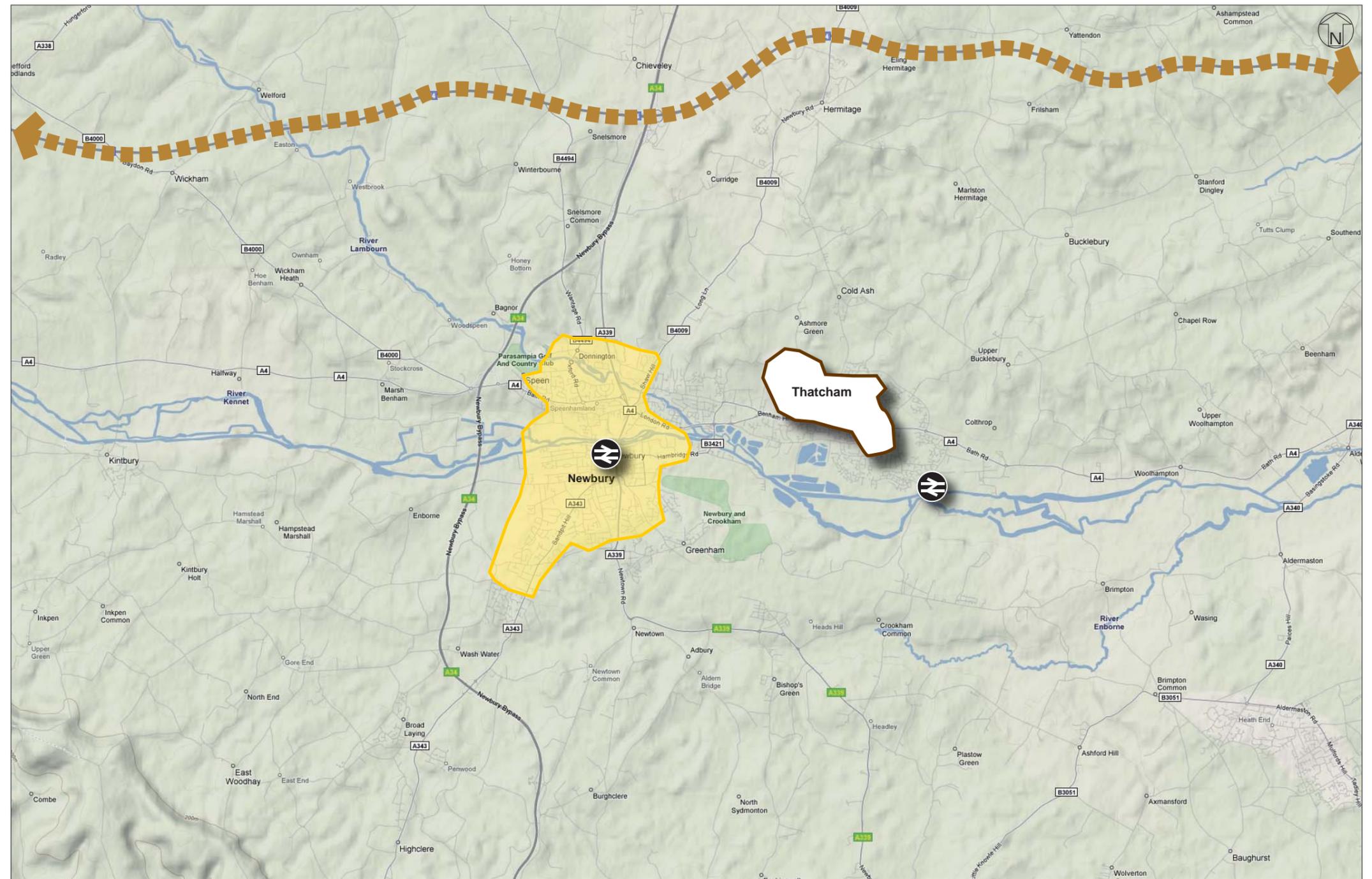
- 1 Waitrose store, Hythe
- 2 High Street, Hythe
- 3 Pylewell shopping parade, Hythe
- 4/5 Traditional shopfronts, Hythe



### Thatcham and Newbury

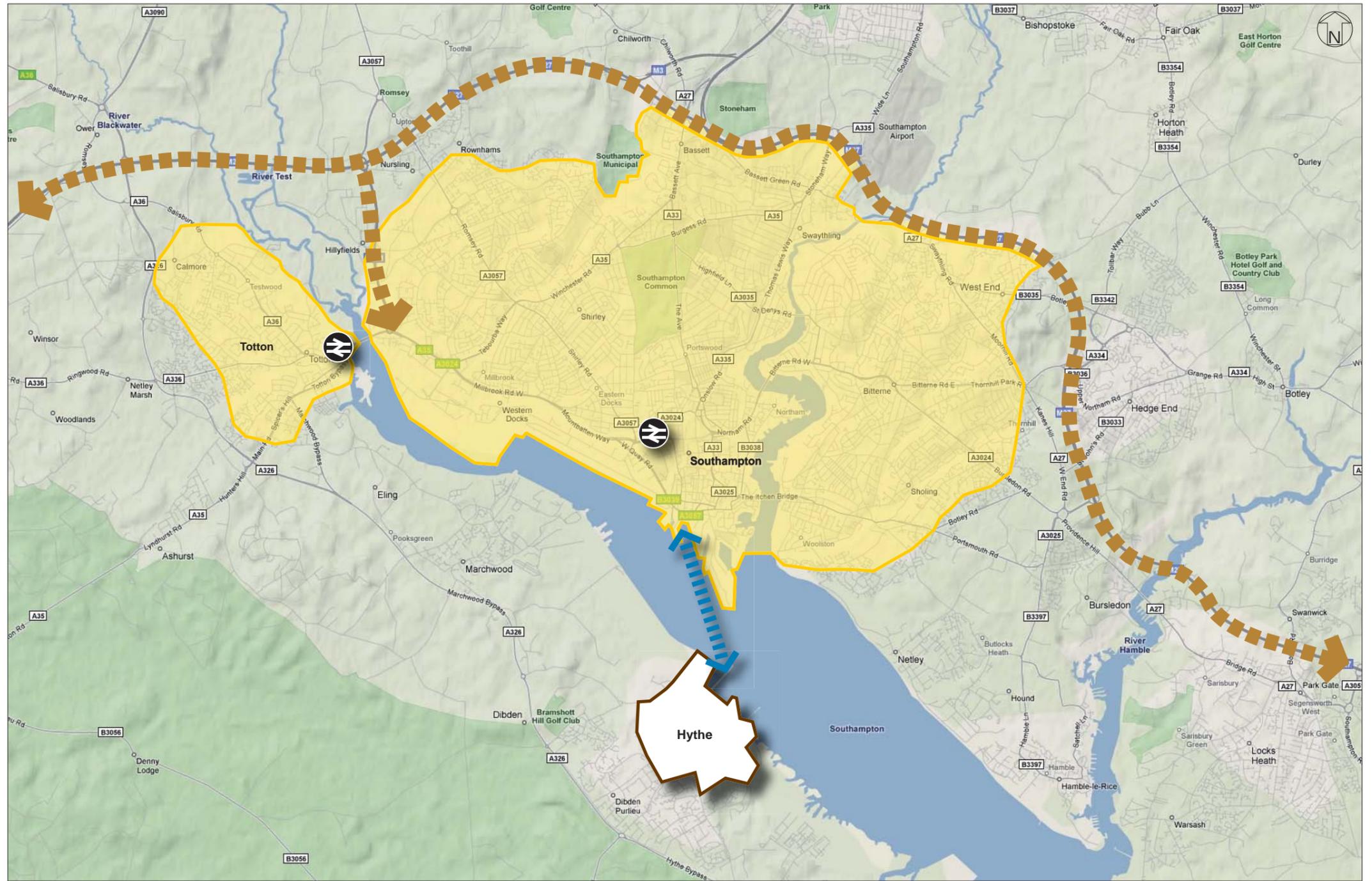
The plans opposite show the relationship of Thatcham to Newbury and Hythe to Totton and Southampton in support of the benchmarking exercise.

	Thatcham	Hythe
Population (2001 Census)	22,989	19,599
Geographic area (ha)	488	543
Nearest competing centre	Newbury	Southampton
Distance to competing centre (miles)	3	8 (3 passenger ferry)



-  Thatcham
-  Competing Centre of Newbury
-  Motorway Network
-  Main Railway Stations

Hythe, Southampton and Totton



-  Hythe
-  Competing Centres of Southampton and Totton
-  Motorway Network
-  Passenger Ferry Link
-  Main Railway Station

0 2.5  
kilometres



## Thatcham - Local Retailing Context

The five centres within the West Berkshire District each have their own distinct character, role and function within the District's town centre hierarchy.

Newbury is the largest town centre in the District and it is the main location for a variety of shopping, leisure and employment uses. Hungerford, Thatcham, Pangbourne and Theale are subordinate to Newbury in terms of their scale and the quality of their retail, leisure and employment offer. The main characteristics and role of these centres are briefly set out below.

### Thatcham

Thatcham is a small town centre and although it is larger than Hungerford, it serves a more local catchment. This is because Thatcham lies in close proximity to Newbury and competes directly with Newbury's leisure, employment and retail offer. As a result, Thatcham's retail offer is mainly dominated by convenience goods retailing, anchored by a Waitrose and Co-Op supermarket.

### Newbury

Newbury benefits from good road and rail transport links, with good access to London and Heathrow airport. The construction of the Newbury by-pass and the resultant pedestrianisation schemes in the town centre have significantly improved the town centre environment over the last decade.

Other major visitor and tourist attractions include the Newbury Racecourse, the Kennet and Avon Canal and the surrounding countryside, much of which is designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). Although Newbury serves an affluent, largely rural catchment, its market share has felt the impact in recent years of the rapid growth of higher order larger retail centres outside the District, including Reading, Swindon, Oxford, Basingstoke and Southampton.

### Hungerford

Hungerford is a small town centre and has developed a niche market as a destination for antique shopping. It is an historic town with many fine old buildings that offer an attractive backdrop to the town centre experience and serves a wide catchment area from the local rural areas.

### Pangbourne

Pangbourne is a local centre within an attractive village setting. Pangbourne functions as a convenience goods shopping destination, but it is also supported by a range of service businesses, pubs, restaurants and hot food take aways. Pangbourne like Thatcham competes with a nearby larger centre, in this case Reading.

### Theale

Theale, like Pangbourne, is a local centre within an attractive village setting. Theale functions as a convenience goods shopping destination, but it is also supported by a range of service businesses, restaurants and hot food take aways.

## Focus on Thatcham

### Convenience Goods

Thatcham's town centre predominantly functions as a food shopping destination and this is reflected by the fact that convenience goods retailing accounts for almost 38% of all floorspace, which is 2½ times above the UK average. The majority of this floorspace is provided by the Waitrose and Co-operative supermarkets.

### Comparison Goods

Comparison goods in Thatcham represents only 30% of all floorspace, compared to the national average of 55%. This is a significant weakness in the retail structure of the town centre. Whilst it would be expected that residents of a town centre of Thatcham's size would gravitate to higher-order centres (Newbury/Reading/Basingstoke) for comparison goods purchases (for reasons of improved choice and overall shopping experience) the lack of a base level of comparison offer undermines the town centre. Those sectors under-represented include clothing, DIY and sports goods. Thatcham is reliant upon the weekly stall market to offer comparison goods retailing and does not benefit from a department store.

### Service Businesses

Thatcham has an above average number of service businesses, particularly banks, buildings societies and estate agencies. This high proportion of service businesses reinforces Thatcham's role as a local destination and contributes to footfall within the town centre.

### Food and Drink Uses

There is an above average representation of food and drink premises in Thatcham. However, with the exception of several pubs run by chain breweries, there are no major 'multiple' restaurants or wine bars. A 'multiple' is a commercial premises owned or franchised to/from a national chain. A Subway sandwich bar trades within the Kingsland Centre and is the only food and drink multiple in Thatcham.

### Kingsland Centre

With the exception of Newbury, Thatcham is unique amongst the other retail centres within West Berkshire as it has a managed shopping centre. The Kingsland Shopping Centre, which opened in 1996 is a small centre at 3,346 sq. m gross retail space. Crucially it is anchored by Waitrose which is a significant attractor of shopping trips.



Entrances to the Waitrose store and smaller Co-op supermarket, Thatcham

## Uses and Activities

Thattham town centre has a broad mix of uses though as a whole it does not contain many multiples. It does however contain a significant number of small independent traders.

Shops are mainly concentrated within the central area of The Broadway. Larger convenience goods shopping is represented by the anchor Waitrose Store to the east of The Broadway and two Co-operative stores also on The Broadway. There is a noticeable absence of comparison shops within the town centre.

Although small offices and professional services are dotted across the town centre, there is a noticeable cluster around the southern end of The Broadway. This lends this part of the town centre a quieter and less active character.

Community and religious activities are mainly located on the periphery of the town centre. There is a clear concentration of activities on Brownsfield Road with the Town Council Offices, Medical Practice and Library. The United Reformed Church and Church of St Mary's are on Church Lane.

In terms of uses that keep the town centre alive during the evening, the High Street contains a number of restaurants and takeaways. There are a total of four pubs in the town centre - the Crickets and White Hart on the High Street and Kings Head and The Old Chequers at the northern and southern end of The Broadway respectively. The central shopping area of The Broadway benefits from little in the way of evening uses.

There are a number of vacant units throughout the town centre. These include two properties on the High Street (formerly Roc Telephone and no.29), 9 buildings on The Broadway and 1 unit in The Courtyard. The vacant premises at the corner of the High Street and The Broadway (formerly Threshers Off Licence) and at the top of The Broadway (formerly Wyatt's Butchers) are key locations within the structure of the town centre.

## Ground Floor Land Uses



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0 50 100  
metres

### Building Uses and Clusters

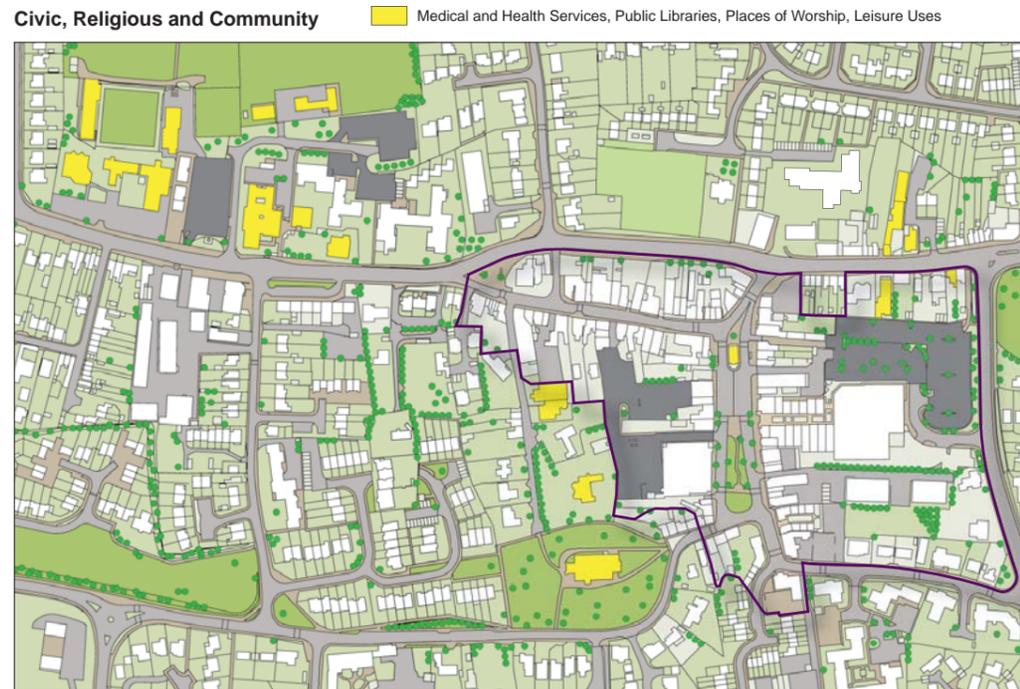
- Shops (A1)
- Professional Services (A2)
- Restaurants and Cafes (A3)
- Drinking Establishments (A4)
- Hot Food Takeaways (A5)
- Business (B1)
- General Industrial (B2)
- Residential Institutions (C2)
- Residential (C3)
- Non Residential Institutions (D1)
- Car Parking
- Sui Generis
- Public Open Space
- Vacant
- Existing Town Centre



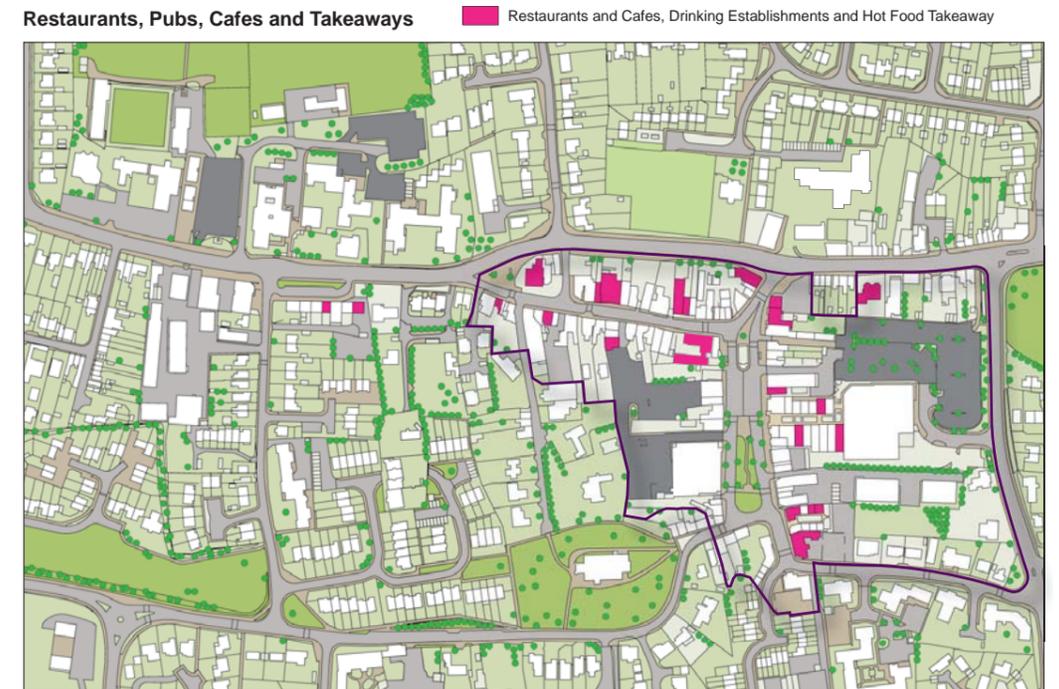
**Retail** ■ Food ■ Non-Food



**Offices and Professional Services** ■ Business, Financial and Professional Services



**Civic, Religious and Community** ■ Medical and Health Services, Public Libraries, Places of Worship, Leisure Uses



**Restaurants, Pubs, Cafes and Takeaways** ■ Restaurants and Cafes, Drinking Establishments and Hot Food Takeaway

## Diversity of Uses

PPS6 (2005) advises that the diversity of main town centre uses (by number, type and amount of floorspace) and the amount of space in use for different functions, such as offices; shopping; leisure, cultural and entertainment activities; pubs, cafes and restaurants is a key indicator of the health of a town centre.

The Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) Order 1987 and its subsequent amendments, set out the following classes of use for England. Where uses do not fall within the four main use classes (Classes A, B, C and D) they are classified as 'sui generis'; which is Latin for 'in a class of their own'.

### The Use Classes Order

**Class A1** (shops) - shops, retail warehouses, hairdressers, undertakers, travel and ticket agencies, post offices, pet shops, sandwich bars, showrooms, domestic hire shops, dry cleaners and funeral directors.

**Class A2** (financial and professional services) - banks, building societies, estate and employment agencies, professional and financial services and betting offices.

**Class A3** (restaurants and cafés) - for the sale of food and drink for consumption on the premises - restaurants, snack bars and cafes.

**Class A4** (drinking establishments) - public houses, wine bars or other drinking establishments (but not a night clubs).

**Class A5** (hot food takeaways) - for the sale of hot food for consumption off the premises.

**Class B1** (business) - offices, research and development, light industry appropriate in a residential area.

**Class B2** (general industrial)

**Classes B3 to B7** (special industrial groups)

**Class B8** (storage or distribution) - this class includes open air storage.

**Class C1** (hotels) - hotels, boarding and guest houses where no significant element of care is provided.

**Class C2** (residential institutions) - residential care homes, hospitals, nursing homes, boarding schools, residential colleges and training centres.

**Class C2A** (secure residential institution) - use for a provision of secure residential accommodation, including use as a prison, young offenders institution, detention centre, secure training centre, custody centre, short term holding centre, secure hospital, secure local authority accommodation or use as a military barracks.

**Class C3** (dwellinghouses) - family houses, or houses occupied by up to six residents living together as a single household, including a household where care is provided for residents.

**Class D1** (non-residential institutions) - clinics, health centres, crèches, day nurseries, day centres, schools, art galleries, museums, libraries, halls, places of worship, church halls, law court. Non residential education and training centres.

**Class D2** (assembly and leisure) - cinemas, music and concert halls, bingo and dance halls (but not night clubs), swimming baths, skating rinks, gymnasiums or sports arenas (except for motor sports, or where firearms are used).

**Sui Generis** - theatres, houses in multiple paying occupation, hostels providing no significant element of care, scrap yards. Petrol filling stations and shops selling and/or displaying motor vehicles. Retail warehouse clubs, nightclubs, launderettes, taxi businesses, amusement centres. Casinos.

West Berkshire Council's Property Service have undertaken annual reviews of occupants in Thatcham since between 2002 and 2007. We have undertaken a review in October 2008 which combined with the West Berkshire Council data provides a set of data that we can examine to identify trends in the levels of vacancies and the diversity of uses. Since 2004 the number of Class A1 retail units has fallen, this corresponds with an increase in the levels of vacancies. Levels of Class A2, A3, A4, A5 and Sui Generis uses have remained broadly static since 2002.

### Convenience Goods

Thatcham's town centre predominantly functions as a food shopping destination and this is reflected by the fact that convenience goods retailing accounts for almost 38% of all floorspace, which is 2½ times above the UK average. The majority of this floorspace is provided by the Waitrose and Co-operative supermarkets.

### Comparison Goods

Comparison goods in Thatcham represents 30% of all floorspace, compared to the national average of 55%. Those sectors under-represented include clothing, DIY and sports goods. There are no shops in Thatcham selling footwear or clothing, except the charity shops. It is reliant upon the weekly market to offer comparison goods retailing and does not benefit from a department store. The market does frequently host a footwear and clothing stall, but we do not consider that this offers an appropriate level of choice for Thatcham. We would expect to see a higher level of comparison floorspace, and a broader range of comparison goods sold in a town centre of this size.

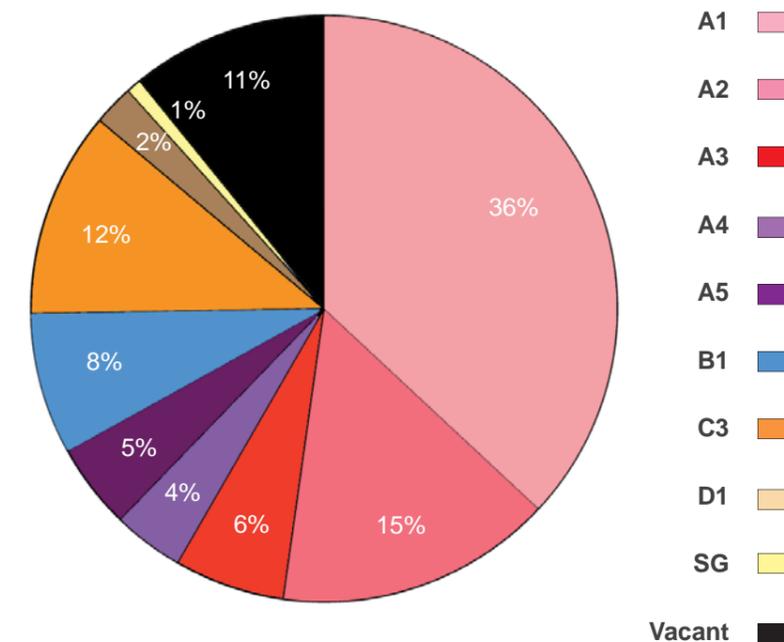
### Service Businesses

Thatcham has an above average number of service businesses, particularly banks, buildings societies and estate agencies. This high proportion of service businesses underpins Thatcham's principle role as a local destination. Barclays, HSBC and Lloyds TSB occupy prime spots on the Broadway. Natwest also occupies a prominent unit on the High Street. Other banks, building societies and estate agents occupy premises in the High Street at less favourable positions.

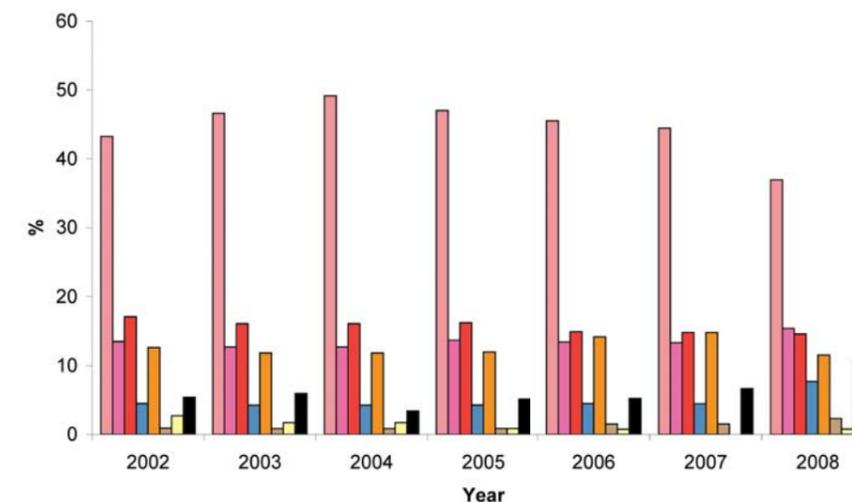
### Food and Drink Uses

There is an above average representation of food and drink premises in Thatcham: the town centre contains numerous restaurants, hot food takeaways and public houses. However, with the exception of several pubs run by chain breweries, there are no 'multiple' restaurants or wine bars. A 'multiple' is a commercial premises owned or franchised to/from a national chain. A Subway sandwich bar trades within the Kingsland Shopping Centre and is the only food multiple in Thatcham.

Diversity of Uses by Use Class in 2008 (Turley Associates, 2008)



Diversity of Uses by Use Class 2002 - 2008 (WBC Property Services, 2002-2008)



## The Amount of Retail, Leisure and Office Floorspace

PPS6 (2005) states that the amount of retail, leisure and office floorspace in edge-of-centre and out of centre locations should be measured to inform a town centre health check.

Thatcham, due to its layout and tight urban grain is a compact town centre. Crown Mead does provide a shopping destination but this is primarily used as a top up destination by local residents and people driving to it by car either as a single trip or on their way to or from work, along the A4 (Bath Road).

The American Golf Discount Centre is a large retail unit in an out of centre location but owing to the limited range of products sold and the specialist nature of golf, it does not relate to or cause any substantial harm to, the town centre.

### Newbury Retail Park

The Newbury Retail Park in Greenham is a large out of town retail destination situated to the south-east of Newbury and to the south-west of Thatcham. The retail park is anchored by a Tesco superstore and also contains an Argos, Borders, Currys, Evans, Homebase, In-Store, JJB Sports, Mothercare, New Look, Next, Outfit, Rosebys and Sportsworld units. The retail park also contains a Pizza Hut and McDonalds that add to the attractiveness of the destination.

There is no doubt that the Retail Park provides an alternative destination to Thatcham town centre for many Thatcham residents and has been harmful to the town centre.

1	2
3	4

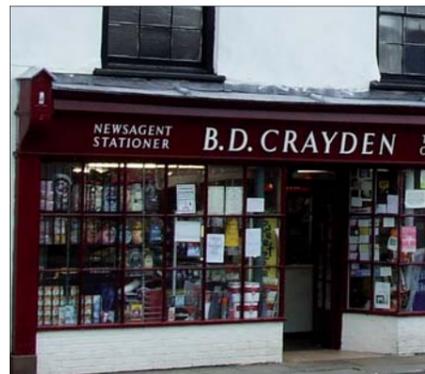
- 1 Traditional Shop front, 57 The Broadway
- 2 Traditional Shop front, 11 The Broadway
- 3 Co-op convenience store, northern end of The Broadway
- 4 Co-op Supermarket, southern end of The Broadway

## Potential Capacity for Growth or Change

PPS6 (2005) advises that the potential capacity for growth or change of centres in the network and any opportunities for centres to expand or consolidate, typically measured in the amount of land available for new or more intensive forms of town centre development is a key indicator of the current and predicted strength of a town centre.

Thatcham is heavily constrained by the fine urban grain and a lack of space within which to grow.

Land to the east of The Broadway including surface car parks, Kingsland Shopping Centre and vacant warehouse units provides an opportunity for expansion of the centre and we note the recent granting of outline planning permission for the redevelopment of the Kingsland Shopping Centre, to provide 17,201 sq m (GEA) of additional floorspace including larger units that are currently available elsewhere in the town centre. This proposed development represents the most important redevelopment scheme for Thatcham town centre since the construction of the Kingsland Shopping Centre in the early 1980s.



## Retailer Representation

PPS6 (2005) advises that retailer representation and the intentions of retailers to change representation, including: existence and changes in representation of types of retailer, including street markets, and the demand of retailers wanting to come into the centre, or to change their representation in the centre, or to reduce or close their representation are all key indicators of health and vitality of town centres.

Convenience retailing is dominated by Waitrose and the Co-operative stores. There are no independent grocers or green-grocers and the last independent butcher (Wyatt's) closed in 2007.

There are no national comparison goods multiples represented in Thatcham and we regard this as unusual for a town of this size. There are a number of independent comparison outlets (including a number of niche retailers). However the absence of any national comparison multiples is a weakness of the town centre.

The Co-operative, have two premises in Thatcham; a small supermarket and a convenience store.

Mintel, Focus and Experian are well known agencies that collate data on the top 710 towns and cities across the UK, ranked by size and turnover per person. Thatcham is not ranked within the top 710 retail centres and we have been unable to confirm from available databases whether there are any retailers looking for sites or floorspace within the town centre.

Data available for Newbury notes that the following top 20 retailers are not present in Newbury: John Lewis, BHS, Lloyds Pharmacy, Wilkinson, Co-operative Department Stores and Primark.

## Shopping Rents

PPS6 (2005) advises that shopping rents, including the pattern of movement in Zone A rents within primary shopping areas (i.e. The rental value for the first 6 metres depth of floorspace in retail units from the shop window) is a key indicator for town centre health checks.

Initial discussions with local and national commercial agents (including Savills, Dreweatt Neate and Ansell's) has revealed that rents in Thatcham are set at low levels. It is interesting to note that all of the agents have reported that rents sought on vacant properties in Thatcham have been reduced to stimulate interest.

The survey of the town centre identified a number of vacant properties. The vacant properties and the details of commercial property agents marketing property in the town centre were noted. Ansell's, Dreweatt Neate, Quintons and Savills are currently marketing property within the study area. There are only 3 vacant ground floor premises in Thatcham town centre being actively marketed for sale or to let. These are: 40 and 41 The Broadway and 13-15 High Street.

13-15 High Street, the former Roc Telephones store, is a medium sized retail unit offering 51 square metres (550 sq ft) gross internal floorspace in a good prominent position. It is being marketed to let at £14,500 per annum; which equates to £283 per square metre (£26 per sq ft).

40 The Broadway, the former Little Peeps store, is a larger retail unit offering 123 square metres (1,326 sq ft) gross internal floorspace in a good prominent position. It is being marketed to let at £20,000 per annum; which equates to £162 per square metre (£15 per sq ft). The commercial agent advises that there had been a modest level of interest in this property, but feedback received stated that the site's location was unsuitable for the intended occupier.

41 The Broadway, the former Thatcham Health Shop, is a small sized retail unit offering 24 square metres (263 sq ft) gross internal floorspace in a good prominent position. It is being marketed to let at £9,000 per annum; which equates to £368 per square metre (£34 per sq ft).

One further unit, at the corner of the Kingsland Shopping Centre and The Broadway is being marketed however, the letting agents were unable to confirm the rents being sought.

Two other prominent premises are vacant. The former Wyatt Butchers and the former Threshers off licence both occupy prominent positions at the corner of High Street and The Broadway but are not being marketed for sale or to let. This could indicate a lack of confidence in the property market.

Only one first floor unit is being marketed. 27a The Broadway is a small first floor office of 47 square metres (513 sq ft) gross internal floorspace. It is being marketed to let at £9,000 per annum; which equates to £188 per square metre (£17 per sq ft). The commercial agent advises that there has been little interest in this property.

The Focus town reports for Newbury and Reading (2009), which use rental completions data from King Sturrgge confirm that rents for Zone A primary retail areas are on average £240 per sq ft for Reading and £120 per sq ft in Newbury.

Whilst this is a limited set of data, we can establish that rental values sought in Thatcham (between £15 and £34 per sq ft) for units in the primary zones are not unreasonable and should not be regarded as a barrier to occupancy.



Currently vacant unit at the prominent corner location of the High Street and The Broadway

## Vacancy Rates

PPS6 (2005) advises that the proportion of vacant street level property is an important indicator of the health and vitality of a town centre. However PPS6 (2005) advises that vacancies can arise even in the strongest town centres, and this indicator must be used with care. Vacancies in secondary frontages and changes to other uses will also be useful indicators.

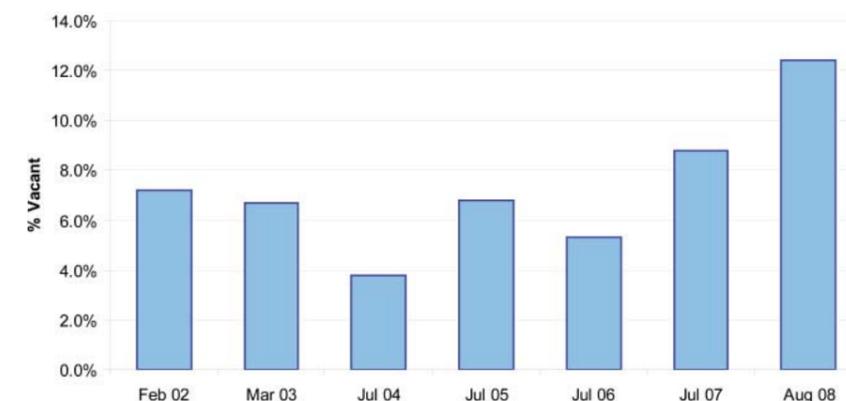
There are some notable vacancies in Thatcham at key locations, notably the former Threshers at the corner of The Broadway and the High Street and the former Wyatts butcher on The Broadway near its junction with Bath Road.

Overall, the levels of vacancies have risen since July 2004 from less than 4% to just over 12% by August 2008.

This figure must be used with caution as it is noted that 3 premises remain vacant within the Kingsland Shopping Centre, which is the subject of an outline planning permission for redevelopment. The proposed redevelopment may be acting as a barrier to re-occupation on the part of either the landlord (who may not wish to commit to long-term leases) or potential occupiers.

### Thatcham town centre Vacancy Rates 2002 - 2008

(WBC Property Services, 2002-2208 and Turley Associates 2008)





Entrance to the Kingsland Shopping Centre on The Broadway



Shops along the key walkway within the Kingsland Shopping Centre

## Commercial Yields on Non-Domestic Property

PPS6 (2005) advises that commercial yields on non-domestic property (i.e. the capital value in relation to the expected market rental) demonstrates the confidence of investors in the long-term profitability of the centre for retail, office and other commercial developments. PPS6 (2005) also advises that this indicator should be used with care.

The Valuation Office confirm that:

“Yield is a measure of property value which enables values of properties of different size, location and other characteristics to be compared. It is the ratio of rental income to capital value, and is expressed in terms of the open market rents of a property as a percentage of the capital value. Thus, the higher the yield the lower the rental income is valued, and vice versa. A high yield is an indication of concern by investors that rental income might grow less rapidly and be less secure than in a property with a low yield.” (Valuation Office, Property Market Report, 2008).

The Valuation Office monitors prime retail yields in some 550 shopping centres throughout England. Their measurement of yields:

“are based on the evidence of transactions where individual properties are bought and sold. Because the circumstances of individual properties vary, transactional evidence needs to be interpreted to allow comparison on a like for like basis between different towns and over time. The volume of transactions is small relative to the number of properties, so the interpretation of evidence by the valuer necessarily involves an element of judgement.”

The Valuation Office and third party data agencies (e.g. EGI and Focus) have been tracking shopping centre yields since 1994 for the top 710 towns in the UK. Thatcham is not within the top 710 towns and there has been little investment activity in Thatcham over the last two years that can therefore be used to ascertain market conditions. As a result there is no information available on prime yields.

## Pedestrian Flows

PPS6 (2005) advises that pedestrian flows (footfall) are a key indicator of the health and vitality of shopping streets. Footfalls are measured by the numbers and movement of people on the streets, in different parts of the centre at different times of the day and evening, who are available for businesses to attract into shops, restaurants or other facilities.

Pedestrian flowcounts were undertaken in Thatcham on 16 and 17 May 2008 by specialists Pedestrian Market Research Services (PMRS).

The weekly footfall figures show that the average counts for Thatcham are calculated at 5,870. The highest counts are recorded at the Waitrose Store entrance (18,950) where counts are 223% above the average, with a significant rise in activity around the entrance on Saturdays.

High pedestrian footfall rates are also recorded in the mall at the Kingsland Shopping Centre (16,060 – 174% above the average), although there is a slight drop in footfall rates between the entrance to Waitrose and across the mall which indicates that some shopper visits are only to Waitrose and that they do not make linked trips to the wider town centre. This is particularly apparent on Saturdays.

These figures therefore indicate that a significant number of people visit Waitrose from the east. Whilst we cannot be certain, it is presumed that these persons park their own vehicles in the car park adjacent to the car park before visiting the store. We cannot rule out the possibility that pedestrians may walk through the car park from the east.

Generally, the footfall rates drop off beyond the Kingsland Shopping Centre and onto The Broadway. However, both the Co-operative supermarket and HSBC Bank on the west of The Broadway have above average footfall counts (8,790 and 8,010 respectively); notwithstanding the above, this indicates that some people are crossing over the Broadway and making a linked trip out of the Kingsland Shopping Centre to the wider town centre. Footfall counts outside the White Hart Public House along The Broadway are also relatively high (7,760).

However, pedestrian footfall figures are below average at the northern and southern extremes of The Broadway, indicating that few people venture past The Broadway Green or beyond the junction with the High Street.

Pedestrian Flow Counts May 2008 (PMRS, 2008)

The High Street itself generally has below average footfall figures, and this trend increases further west along the High Street with footfall figures dropping to 37% below the average outside the Light Lunch Café (3,710 at 34 High Street). However, the southern side of the High Street has noticeably more pedestrian footfalls than the northern side, with the northern side recording counts of 2,290 towards the east outside Peter Burke Photography and only 740 towards the west outside Spice Indian restaurant.

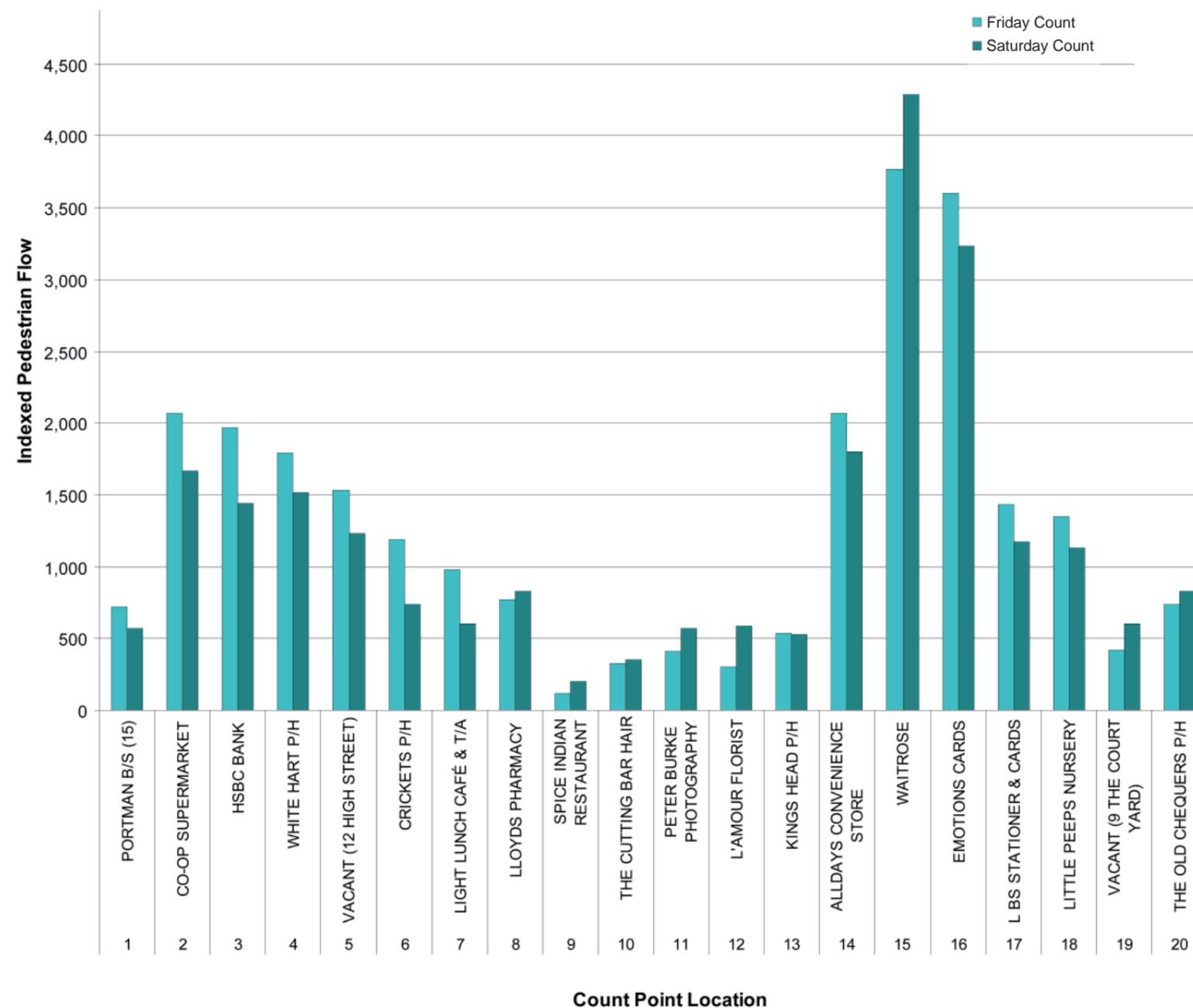
This is between 61% - 87% below the average footfall counts for Thattham and indicates that people are not using the northern side of the High Street as much as the southern side.

Overall, the highest pedestrian footfall counts are in the east by Waitrose and the lowest counts are in the west by Spice Indian restaurant. The figures indicate that many people visit Waitrose and the Kingsland Shopping Centre but do not make linked trips to the wider town centre. Shoppers who do make linked trips tend to stay within the central part of The Broadway and the southern side of the High Street. Footfall counts decrease dramatically towards the edge of the town centre and also towards the west.

The table below summarises the pedestrian counts and the individual locations are shown on the plan opposite.

Rank	Count Location	No	Friday Count	Saturday Count	Week Count
1	Waitrose Store	15	3,770	4,290	18,950
2	Emotions Cards	16	3,600	3,230	16,060
3	Alldays Convenience Store	14	2,070	1,800	9,110
4	Co-operative Supermarket	2	2,070	1,670	8,790
5	HSBC Bank	3	1,970	1,440	8,010
6	White Hart Public House	4	1,790	1,520	7,760
7	Vacant (12 High St)	5	1,530	1,230	6,490
8	L BS Stationer and Cards	17	1,430	1,170	6,110
9	Little Peeps Nursery	18	1,350	1,130	5,820
10	The Crickets Public House	6	1,190	740	4,520
11	Lloyds Pharmacy*	8	770	830	3,740
12	Light Lunch Café and Takeaway	7	980	600	3,710
13	The Old Chequers Public House	20	740	825	3,670
14	Portman B/S	1	720	570	3,040
15	Kings Head Public House	13	540	530	2,510
16	Vacant (9 The Courtyard)	19	420	600	2,400
17	Peter Burke Photography	11	410	570	2,290
18	L'Amour Florist	12	300	590	2,080
19	The Cutting Hair Bar	10	330	350	1,590
20	Spice Indian Restaurant	9	120	200	740

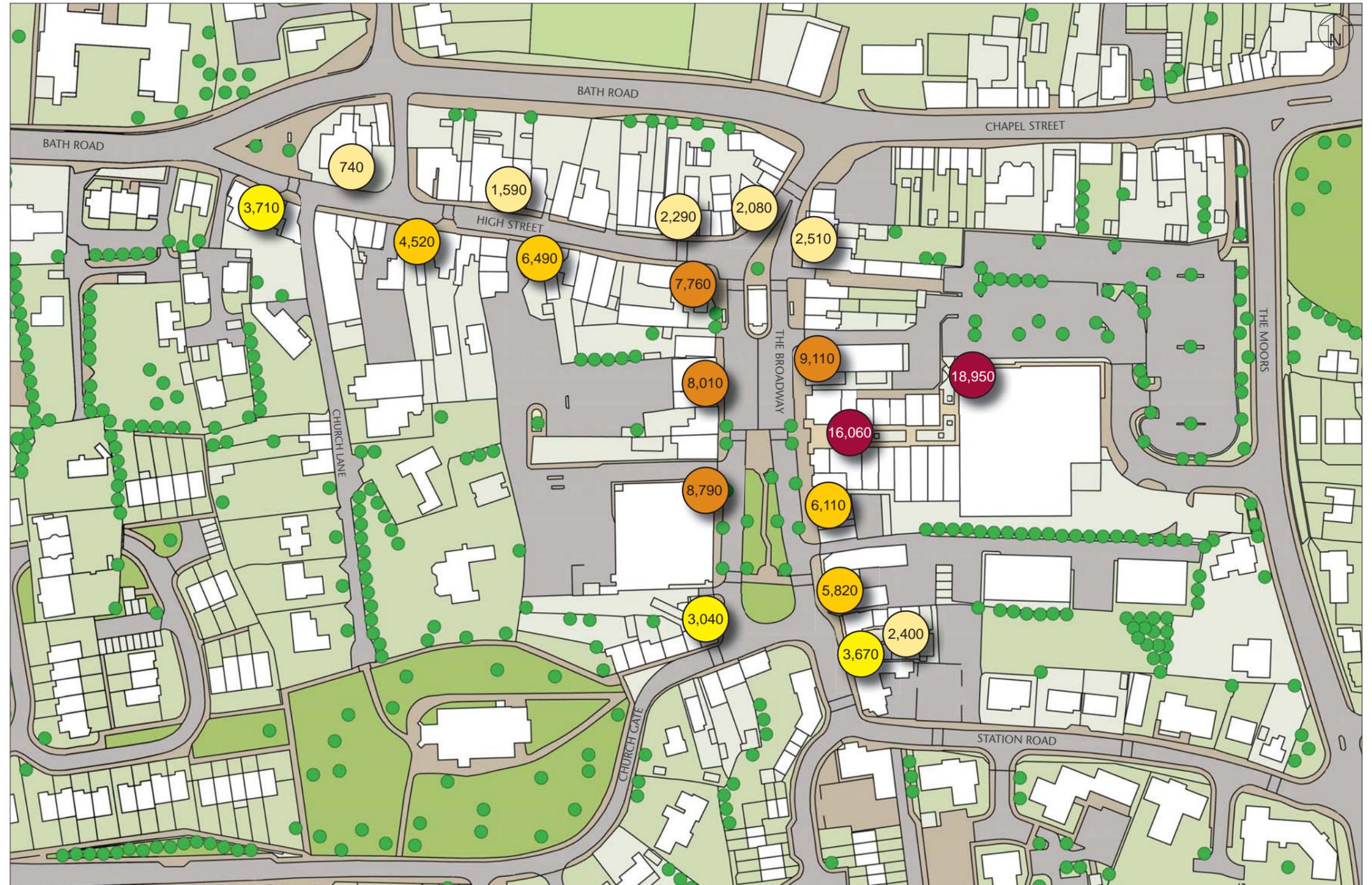
\*Count location at Crown Mead - outside the town centre and area included on the plan opposite



**Pedestrian Footfall Weekly Counts (May 2008)**

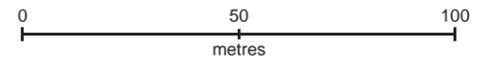


Pedestrian activity within the town centre, High Street



 Count Location with Footfall Figure

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## Accessibility

PPS6 (2005) advises that accessibility is a major indicator of the state of town centres. Health checks should consider the ease and convenience of access by a choice of means of travel, including the quality, quantity and type of car parking; the frequency and quality of public transport services and the range of customer origins served; and, the quality of provision for pedestrians, cyclists and disabled people and the ease of access from main arrival points to the main attractions.

The town centre is easily accessible to most residents but has few dedicated parking spaces for disabled people. We understand that West Berkshire Council will be de-regularising car parking in the District in April 2009 and that car parking will be reviewed before and after this process.

### Car Parking

The town centre is served by five small to medium sized car parks. Whilst stakeholder consultation identified that 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.

The Thatcham Vision report states that “the perception of there being not enough parking is more often related to driver perception and behaviour, including an unwillingness to pay 30p to use the main car park, rather than a lack of parking itself”.

The Thatcham Vision also observes that there is an expectation amongst respondents that parking should be free, and that many drivers wish to be able to park next to their chosen destination. We consider that Thatcham is well served by well located car parks, that enable users to park relatively close to their destination and walk only short distances.

The town centre contains the following car parks:

<i>Car park</i>	<i>No of spaces/fee</i>
The Moors and Kingsland Centre	228 (£)
Rear of Co-Op & Europarks	105 (F/ST)
Memorial Hall	72 (F/ST-3)
Brownsfield Road	59 (F/LT)
Broadway on-street parking	30 (F/ST-0.5*)
High Street on-street parking	6 (F/ST-0.5*)
Total	441

£: fee payable (refundable in Waitrose if £10 spent)

F: Free

ST-X: Short-term max waiting time in hours

LT: No restrictions ex no overnight, lorries or coaches

### Trains

Thatcham Railway Station is managed by First Great Western, which operates train services via Thatcham from London Paddington and Reading to Bedwyn and Newbury. The station itself has relatively good accessibility, with buses to Thatcham town centre and Newbury (routes 2 and 11) stopping at the station every 30 minutes and the 104 service to Calcot and Newbury stopping at the station every 2 hours.

Train services to Newbury operate from 05.43 at a frequency of twice an hour and continue to Bedwyn once an hour, although the frequency of services increases slightly during the morning and evening peaks (typically 3-4 services per hour). The last train to Newbury and Bedwyn is at 23.22. Train services to Reading operate from 05.47 at a frequency of twice an hour and continue to London Paddington once an hour. Once again, the frequency of services increases during the commuter peak periods. The last train to Reading is at 23.24 and the last direct service to London Paddington is at 20.12.

The above services operate a similar timetable in terms of frequency on Saturdays, but unsurprisingly all services operate at a reduced frequency of once an hour on Sundays.

Owing to its location (over a mile away from the town centre) Thatcham railway station is not easily accessible for Thatcham residents who don't have access to cars, especially those living in the north and west of the town.

The majority of rail users are taken to and from the station by car, or drive there themselves, adding to local traffic. Cycle parking has been significantly improved recently and includes some secure storage as well as covered bike racks. However, cycle parking at times is already being used almost to capacity and additional cycle parking will need to be considered in the near future.

Thatcham Railway Station has no toilets. The waiting room and ticket office close soon after mid-day. Feedback from the Thatcham Vision indicates a desire for toilets and a small shop at the station selling food & drink, magazines & newspapers.

Parking is reported to be an issue at the train station, and despite the new layout some commuters are known to be parking in the car park of the adjacent Swan public house.

It is noted that there is a lack of disabled access across Thatcham Level Crossing.

### Buses

Public transport in Thatcham is relatively good, with the town centre being served by both Newbury Buses and Weavaway, which operate a total of 9 routes. Services include the 2, 10, 11, 11A, 12, 99, 101, 102 and 104 bus routes which connect Thatcham to the centre of Newbury, the West Berkshire hospital and Thatcham railway station, as well as surrounding residential areas such as Greenham, Kingsclere and Colthrop.

The 11, 11A, and 102 bus services to Newbury each run at a frequency of twice an hour during peak times, whilst the 12, 104 and 105 services each operate at a frequency of once an hour. The 99 and 101 bus routes offer a slightly more irregular service, running 6 and 8 services respectively a day. Finally, bus route number 10 offers a Monday-Thursday evening service to Newbury consisting of 3 journeys running from 6.30pm to 8.30pm.

Frequency of services will improve as a result of a new service (103) which is being introduced by Newbury Buses from 12 January 2009. This will mean there will be four buses an hour along the A4 between Thatcham Broadway and Newbury Town Centre, providing a complete quarter hour frequency along the most direct route between Thatcham and Newbury all day on Mondays to Saturdays.

### Road safety

In the whole of Thatcham, there have been 107 injury accidents (no fatalities, 20 serious and 87 slight) in the three year period ending 30th September 2006.

As part of ongoing monitoring, West Berkshire Council has identified five accident cluster sites within Thatcham, which have higher accident rates than the district average. These are: The Broadway; A4/Tull Way roundabout; A4 Chapel Street/Stoney Lane junction; A4/Pipers Way junction. There are also more accidents than average on Harts Hill Road and Crookham Hill (West Berkshire Council, November 2006).

Data supplied by West Berkshire Council for all recorded personal injury accidents in Thatcham shows a fairly even distribution of incidents across the district, all of which have occurred on classified roads and not smaller side roads. Four areas have been identified that contain an above average number of incidents - on The Broadway (4 accidents), on the High Street (1 accident), at the level crossing and station environs (7 accidents), and along Bath Road between Brownfield Road and The Moors (8 accidents).

Road safety is a particular issue for children, many having expressed strong views on the subject during the consultation undertaken by The Thatcham Vision team. It is reported that some parents are also fearful of allowing their children to walk or cycle alone (this fear may be transmitted to children, thus the strong views expressed by them during the consultation).

#### Customer and Residents' Views and Behaviour

PPS6 advises that customer and residents' views and behaviour are vital information to feed into a health check. Analysis should include regular surveys and will help authorities in monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of town centre improvements and in setting further priorities. Interviews in the town centre and at home can be used to establish views of both users and non-users of the centre, including the views of residents living in or close to the centre. This information can also establish the degree of linked trips.

The Christmas Festival held on Friday 5 December was a very well attended event and shows a high level of civic pride in Thatcham.

#### Perception of Safety and Crime

PPS6 (2005) advises that the perception of safety and occurrence of crime is a key indicator of the vitality and viability of town centres. Health checks should include views and information on safety and security, and where appropriate, information for monitoring the evening and night-time economy.

This section will draw heavily on the findings of the Thatcham Vision First Action Plan 2007 (The Vision).

The Vision states that there has been a steady decline in the majority of reported crimes in Thatcham in recent years (page 3). However, reported incidents of vandalism have increased in parts of Thatcham.

Comparison between years is difficult because of changes in the way crime is reported. Also, it is likely that incidents are reported more frequently than they were in the past. For example, Thatcham Town Council now keeps a log of all incidents and reports every one to the police, whereas this didn't happen in the past.

Examples of anti-social behaviour cited by respondents of the Thatcham Survey include:

- nuisance neighbours;
- under age drinking;
- rowdy and nuisance behaviour;
- yobbish behaviour and intimidating groups taking over public spaces;
- vandalism, graffiti and fly-posting;
- people dealing and buying drugs on the street;
- speeding;
- dog fouling and littering streets, greenspaces and other areas;
- abandoning cars;
- begging and anti-social drinking;
- the misuse of fireworks.

West Berkshire Council's Satisfaction Survey (2006) - A sample of Thatcham residents indicated that 'level of crime' ranked third out of 22 factors in their priorities for 'things that need improving' in Thatcham, after road and pavement repairs and provision of cultural facilities. Respondents ranked level of crime eighth in response to the question 'Things that are important in making somewhere a good place to live' with low level of pollution, job prospects and education provision forming the top three priorities.

General observations of the town centre do not reveal high levels of vandalism, graffiti or abuse. However, it was noted that plant containers were empty and bus timetables had been removed from several bus shelters. This lack of maintenance can give rise to a feeling that the streetscape is not being cared for, which can breed further abuse and a lack of civic pride.

The Vision states (page 6) that "there are fairly frequent occurrences of vandalism to business properties in Thatcham town centre. Business people have requested a police presence at key times in the town centre. The majority of incidents are related to large groups congregating in The Broadway, who then demonstrate "bravado" by smashing windows and causing other damage to property. This is often associated with under-age drinking. Occasionally this can result in serious assault to individuals."

Other examples cited in the Vision include "vandalism and theft of produce at Henley's Allotments and egg-throwing at properties and vehicles. Recently it has become more common for glass bottles to be thrown and smashed on pavements, in play areas and on cycleways, and for dog bins to be emptied and their contents thrown everywhere".

It has been reported in The Vision that large groups congregating in The Broadway in the evening are intimidating to other users, especially young people (page 6). The consultation identified a need to employ community wardens. This has since been achieved.

Drunken behaviour in the town centre is also reported to result in occasional violence. Publicans in the town have signed up to a 'Pubwatch' scheme, which aims to coordinate information between pubs to reduce anti-social behaviour.

The Vision's consultation exercises have shown that many people are concerned about anti-social behaviour and crime. A small number of well-publicised incidents of violence in the town centre, at night or in the early hours of the morning, have increased public fears. However, it is worth noting that perception of crime is not directly linked to levels of crime.

Reliance on private cars for short trips reduces interaction between people in the town. At night it is rare to see people walking around town – most use their car. As fewer people walk around town, fear of walking at night increases – and as a consequence social interaction between the population decreases. Vandalism and other forms of anti-social behaviour also become anonymous as there is no one to see what is going on.

#### Threat of Terrorism and Criminal Activity

Proposed amendments to PPS6 require that any threat of terrorism is considered as part of a health check. It is considered that the threat of terrorism and criminal activity does not impact upon Thatcham.

#### Air Pollution

Our observations of the town centre reveal that the town centre experiences odours associated with restaurants, hot food take aways and mobile catering units; however, these odours are not so obnoxious that they cause any appreciable harm to the town centre.

Air pollution from vehicles is high along the A4 Bath Road, and pedestrians waiting to cross the road will be exposed to traffic fumes.



## Street and Public Realm Network

The use of the public realm (all those parts of the built and natural environment where the public has free access which covers streets, squares, rights of way, open spaces and parks) should reflect the buildings and spaces that enclose it. These have changed over time across the town centre and are likely to continue to do so. Proposals for the public realm have to meet the needs and quality aspirations of modern users and create a sense of continuity with the past. It also has to be sufficiently simple, robust and flexible to provide a stage on which the public life of Thatcham will be able to be played out in the future.

Investment and improvements in the public realm can contribute to the economic growth of the town centre. Land and property values can be increased, the town centre's image enhanced, productivity improved and new investment attracted.

The historic street and public realm network hierarchy set out in the eighteenth and nineteenth century provided a clear distinction between principal and secondary streets. The principal streets were Bath Road, High Street, Chapel Street and The Broadway. This 'T' structure has influenced the building pattern, uses and activities, and movement patterns since this period and has been subject to a number of interventions.

The majority of the post war housing neighbourhoods that envelop the town centre have not produced a high level of townscape quality, largely ignoring the valued historic pattern of development.

The key elements and some of the 'hot spots' of the street and public realm network are:

**Bath Road, High Street and Chapel Street (partially deflected)** - these historic routes provided the main east west routes through Thatcham and across what has become the current top of the town centre. During the 1960s there was fundamental restructuring of the hierarchy of the street and public realm network brought about by the High Street relief road across the back of the High Street - this relates to the 'extended' Bath Road to the north of the High Street that connects with Chapel Street to the west. This signalled a significant physical deflection along this route and shift towards vehicle priority which is still evident today. The result has been severance of pedestrian connections, the exposure of buildings which serve as the main arrival points to the town centre which were never designed to perform such a role, and a significant impact upon the overall legibility and townscape. The traditional role of the High Street, together with The Broadway as the main shopping streets has been significantly altered and eroded.

While the medieval fine grain of the High Street remains largely intact on either side, the pavements are far from generous in several places.

The area of public realm outside of The Poplars on Bath Road which includes the main controlled pedestrian crossing point between the community uses around Brownsfield Road and the town centre, provides a poor quality physical and visual environment. It is clear that vehicular movements are favoured over pedestrian links.

The triangular area at the western end of the High Street serves as a main arrival point to the town centre but does little to positively mark this key location or create clear connections. The raised planters, bollards and exposed Spice Indian Restaurant corner building (which was not designed as a corner building) are unattractive, unwelcoming and dated. The public realm in this area would benefit from being strengthened and redefined with public art and perhaps a new development of an appropriate scale.

Equally, the significant length of properties along the High Street that back onto Bath Road fail to present a welcoming or attractive image (refer to section on Unclear Fronts and Backs).

**The Broadway and Broadway Green** - the public convenience block at the northern end of The Broadway occupies a key position, though the use and design of the building are questioned in such a prominent location within the town centre.

The Broadway Green is the key green focal space within the town centre. The space is used for events including the market (overspill), continental markets, Christmas festival and other community uses. With trees, hedges, grassed areas and seating the space provides a degree of relief in the middle of The Broadway, and an informal seating/meeting place for town centre users. Visually and functionally it appears somewhat cramped and awkward between the vehicular routes on either side of it, and in design terms it is not a vibrant or dynamic space. There is clear potential to improve its attractiveness and use.

The south western corner of The Broadway also suffers from narrow pavements which make pedestrian movements difficult.

**The Kingsland Shopping Centre** - the development of this shopping centre and associated highway infrastructure required some clearance of properties along The Broadway and their replacement with a considerably larger development dominated by the Waitrose foodstore. The new pedestrian route which links the car park to the east and foodstore with The Broadway provides a poor and pinched visual connection. The raised planters, pavements, bollards and street furniture create an inconsistent visual identity with the rest of the town centre and provide a dated and poor quality environment.

The development of the shopping centre has resulted in a significant shift in the scale and location of arrival points, the distribution of the main pedestrian thoroughfares and associated levels of footfall.

Street and Public Realm Hierarchy

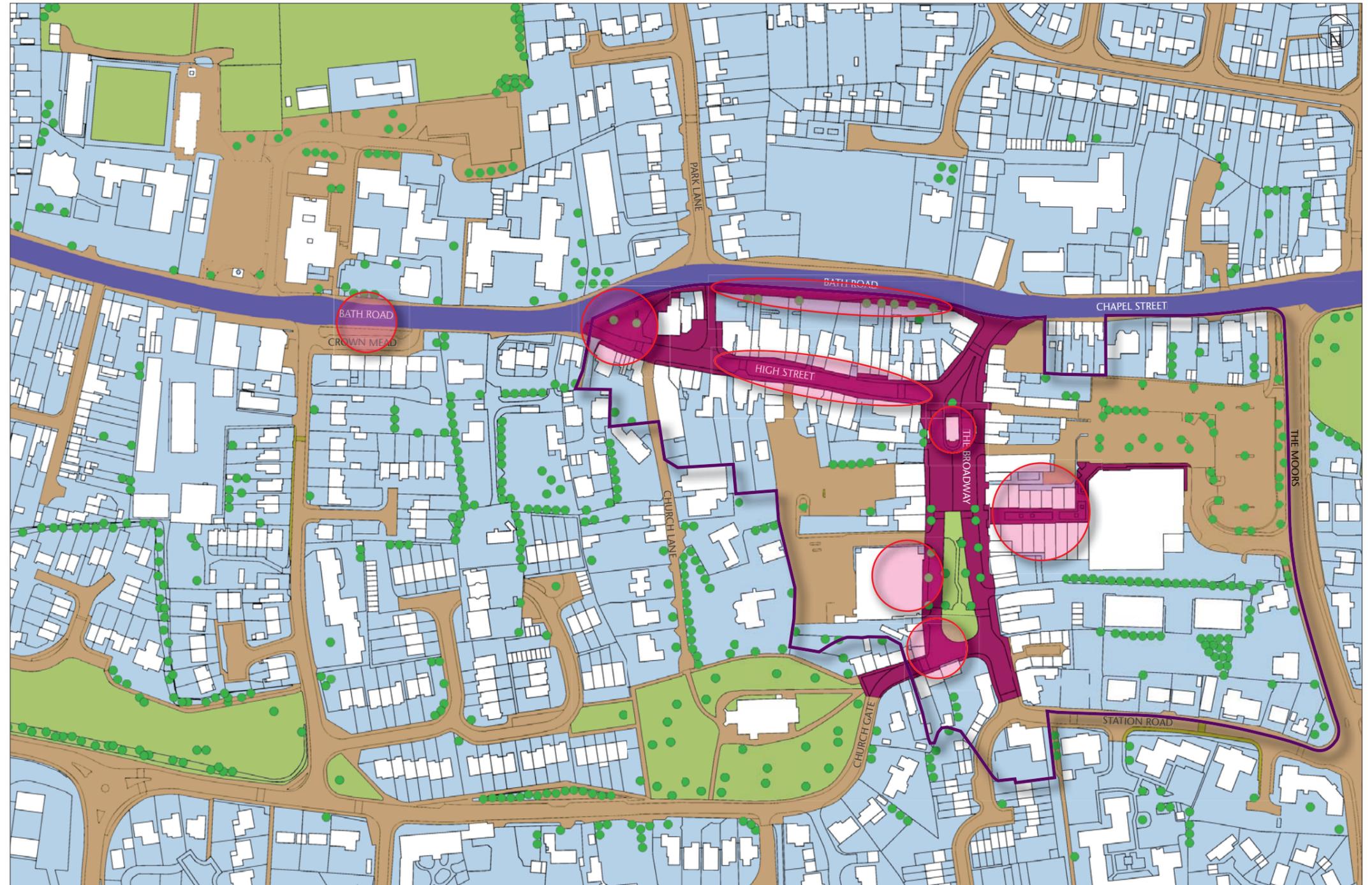


Unfriendly environment created by guard railing



Unattractive planters used as a barrier

-  Existing Town Centre
-  Vehicular Dominated A4
-  Main Public Realm Focus
-  Public Realm
-  Key Public Realm 'Hot Spot'
-  Private Realm
-  Key Town Centre Space
-  Building

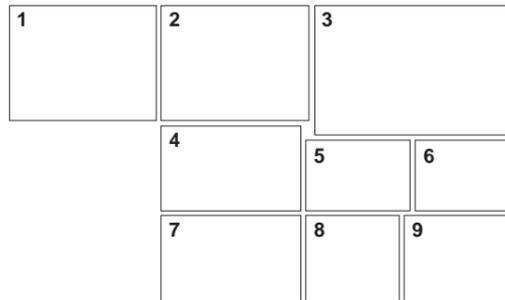


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0 50 100 metres







**Building Frontages within the town centre**

- 1 Impressive Natwest Bank, 9 High Street
- 2 Tom Carroll Betting Office, 8-12 High Street
- 3 The Kingsland Centre Walkway, Units 4-6
- 4 Thattham Jewellers, 12 The Broadway
- 5 Co-op Store and Fry 5ty Five, 55-55a The Broadway
- 6 HSBC and Barclays Banks, 14A-16 The Broadway
- 7 Spice with the poorly related building additions sited at the critical entrance to the town centre from the west, insensitive building additions, 35-37 High Street
- 8 More Finance, 28-29 The Broadway
- 9 Unsightly infill development, 7, 5A and 5 High Street



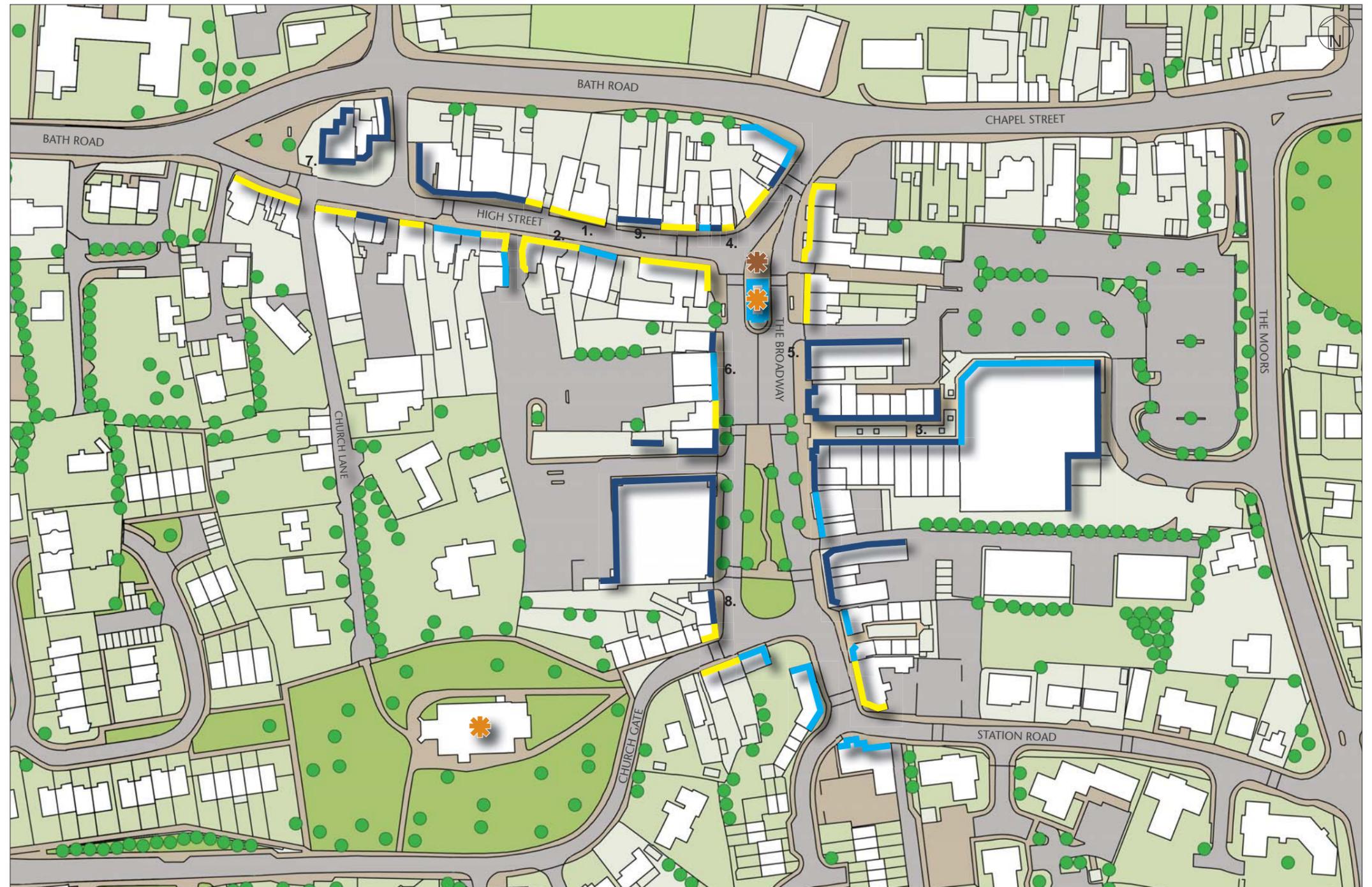
### Building Frontages

#### Quality of Building Frontages

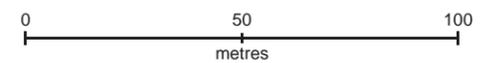
The centre of every town has its own unique character. Interesting buildings, local building styles and materials and the pattern of streets and spaces all contribute to the special qualities of each location. Building frontages form a dominant visual element in the public realm and wider townscape. The traditional elements of shopfronts are of particular importance to the historic town centre of Thatcham.

The Building Frontages plan reveals the spread in quality of building frontages across the town centre. Those building frontages which make a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the town centre are concentrated at the northern end of The Broadway and along the High Street. Conversely, unsympathetic frontages tend to be focussed on the centre of The Broadway and at the western end of the High Street, typically associated with post war and late twentieth century infill development.

-  Landmark Buildings
-  Landmark Feature (Tree)
-  Frontage with Positive Contribution
-  Frontage that could be Improved/Neutral
-  Frontage Negative Contribution



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### Unwanted Backs

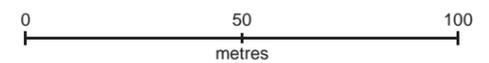
#### Unclear Fronts and Backs

The High Street relief road (Bath Road) and two central surface level car parks behind the eastern and western sides of The Broadway serve to expose many of the backs of properties and their boundary treatments to the people passing by or using the space. As the 'front door' and first impression of the town centre for many they develop an unwelcome and unfriendly environment. As key 'Arrival Points', there is a clear need for these locations to create a positive and good impression of the town centre.



- Exposed Back of Property
- Key Visible Boundary Treatments

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## Movement and Connections

The street and public realm networks containing Bath Road and Chapel Street, High Street, The Broadway, Church Gate, The Moors and Station Road provide a choice of pedestrian, public transport and vehicular connections between the main town centre approaches, arrival points and the key shopping destinations. They have changed and adapted over time in response to changing markets, lifestyles and expectations.

The most drastic change was the major restructuring of the highway network brought forward through the High Street relief road in the early 1960s. This gave rise to significant severance and townscape impacts upon the High Street in particular and more generally the town centre.

Two other key changes to the highway network were the restructuring introduced with The Moors to the east of the town centre, which gave parking and servicing access to the Kingsland Shopping Centre, and changes to traffic priorities with the one-way gyratory system around The Broadway and along the High Street, including the use of raised pedestrian crossing points to make pedestrian flows more comfortable and safe.

The way the town centre is accessed can be defined by four systems that characterise and influence the nature of the town centre. These systems are 'Arrival Points', 'Destinations' and 'Connections', together with the most significant 'Barriers' between them.

### Arrival Points

There are several key arrival points or gateways into the town centre which, along with the poor definition of boundaries, reinforce the lack of distinctiveness or high quality expected of a historic town centre. These arrival points can also be considered as the outer gateways since they provide the first impressions for many on entering the town centre. These are:

From the north:

- Bath Road/Chapel Street (A4)
- The Broadway

From the east:

- The Moors

From the south:

- Church Gate
- Station Road

**Bath Road/Chapel Street (A4)** - the town centre is bounded to the north by these east west primary roads. These roads are widely recognised as the most significant approaches and arrival points into the town centre, bringing the majority of employees, shoppers and visitors. The visual experience of both routes is mixed. The combined effect of the changes introduced via the High Street relief road, low key scale of building heights, poor way finding (e.g. signs) and mediocre public realm, is a failure to properly announce the town centre. It is therefore very easy to drive past it without even knowing that it is there.

**The Broadway** - the northern end of The Broadway is characterised by the fine grain historic buildings which develop a pleasant and welcoming appearance. There are however a few buildings that detract from this arrival point, including no.s 5 and 6 The Broadway next to the listed Chamberhouse Cottages and opposite the Kings Head Inn, which represent unsympathetic infill development. Bus stops with shelters and a taxi rank are also located at the northern end of The Broadway reinforcing its importance as an arrival point. The visually dominant public toilet block obstructs views into The Broadway and High Street in this area. There is clear scope to improve the arrival experience in this key area within the town centre.

**The Moors** - to the east of the town centre provides a key access to the Kingsland Shopping Centre. While some greening and softening of this route has taken place with trees and grass verges along both sides of the road, the entrance to the back of the shopping centre and extensive surface car park creates an unwelcoming and negative edge.

**Church Gate** - in contrast functions as a much quieter and low key arrival point to the south west of the town centre, dominated by the prominent historic Church of St Mary, the churchyard and housing neighbourhoods. Speed humps limit traffic speeds along this route.

**Station Road** - this secondary outer gateway is characterised by low scale housing developments which give the sense of being in a housing neighbourhood as opposed to on the edge of the town centre. The town centre appears out of nowhere as one turns northwards onto The Broadway. Again, as with Church Gate, speed humps limit traffic speeds along this route.

The inner gateways to the town centre comprise:

From the north:

- South of the High Street (between no.'s 14 and 16)

From the east:

- Kingsland Shopping Centre
- The Broadway east (between no.'s 55 and 56)

From the west

- The Broadway west (between no.'s 20 and 21)
- Church Gate and pedestrian routes around the Church of St Mary

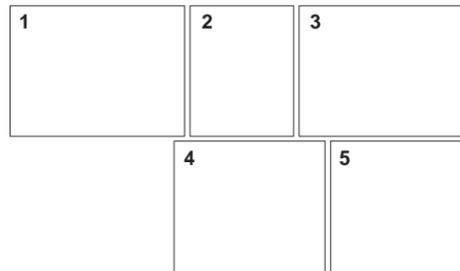
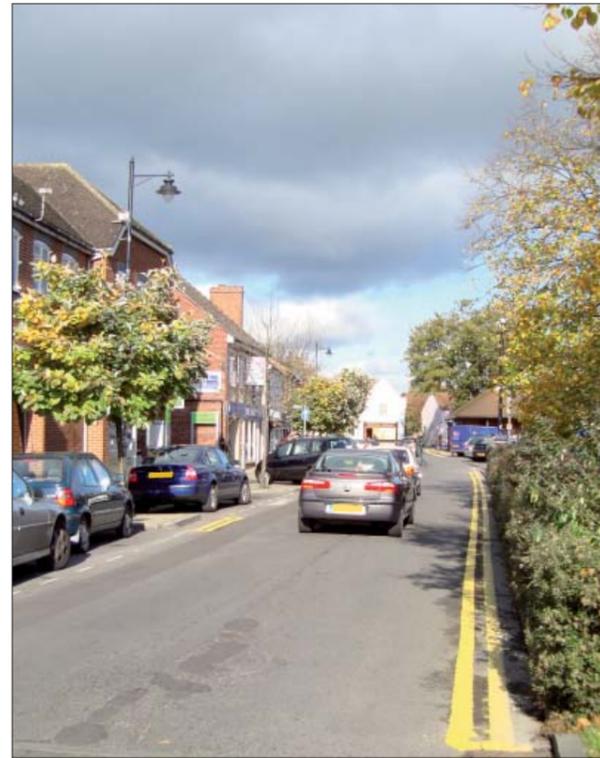
The inner gateways onto The Broadway do not present a particularly positive or friendly image of the town centre being characterised by pedestrian routes along the blank and inactive side elevations of buildings.

Inner and Outer Gateways



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0 50 100 metres



**First Impressions of the town centre**

- 1 Entering The Broadway from the main Bath Road/ Chapel Street junction
- 2 Looking northwards along the western side of The Broadway
- 3 Dated street furniture within the Kingsland Shopping Centre walkway
- 4 Poor public realm at the western end and first impression for many of the town centre, High Street
- 5 'Cattle pen' style controlled pedestrian crossing on Bath Road





Varied public realm experience and poor quality pedestrian crossing point on Bath Road, which provides a key link from the existing community services at Brownsfield Road with the High Street and town centre

## Destinations

There are a number of buildings and spaces acting as destinations in the town centre setting. A summary of the main destinations is provided below, focusing upon the particular role which sets them out as destinations and their location.

**Kingsland Shopping Centre** - provides the most significant structural element on the eastern side of The Broadway. This the most significant attraction and established 'anchor' store which attracts significant footfall. The surface car park to the rear of the store provides some 228 car spaces.

**Co-op Supermarket** - represents the second largest food retailer within the town centre and retail offer to the west. It attracts large footfall levels directly connected with the car park to the rear (approximately 105 cars) and from across The Broadway. The store however, as a piece of architecture has serious shortcomings, in particular the significant inactive frontages presented to The Broadway.

**Banks** - on the opposite side to the Kingsland Shopping Centre, the group of banks (no.'s 14A and 16) act as a draw to this part of The Broadway.

**The Broadway and Broadway Green** - both The Broadway and Broadway Green are major destinations, historically as meeting points and more recently as event spaces for markets, street fairs and entertainment events. The Broadway has benefited from public realm investment, appealing to shoppers and pedestrians. The northern end of The Broadway is the busier with the southern end displaying a more relaxed and quieter character - due in large part to Broadway Green as a green space, wider dimensions, inactive frontages of 21-25 The Broadway, fewer off-street parking spaces and group of service based businesses which have inactive frontages and attract relatively little footfall.

The small central parking area on The Broadway provides 18 of the 30 on-street spaces available. Limited cycle parking is available at the northern end of The Broadway close to the public convenience block.

**Town Council Offices, Medical Centre and Library** - are a complex of community buildings and services located outside of the town centre, less than 350 metres away from The Broadway. Brownsfield Road offers 59 car parking spaces. Pedestrian accessibility to the town centre is along Bath Road and the 'cattle pen' style crossing opposite The Poplars.

**Railway Station** - is situated on the main line between Bedwyn and London Paddington, located 1.5km to the south of the town centre. It has a ticket office and small waiting room but no other dedicated facilities (there are no toilets and the facilities close at midday), though a coffee hut has recently set up at the station on a regular basis. The remote location of the station does not make it easily accessible from the town centre with the majority of rail users taken to and from the station by car adding to local traffic. The 103 service connects the station with the town centre every half an hour.

## Connections

Clear and direct 'Connections' between 'Arrival Points' and 'Destinations' are essential in creating successful, comfortable, easily understood, well loved places. The town centre setting benefits from a network of connections - pavements, public realm, pedestrian crossing points - with significant differences in the quality of the pedestrian environment.

**The Broadway** - is the structural 'backbone' to the town centre along with the High Street. This role will become increasingly important as the town expands, delivering an expected increase in the shopping offer and range of community services. In response, the town centre proposals could set out bold, contemporary public realm features.

The short pedestrian through fare between no.'s 14 and 16 links the extensive car park behind The Broadway to the west with the High street. It offers a pleasant route with a clear view from the High Street back to the impressive tower of St. Mary's Church. Bollards at the entrance to the High Street prevent vehicles from using this route.

**The Kingsland Shopping Centre** - the walkway provides a pedestrian route from the car park and Waitrose store onto the centre of The Broadway. Although it may provide a useful and easy route for town centre users, the environment is not particularly attractive or friendly and appears dated and cluttered with the street furniture, functional lighting and raised planters. This undermines the importance of pedestrian accessibility to the town centre.

**Servicing Access** - though unauthorised, people make use of the servicing access between 55 and 56 The Broadway as a routing choice to the town centre via the Waitrose car park. Designed as a servicing route the backs and sides of the buildings fail to positively address the route.

**Co-operative Supermarket Car Park and The Broadway** - this short pedestrian route behind the supermarket on the western side of The Broadway is not welcoming or well defined. Whilst permeable, there is little active frontage.

The car park also serves to undermine the setting to the Church of St Mary's as a key local landmark in the area.

**Church Lane** - provides a secluded north-south route that connects the western limits of the town centre with the United Reformed Church and Church of St Mary's, and well as housing neighbourhoods to the south west.

**Station Road** - Station Road is the last section of the link from the railway station to the south of the town centre. It is characterised by housing development along both sides and does little to signify its role as a connection to the town centre.

## Barriers

An analysis of key 'Arrival Points' and 'Destinations' is essential to reveal how well they are connected, if at all, and identify those physical and perceptual barriers which discourage or prevent future connection being established. There are a number of factors impeding connections across the town centre setting.

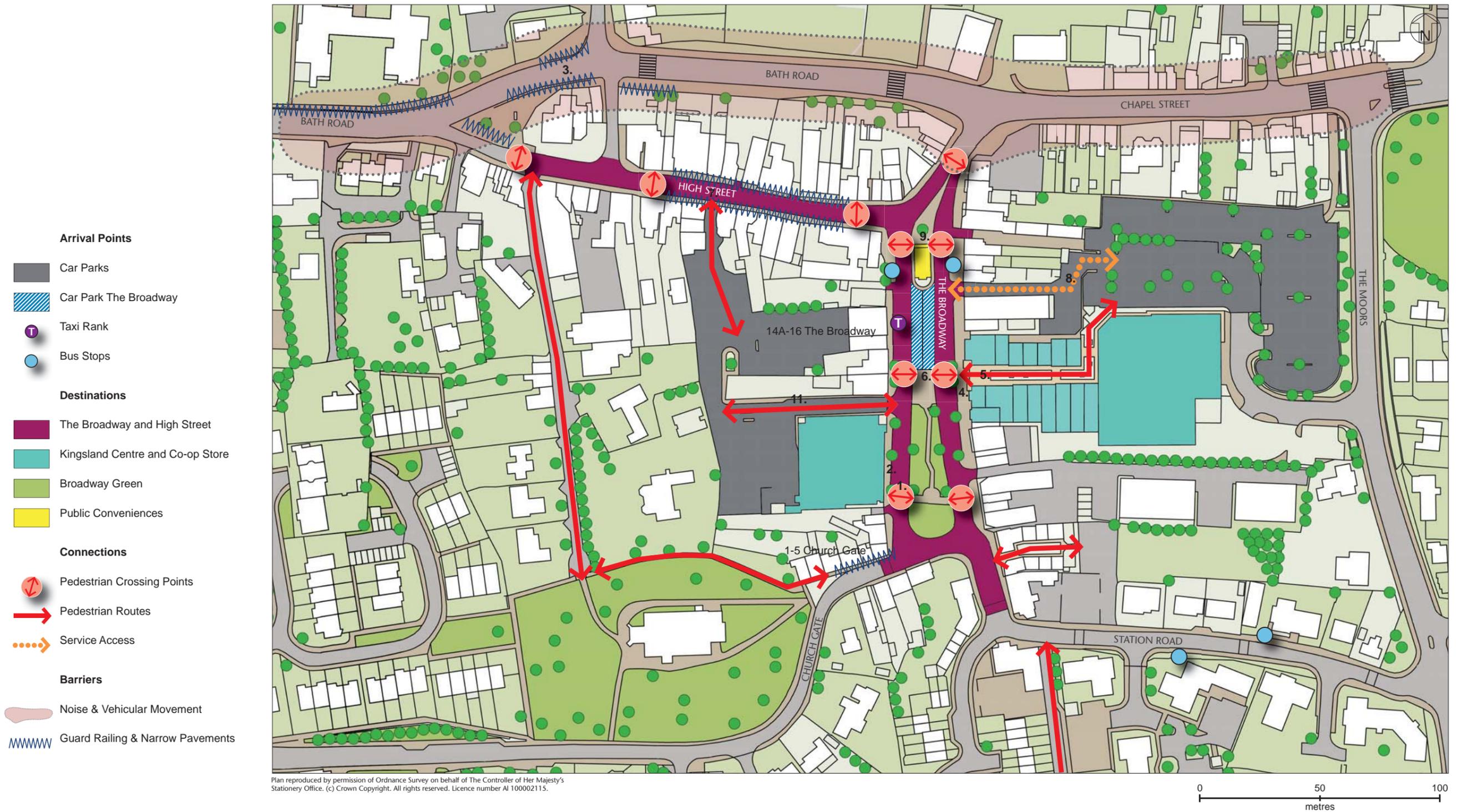
They are:

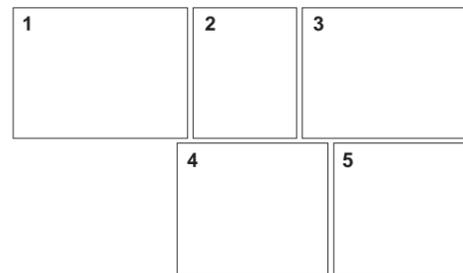
**Noise and Vehicle Dominance** - the volume and speed of traffic dominate and impact upon the pedestrian quality of Bath Road and Chapel Street on approaching and passing across the top of the town centre. As such, and in spite of the controlled crossing points in place, they are considered to form a 'Barrier' to movement from the north towards the High street and The Broadway.

**Guard Railing and Narrow Pavements** - guard railing on the northern side of Bath Road between Brownsfield Road and Park Road is particularly hostile and could be removed in an attempt to reduce street clutter and improve the public realm. The pavements along the High Street and at the eastern end of Church Gate in front of no.'s 1-5 are particularly narrow and difficult to negotiate. Similarly, sections of the pavements along The Broadway would benefit from being widened as part of a strategy to increase the pedestrian area within the town centre.

**Co-operative Supermarket** - the inactive frontage presented by the Co-operative supermarket onto The Broadway can be considered as a 'Barrier' to the performance and overall attractiveness of the south western corner of the town centre.

**Movement and Connections - Arrival Points, Destinations and Barriers**

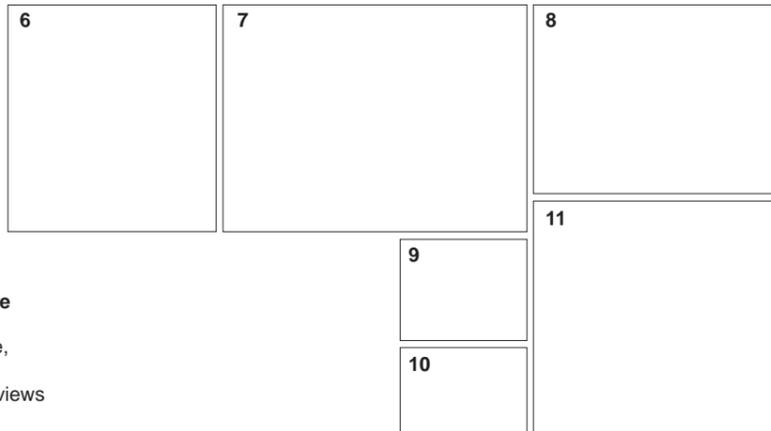




**Movement and Accessibility within the town centre**

- 1 Raised pedestrian crossing on The Broadway
- 2 Off street parking and narrow pavements
- 3 Redundant pedestrian crossing and hostile guard railing
- 4 Parking at the northern end of The Broadway
- 5 Kingsland Shopping Centre walkway





**Movement and Accessibility within the town centre**

- 6 Entrance to the Kingsland Shopping Centre, The Broadway
- 7 Pedestrian access off the High Street with views to the Church of St Mary
- 8 Service access adjacent to the smaller Co-op store which people use to get onto The Broadway from the car park
- 9 Cycle stands on The Broadway
- 10 Disabled 'call for assistance' access to the Nat west Bank, High Street
- 11 Side of the Co-op smaller foodstore from the car park

Figure-Ground - Thatcham at Present

**Building Pattern and Scale**

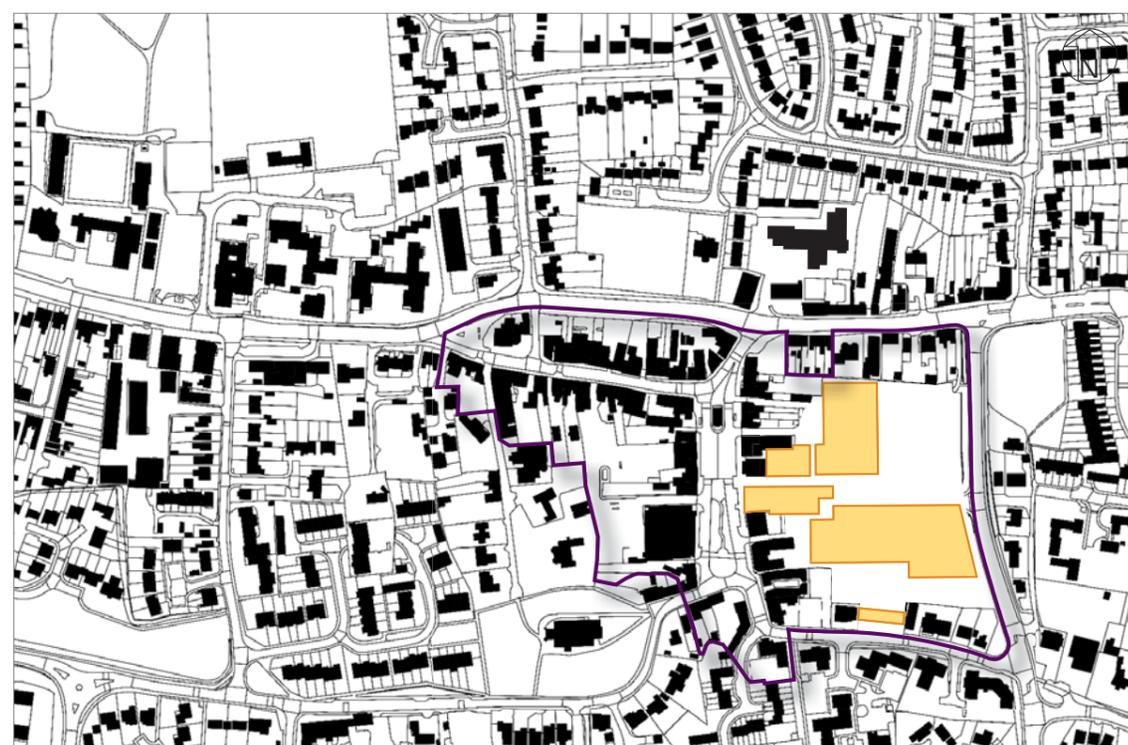
The principal building patterns and scale within the town centre were set out in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, and have been generated through, and reflect, a particular process of historical development and renewal (outlined in Historical Development section). They remain largely intact along the High Street and at the northern and southern ends of The Broadway. Elsewhere within the town centre, they have been subject to varying degrees of replacement and restructuring. Together, they form distinct patterns across the town centre.

The town centre as it stands today has a mixed urban-grain evident from the figure-ground drawing and analysis of Historical Development. Both the Kingsland Centre and Co-operative Supermarket stand out as significantly larger building forms that sit somewhat awkwardly amongst the finer grain historic core to the north and west. The permitted redevelopment of the Kingsland Shopping Centre would, if implemented in its approved form, introduce further large building forms and care should be taken in considering any Reserved Matters proposals to ensure that adequate regard is had to minimising disruption of the urban grain, enhancing pedestrian linkages and maximising footfall throughout the centre.



- Existing Town Centre
- Large Foodstore Footprints

Figure-Ground - Thatcham with the Proposed Kingsland Shopping Centre Redevelopment



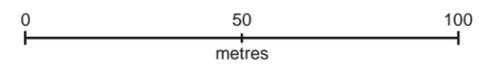
- Existing Town Centre
- Approved Building Block (Parameter)

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### Building Patterns



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### Building Heights

#### Building Heights

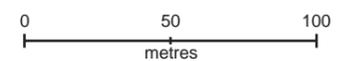
The built form across much of the town centre is consistently 2 to 2.5 storeys and sets an important context for any new building. Any proposed development taller than this would need to be carefully considered in terms of how it impacts on the skyline, sense of enclosure and views across the town centre.

The boundaries of the town centre are not well defined. One drawback of the consistency in building scale, particularly of buildings lining the key routes and at the gateways and thresholds to the town centre, is that the boundaries are not distinguished from the rest of the urban fabric. Taller developments at these key locations, or the use of distinctive architectural treatment with active uses, are well known devices which could mean that they could help contain, define and protect the town centre, adding to its sense of identity and character.

- 1 Storey
- 1.5 Storey
- 2 Storey
- 2.5 Storey
- 3 Storey



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## Design Quality, Value and Sensitivity

The quality of the townscape and architecture of some of the town centre has been recognised in the designation of the Thatcham Conservation Area which covers much of the existing town centre commercial area. The Conservation Area was designated in 1980, covers some 6.8 hectares and contains over 120 buildings. Of these however, only a very limited number of individual buildings are listed – 7 within the current town centre - these are listed below and shown in the following plan. Many of the old buildings in the town centre were incrementally demolished between the 1960s and 1980s to make way for the shops that are seen today.

Listed buildings within or in close proximity to the existing town centre include (the number in brackets corresponds to the location on Design Quality - Sensitivity and Value Plan overleaf):

**Church of St Mary (1), The Priory (2) and United Reform Church (3)** – this building group forms one of the highest quality edges and ‘set pieces’ to the town centre which includes Church Lane and Church Gate. The most significant and sensitive building is St Mary’s Church – one of the oldest buildings in Thatcham, a Grade II\* listed building at the south western corner of the town centre area. The church stands proud in its grounds and acts as an important local landmark.

**Buttercross (4)** - memorial at the northern end of The Broadway.

**The Kings Head Inn (5) and The Old Chequers Public House (6)** – both Grade II listed buildings, these public houses occupy prominent locations at the northern and southern most points along the eastern side of The Broadway. Their quality reinforces the sense of a traditional village environment and good first impressions at the entrances to the town centre from Bath Road and Station Road/Church Gate respectively.

**Chamberhouse Cottages (7)** – opposite The Kings Head Inn, this low, single storey Grade II listed building helps to develop a high quality environment at the northern end of The Broadway and together with the public house, frame the vista to the Grade II listed Barn beyond on Chapel Street.

**Crown House (8)** – a Grade II listed building which sits at the north western entrance to the town centre visible from the Bath Road approach.

**The Poplars (9)** – a Grade II listed building which with its low brick walls and railings provides a good quality ‘moment’ on approaching the town centre from the west along Bath Road, though it is very much lost amongst the mediocre urban fabric that surrounds it. The pedestrian crossing point directly opposite does little to set-off this particular asset along Bath Road.

**The Barn (10)** - Grade II listed Barn at the end of the important view looking out of the town centre from The Broadway onto Chapel Street. The Barn is currently vacant but has planning permission for conversion to a retail unit. Behind the Barn is the modern three storey Bupa Care Home.

There are several other buildings of recognised design quality within the town centre. They include: 58 The Broadway (The Family Bookshop), 12 The Broadway (Thatcham Jewellers), 14 The Broadway (vacant), 56 and 57 The Broadway (BD Crayden Newsagent and Chancellor Estate Agents), 30 The Broadway (Stitch In Time), 2 High Street (White Hart Public House), 3 High Street (Chequers Estate Agents), 9 High Street (Natwest Bank) and 32 High Street (Old Mews Units). These buildings are largely confined to the northern end of The Broadway and along the High Street. Often adjacent to the listed buildings highlighted above they help to create a good quality impression on entering the town centre from the north.

The central area of The Broadway immediately around the Kingsland Shopping Centre does not currently project the welcome or quality of appearance desired for the heart of the town centre. The Kingsland Shopping Centre is a significant imposition, poorly related to its surroundings and detracting from the overall townscape quality. The unsympathetic scale, form, massing, elevations and materials are all significantly discordant with their surroundings. Similarly, the Co-operative supermarket (21-25 The Broadway) presents an inactive and poor quality shopping frontage of 38 metres to The Broadway and Broadway Green.

In recognition of the need to raise the design quality of existing buildings, shop fronts and new development to provide an enhanced town centre environment and meet the expectations associated with the conservation area status, the existing poor quality shopping frontages will need to be improved, if not replaced in time. There is a clear need to bring forward high quality, contemporary proposals to complement the historic assets within and adjacent to the town centre.



The Poplars (Grade II Listed) on Bath Road, outside of the town centre but forms part of its setting



The Barn (Grade II Listed) which is at the end of the view from the High Street northwards along The Broadway



Design Quality - Sensitivity and Value



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0 50 100  
metres

### Building Quality

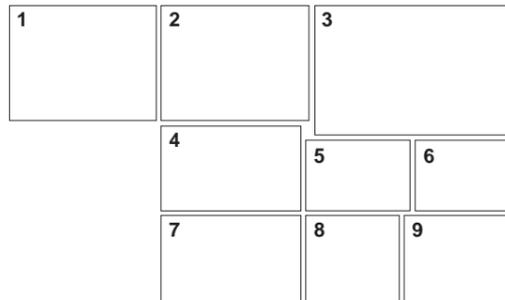
#### Building Quality

As is clear from the plan on this page, buildings which make a positive contribution to the town centre fabric and public realm are mainly orientated towards the convergence point of The Broadway and High Street, and along the historic Church Lane. A lack of active frontages and unattractive buildings are located centrally on either side of The Broadway, northern and western limits of the High Street and around the Bath Road/Chapel Street and Broadway 'Arrival Point.' These represent particular weak points and unattractive areas within the town centre - many examples from the 1960s and late twentieth century represent a failure to appreciate the urban qualities of the town centre.



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**Building Quality within the town centre**

- 1 White Hart Public House (listed), High Street
- 2 Chancellors Estate Agents, The Broadway
- 3 The Kings Head Inn (listed), The Broadway
- 4 26-32 High Street
- 5 28-30 The Broadway
- 6 Public Conveniences on The Broadway, a great location for a feature structure but the current use is questionable
- 7 Low quality buildings, 40-43 The Broadway
- 8 The Priory (listed), Church Lane
- 9 Impressive Church of St Mary (listed)





 **StanJames**  
LICENSED BETTING OFFICE 

 **CUTTING  
CABIN** 

41 **Thatcham  
Health Store**

Best Odds Machines Football Best Odds

Grey Cut	£7.00
Richard Atkinson	£5.00
Children	£5.50
Richard Trill	£2.50

PRICE LIST

Grey Cut	£7.00
Richard Atkinson	£5.00
Children	£5.50
Richard Trill	£2.50

NO APPOINTMENT NECESSARY

**Dreweatt Neate**  
Commercial  
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263 Sq Ft  
01635 263030  
www.dnccommercial.co.uk  
Not Suitable For A3 or A5 Use



Impressive view of the Church of St Mary at the southern end of The Broadway

## Legibility

Legibility is an important quality in navigating within and around the town centre and is a function of several factors including visual structure and containment, location of landmarks, skyline features and definition. An accessible and legible centre is key to the town's long term success.

### Landmarks and Memorable Places

Landmark and memorable places are important in creating a distinct hierarchy, sense of place and identity - often acting as 'gateway' features and focal points.

Within the town centre they are:

**Church of St Mary** - the historic building scale, quality, elevated siting and location at the end of street and car park views combine to create a significant, prominent landmark along the southern approaches into the town centre, from Green Lane, Church Gate and Station Road.

**Oak Tree, Millennium Memorial and Public Conveniences** - the scale and location of the tree combine with the memorial and public convenience building to create a landmark experience for those entering the town centre from Bath Road, Chapel Street and High Street. At the convergence of these key routes the public conveniences role as a landmark is hindered by the design and use of the building which also obstruct longer views into the centre.

**The Broadway and Broadway Green** - the markets and street events define this central location as a memorable place rather than its design quality.

### Views and Vistas

**Bath Road** - this main view and gateway into the town centre from the west provides a poor first impression and as such is recognised as a key redevelopment location. The triangular piece of public realm together with the side and rear elevation of the Spice Indian Restaurant fail to define the edge of the town centre. The proliferation of traffic signs and street clutter further undermine the quality and value of the environment.

In addition, the deflection and view created as a result of the High Street relief road terminates on the bungalow and semi-detached housing at Park Lane (no.'s 4 and 6). There is scope to address this location with a change in scale and/or use that helps mark the edge to the town centre. This site should also be considered in the light of the emerging redevelopment of the former Waring House to the immediate west.

**High Street** - a key west to east historic visual axis from the High Street to The Broadway. This view focuses on the Oak Tree and backdrop of the good quality buildings and shop fronts on the western side of The Broadway (no.'s 57 and 58).

Along the southern side of the High Street there is also a view from between no.s 14 and 16 of the Church of St Mary above the flat car park.

**The Broadway** - the view from the corner of the High Street northwards along The Broadway is framed by buildings on either side and focuses on the Barn. This listed structure is currently vacant and in a poor state of repair but it clearly has the potential to create a significant end stop and focal point for this significant view from within the town centre.

Views south along The Broadway terminate on the inactive frontages of no.s 31, 32 and Winbolt House. Such uses at the southern end of The Broadway lend it a quiet and more domestic character than the remainder of the town centre.

**The Kingsland Shopping Centre and Walkway** - are two of the main 'Connections' from The Moors on the eastern side of the town centre. The approach to the Waitrose store from The Moors is particularly poor and unwelcoming being dominated by the rear of the foodstore and servicing access. The walkway along The Kingsland Shopping Centre suffers from considerable visual clutter and ends across The Broadway on the Sue Ryder Charity Shop (no. 20 The Broadway). Both fall short of creating a good quality first impression of the town centre and The Broadway. The likely redevelopment of the Kingsland Shopping Centre should seek to address these issues.

**Car Parks (west of The Broadway)** - the enclosed view from the flat car parks and along the side elevation of the Co-operative supermarket over The Broadway is of poor quality.

**Church Gate** - the uphill approach from Church Gate to the town centre is framed by the elevated Church of St Mary and good quality terrace of housing (no.'s 1-5) on the bend, though the short view across the southern end of The Broadway is largely blocked by the trees on Broadway Green. The buildings that can be seen on The Broadway include the low quality frontages of no.'s 40 and 41 - both vacant at present.

**Station Road** - the approach along Station Road is dominated by low scale housing on both sides. The view of the Church of St Mary in the distance has not been preserved or respected by the siting of Winbolt House which impedes it.

## Identity and Wayfinding

There is no clear overall identity for the town centre. Local variations are evident on the palette of public realm materials and street furniture used, for example there are 6 different styles of bollards and three types of lighting columns used within the town centre, which if coordinated, together with other street and traffic signing would reinforce the extents and identity of the town centre.

Signs and CCTV tend to dominate the visual appearance of the main 'Arrival Points' or gateways to the town centre.

A 'whole street' approach to the public realm needs to be adopted with features such as public art, planting and architectural style helping with navigation - while possibly reducing the need for signs. The use of smaller signs in particular, given the 20mph traffic speeds across the town centre should be considered in appropriate locations.

High quality pedestrian-friendly places, and an information system delivered where and when people need it, will encourage people to explore the town centre on foot and spend more time outdoors, supporting local businesses and creating safer streets and spaces for everyone.

Visual Linkages, Landmarks and Focal Points

The Visual Linkages, Landmarks and Focal Points plan shows key locations and buildings where there is an expectation for a good quality landmark or building environment as a result of the views to and across the town centre.



View from Bath Road towards Park Lane

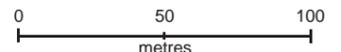


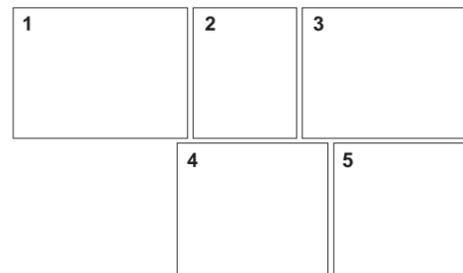
View to The Broadway from the bend in Church Gate

-  Key Visual Link
-  Major Focal Feature
-  Minor Focal Feature
-  Temporary Focal Point (Market)



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**Visual Links within the town centre**

- 1 The High Street - The Broadway is a key corner location, emphasised with the red shopfront, which is unfortunately vacant at present
- 2 Car park behind the Co-op Supermarket looking towards the High Street access, where understanding the routing choices is not obvious
- 3 Framed vista to the derelict Barn looking out from The Broadway onto Chapel Street
- 4 Trees and shrubs obscure most of the view of the shops from Church Gate
- 5 Poor and unfriendly service route used by people to reach The Broadway





## Character Areas

Six indicative character areas have been identified for Thatcham town centre. The character areas are based on land use characteristics, strategic location and role within the urban fabric. The following paragraphs describe the characteristics of each:

**Bath Road/Chapel Street Corridor (A4)** - this critical corridor is characterised by vehicular movement with a mix of housing, health, community and limited commercial uses. The corridor lacks a strong focus or sense of approach to the town centre, partly because of poorly designed buildings and frontages exposed at key locations and low scale development. In general, the corridor is not pedestrian friendly and suffers from significant severance and townscape impacts with the town centre.

**The High Street** - the High Street has many fine historic buildings laid out in a traditional fine grain, though there are examples of unsympathetic infill development. It has struggled since the completion of the relief road which has in effect downgraded its role within the life of the town centre. Its western end in particular is not well used and the rear of properties along this part of Bath Road create a hostile and negative roadside edge. There are opportunities for redevelopment.

**The Broadway Core** - The Broadway is the commercial core of the town centre comprising the main mix of shopping frontages on either side and the key public green space of the Broadway Green at its southern end. Many of the buildings provide a poor quality frontage and the one-way gyratory system does not always support the need for clear, safe and secure routes. As the main route, it should become the strongest and most attractive environment within the town centre.

**The Moors** - contains the Kingsland Shopping Centre and extensive surface car parking area immediately to the east of The Broadway as well as several vacant buildings. It is an important area where plans for the shopping centre's redevelopment, including additional shopping floorspace and housing, received approved outline planning permission earlier in 2007. There is a real risk however of such plans creating a 'centre within a centre' (i.e. a discrete destination separate from the wider town centre) that threatens the viability of shops on The Broadway and wider town centre setting.

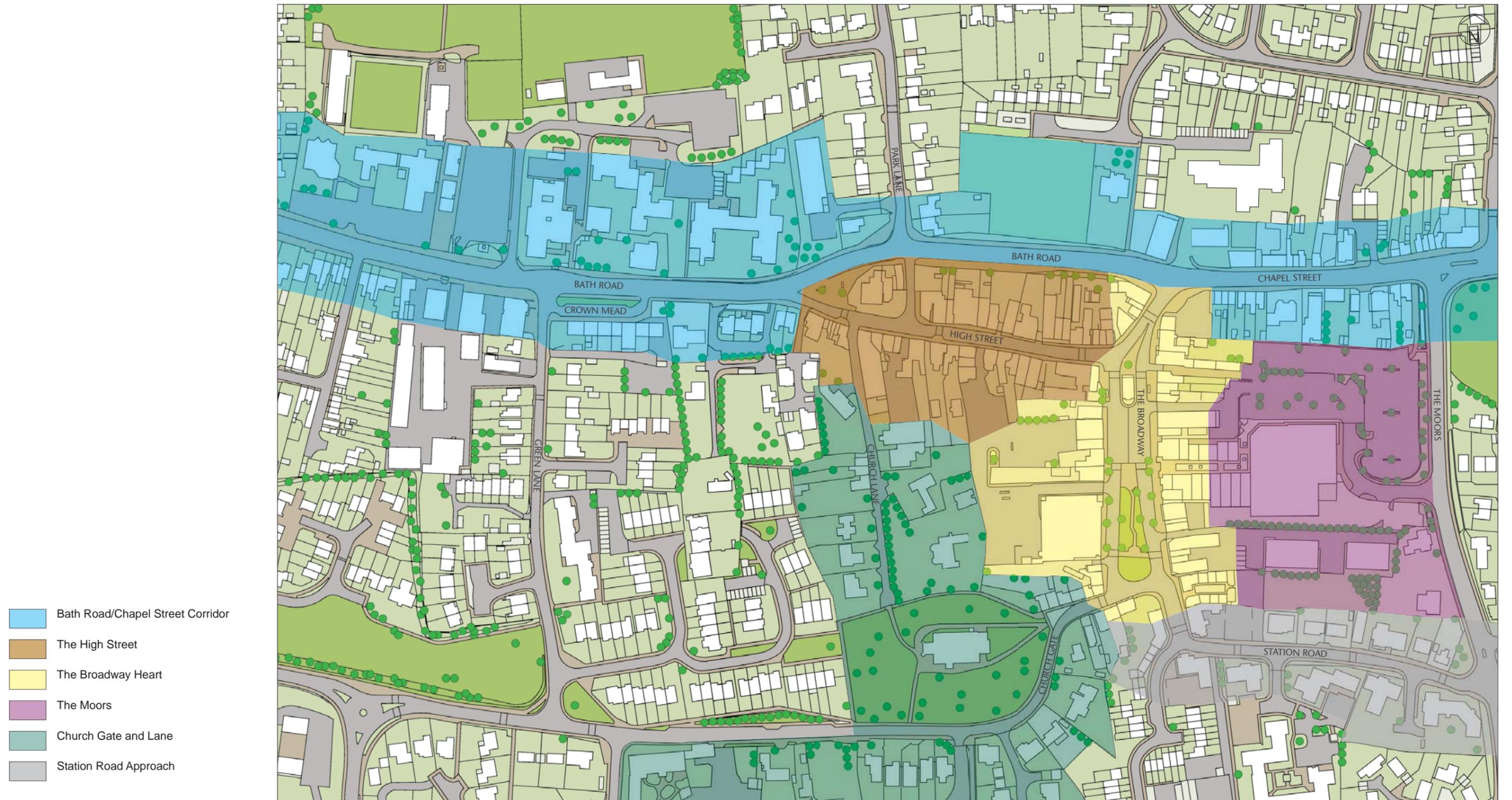
**Church Gate and Church Lane** - the high quality historic set pieces tucked behind the town centre to the west provide, a secluded and quiet atmosphere. There are redevelopment opportunities with several vacant buildings and The Priory along Church Lane, though access is a major constraint.

**Station Road Approach** - the Station Road approach, as it reaches the town centre from the roundabout at The Moors, is characterised by low scale housing (two and single storey) on either side. The proposals for the Kingsland Shopping Centre include removal of the two bungalows (no.'s 2A and 2B) on the northern side of the street to provide access and their replacement with a new housing block. Winbolt House at the western end of Station Road fails to make the most of the landmark opportunities of this key location at the south eastern corner of the town centre.

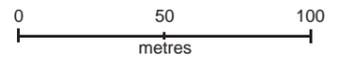
The wider approach from the railway station, which is 1.5km to the town centre is also characterised by a series of large housing neighbourhoods of different development periods. The local parade of shops and Burdwood Centre (a few shops, post office, church and surgery) on Station Road provide little relief from the suburban housing. There is a distinct lack of wayfinding (signs). The 103 bus service provides public transport connection every half an hour.

The following pages consider the character and issues facing the town centre approach to and from the railway station in more detail.

### Town Centre Character Areas



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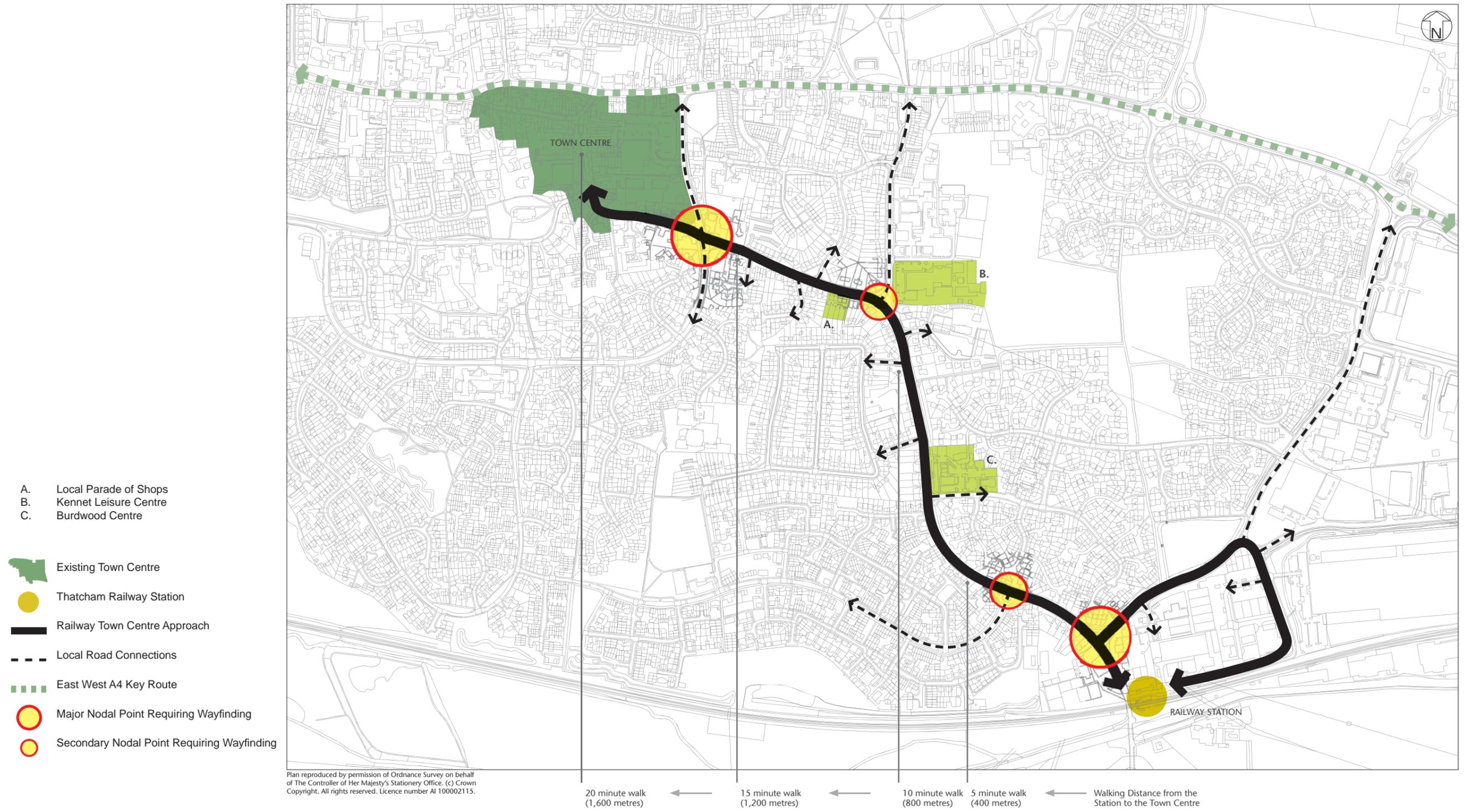


**Key Moments along the Station Road Approach**

- 1 At the north western end of Station Road (past the junction with The Moors) looking towards the Church of St Mary in the distance
- 2 From outside the station looking northwards along Station Road
- 3 The railway station from Station Road
- 4 A key routing choice along Station Road where there are no town centre signs to follow



### Railway Station Town Centre Approach



## Participation in the Design Appraisal Process

As part of the Design Appraisal process, a key stakeholder workshop was held on Friday 16th January 2009 at Thatcham Town Council Offices. The purpose of the workshop was to understand the views and issues influencing the town centre and the potential for change from local professional, community and other interest groups.

The workshop presented some of the images outlining the early analysis and thinking emerging from the Design Appraisal and also included an organised walkabout of the town centre. The attendees were split into three groups and followed a route that took in eight key locations across the town centre.

Out of an invitation list of 23 people, 16 key stakeholders attended the workshop. Amongst those who attended were representatives of West Berkshire's Council's Planning Office (observation only), West Berkshire Councillors and Thatcham Town Councillors, members of Thatcham Vision, Thatcham Volunteer Bureau, U3A and the developers associated with the redevelopment proposals for the Kingsland Shopping Centre (refer to Appendix 1 for a full list of attendees and other supporting information).

Attendees were encouraged to think about five key questions which were:

- What do you like about the town centre?
- What are the best features within the town centre?
- What do you dislike about the town centre?
- What needs to be improved?
- What are the top priorities for the town centre?

Below is a summary, in no particular order of importance, illustrating the nature of the comments received in response to each of the questions. A copy of the comments sheets completed at the workshop can be found in the appendices at the back of this Appraisal.

*What do you like about the town centre?*

- Broadway Green as a public space
- 'Historic heart' and buildings of architectural merit (listed buildings)
- Village design, scale and community feel to the town centre
- Well serviced by shops
- Good selection of restaurants
- Car parks in good locations

*What are the best features within the town centre?*

Answers to this question not surprisingly overlapped with what people liked about the town centre and included:

- Thatcham town centre as a 'hidden gem'
- Broadway Green as an attractive area
- Acknowledgement of the heritage of the town centre with the conservation area designation
- Church of St Mary, The Priory, Buttercross and Millennium Memorial as feature buildings and structures
- Architecture of the medieval High Street
- Two good sized car parks to either side of The Broadway
- Good bus links

*What do you dislike about the town centre?*

- No sense of arriving at the town centre with barriers at the key entrance points
- Inadequate signs and information promoting the town centre
- Poor connectivity and pedestrian flows, particularly along the Kingsland Shopping Centre walkway
- Street clutter as barriers to movement
- Unsympathetic shop fronts and building facades within the town centre
- Dominance of the toilet block in a prominent location and key views within the town centre
- Triangular area of 'wasteland' at the western end of the High Street
- The backs of High Street properties visible from along Bath Road
- A lack of visual permeability to Broadway Green with hedges and street trees blocking views across The Broadway

*What needs to be improved?*

- Signs entering and within the town centre
- Improve the arrival points/entrances to the town centre
- Celebrate the history of Thatcham, particularly if it could be confirmed that it is the oldest continually inhabited settlement in England
- Improve the quality of the public realm
- Enhance or relocate the public toilets within the town centre
- Make more of the conservation area designation
- Improve the streetscape along Bath Road
- Improve pedestrian access and flows within the town centre
- Increase the number of specialist shops and speciality markets
- Remove parking restrictions
- Redesign the High Street to 'revamp' traffic flows

*What are the top priorities for the town centre?*

- Better signs and information promoting the historic town centre, possibly along the lines of a 'Welcome to Thatcham' theme
- Remove unsympathetic shop fronts and building facades
- Raise the profile of the town centre being largely contained within a conservation area
- Encourage the range and variety of restaurants - establishing the town centre as a destination of choice for eating
- Improve Broadway Green as the key public space within the town centre
- Broaden the commercial viability of the town centre
- Locate community facilities within the town centre, considering a town hall and larger library facility, possibly on the site of The Priory
- Parking should be made easier within the town centre
- Establish a town centre consortium to channel views and coordinate action

A summary report of the stakeholder workshop was issued to all who attended the event as well as those who were unable to attend on the day.



One of the stakeholder groups on the walkabout of the town centre



Group discussion and feedback session at the Town Council Offices

## Audit and Analysis Summary

The table opposite summarises the key issues and opportunities for Thatcham town centre that have arisen from the audit and analysis undertaken in this section.

### STRENGTHS

- Fine urban grain, historic character and architectural quality in places
- High number of independent retailers
- Some attractive shop fronts
- Broadway Green as a key public space
- Good connectivity to London by rail
- High levels of separate commercial uses above ground floor frontages
- Free car parking in The Broadway
- Strong services element, e.g. banks and convenience retailing
- A sub post office on The Broadway
- Four attractive pubs in the centre
- Range of quality restaurants
- Sense of community spirit
- Low levels of crime, anti-social behaviour and graffiti

### OPPORTUNITIES

- Population growth
- Kingsland Shopping Centre redevelopment plans
- Vacant premises
- Improvements to Broadway Green
- Expansion of the market
- Environmental improvements to back of premises on Bath Road
- Public realm improvements
- Street redesign - pavement widening, traffic rationalisation and areas of pedestrianisation
- Limited potential for change at The Priory (listed building)
- Enhanced wayfinding around the town centre, including between the railway station and town centre
- Real time bus travel information

### WEAKNESSES

- Lack of notable landmarks and arrival points
- High Street relief road (Bath Road A4) diverts traffic away from the centre
- Vacant premises show low demand
- Lack of comparison goods shopping and absence of national multiple retailers
- Lack of variety, no DIY store, clothes shop, shoe shop, music/DVD store or quality cafe
- Poor connectivity to train station
- Dated public realm
- Major pedestrian pinchpoint in the Kingsland Shopping Centre walkway (near Waitrose store)
- Poor wayfinding on the outer edges and within the centre
- Street clutter and narrow pavements as obstacles and barriers to movement
- Lack of space for Market
- No tourism offer
- Some unsympathetic shop fronts and signs
- Inadequate cycle parking
- Only two dedicated foodstores
- Community uses, including the Town Council offices outside the centre
- Kennet Leisure Centre outside of centre
- Back of premises facing Bath Road
- Poor vehicular circulation in the High Street

### THREATS

- Kingsland Shopping Centre redevelopment plans
- Accelerating vacancy, dereliction and under-use
- UK recession and low investment fails to unlock potential
- Low footfalls in the High Street
- Town centre of Newbury
- Established night time economy of Newbury
- New cinema in Newbury town centre
- Established night time economy of Reading and Basingstoke
- Town centre of Reading and Basingstoke
- Commuter behaviour/habit
- Potential parking charges
- Inappropriate development
- Erosion of townscape and conservation character through unsympathetic development
- Difficulty in assembling large development sites due to tight urban grain and complex land ownership patterns

# 04

## Outputs and Recommendations



### Town Centre Commercial Area

After an evaluation of the current town centre boundary, the town centre uses that exist outside of the boundary, and the planned population growth of Thatcham, we propose some modest extensions to the current town centre boundary. These proposals are made having regard to advice in PPS6 to the effect that local authorities should plan positively for centres within their areas, should encourage diversification of uses in the town centre as a whole, and should make provision for a range of sites to meet the needs of the whole community.

By way of justification for each of the three areas of extension proposed:

The small row of residential properties (no.'s 3-13 Chapel Street) should be included with the town centre boundary, as their exclusion appears as an anomaly: they are the only properties on the south side of Chapel Street (A4) between the junctions with the High Street and The Moors excluded from the current boundary. Although currently a housing area we consider that their inclusion would provide a more defensible boundary and would provide flexibility in respect of any future redevelopment proposals.

A small extension is proposed north of Bath Road, to include the former Auto Crash Repair site and the Barn. Although located north of Bath Road these two sites have strong physical and visual connections to The Broadway and the wider town centre. Both of these buildings are currently vacant and although planning consents have been granted we consider that these sites are important to the future of Thatcham town centre and could play an important role in announcing or identifying the town centre along the A4.

In addition we recommend that the two churches, the hall, Doriel and The Priory are all included within the town centre boundary. These buildings provide a variety of services to the local community and draw people to the town centre. Their inclusion reflects their current use, establishes Church Lane as a logical western boundary to the centre and provides scope for these buildings/sites to contribute to the centre in the event that redevelopment proposals come forward at a future date.

### Proposed Town Centre Commercial Area



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### Primary Shopping Frontage

The saved local plan policies and proposals map identifies three stretches of Primary Shopping Frontage. The plan opposite shows that current and proposed changes to the Primary Shopping Frontage.

Having examined the existing land uses, pedestrian footfalls, the form and function of the principle streets within the town centre and the potential growth of Thatcham's population, we propose some modifications to the primary shopping frontage designations.

We have recommended extensions to the Primary Shopping Frontage in the following locations:

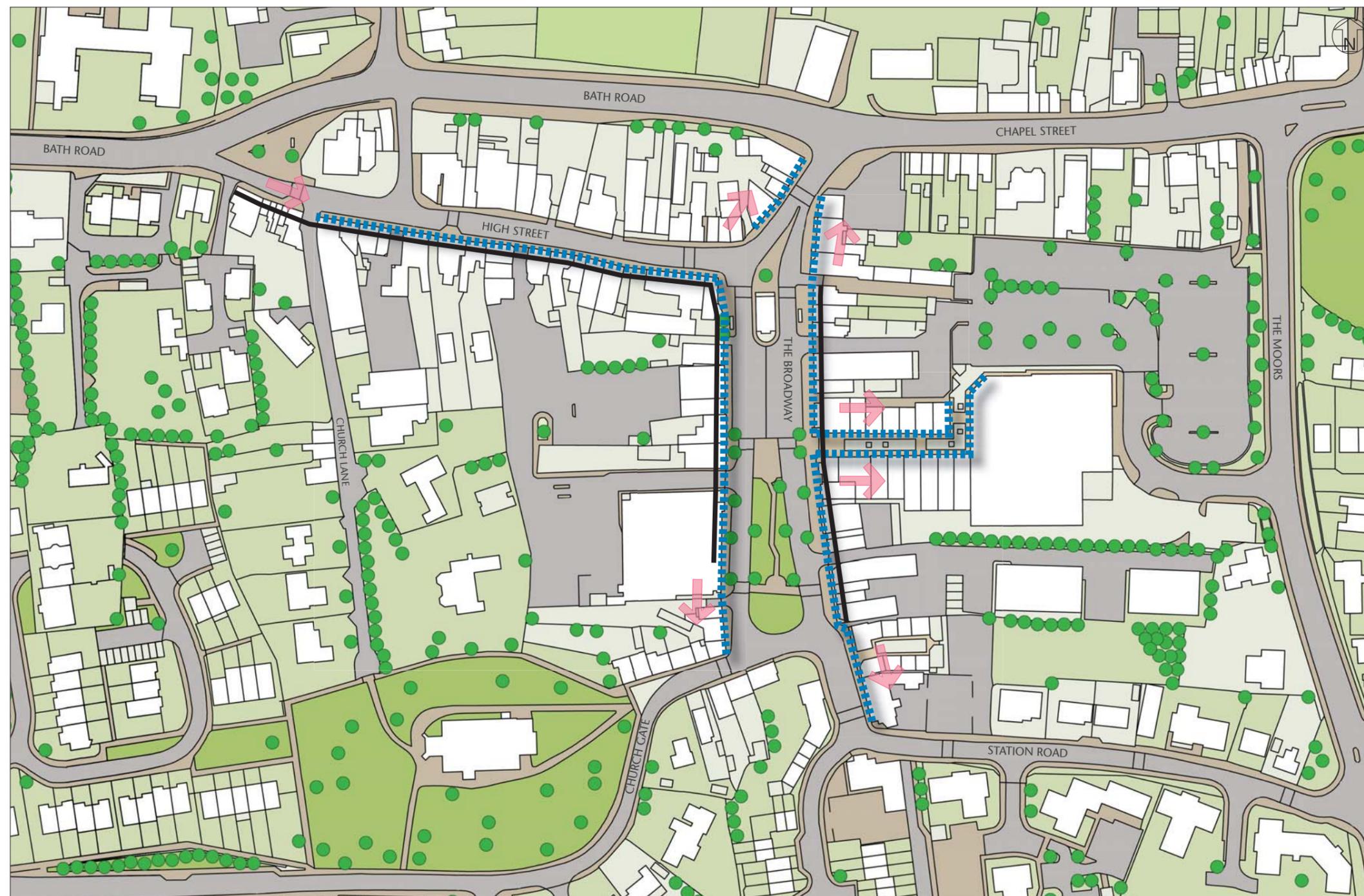
- Broadway - north-west side no.'s 4-7
- Broadway - north-east side no.'s 58-59
- Broadway - south-west side no.'s 25-30
- Broadway -south-east side no. 36 and Units 1/2 and 10/11 The Courtyard
- Kingsland Shopping Centre Units 1-15 and Waitrose (part)

In relation to the extensions to the Primary Shopping Frontage on The Broadway these are proposed having regard to: the desire to consolidate The Broadway as the principal shopping street within the town centre; the location of the additional frontage areas at key 'Arrival Points' to the town centre; and a need to maintain, and if possible enhance, levels of vitality and footfall throughout The Broadway.

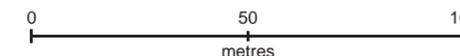
The inclusion of the Kingsland Shopping Centre units within the Primary Shopping Frontage reflects the current use of these units, current levels of footfall and the importance of this pedestrian route in linking the Waitrose store (any future redevelopment of the Kingsland Centre) to the historic town centre.

A reduction of the Primary Shopping Frontage is proposed on the south side of the High Street to reflect the migration of retail uses eastwards within the centre and to avoid the dilution of the town centre offer and the focus of activity along The Broadway.

### Proposed Primary Shopping Frontage



— Existing Primary Shopping Frontage      - - - - Proposed Expansion of the Primary Shopping Frontage



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## Priority Infrastructure Tasks and Projects

Based on the health check and design audit presented in Section 2 and 3, key issues and opportunities have been identified across the town centre and for each of the individual character areas. By embracing the unique potential of each character area, Thatcham town centre is likely to increase its appeal and attractiveness to retailers, investors, residents and visitors.

People today expect more in the design of our urban environments, having travelled and experienced many different types of places. The quality of pedestrian experience, legibility and accessibility that residents and visitors now expect of a historic market town centre must be achieved in Thatcham if it is to become a destination of choice. Making the town centre feel comfortable, ordered and managed requires a coordinated approach to urban design issues, movement, architecture, open space and the public realm.

In view of this, the aspirations of the Design Appraisal in making recommendations which may lead to improvement of the town centre environment are to:

- Minimise the barrier effect of Bath Road and Chapel Street and improve north-south connections for pedestrians and cyclists
- Acknowledge and exploit the gateways to the town centre to ensure positive first impressions and a strong sense of identity
- Achieve a consistency and coherence in built form, shop fronts and spaces throughout the town centre, whilst maintaining the identity of the various character areas
- Improve resident and visitor comfort and convenience throughout the streets, spaces and routes of the town centre
- Underpin the economic health and vibrancy of the town centre
- Improve pedestrian linkages
- Promote a positive identity and image for Thatcham as a confident and welcoming town
- Create a safe and pleasant environment for public interaction and personal contact
- Strengthen the public realm, role and function of public open spaces within the town centre through a coordinated 'whole street' approach to street furniture, CCTV, hard and soft landscaping, and lighting - an overarching sense of quality throughout

- Protect and enhance buildings of architectural merit and their settings within the town centre and maintain the urban grain of development along the High Street and The Broadway
- Foster a sense of inspiration, respect and celebration in the day to day experience of the town

The delivery of these principles will be an ongoing responsibility. It will be vitally important that public realm and open space design and development are led from an urban design perspective and not a traffic-engineering imperative. Simple and safe vehicular and pedestrian movement, applying the guidance in Manual for Streets, should be the principles that guide the design process. Over engineered schemes are both costly and often create unnecessary barriers, clutter and obstacles.

Where appropriate public realm and open space proposals should be coordinated and designed within the context of adjacent development schemes to ensure integrated design solutions and coordinated implementation – a 'whole street' approach.

The town centre does not face major movement or accessibility issues and the existing road hierarchy, public transport system and pedestrian routes generally function well in serving the area although the quality of the connections is an issue. No structural changes are envisaged.

This section of the Appraisal proposes a series of improvement projects. These would serve to provide an enhanced setting for development, improve the attractiveness for residents and visitors and also restore important historic features of the town centre. Proposed improvements are listed below and shown on the Town Centre Prioritised Infrastructure Projects Plan (page 74). They should be viewed as an integrated package of measures where the value of any single project would be enhanced by the implementation of other complementary projects. The whole is bigger than the sum of its parts.

However the Appraisal does contain several projects which will make a particularly strong contribution to the achievement of a more competitive, accessible and attractive town centre.

The proposed improvement projects are divided into two distinct sections. The first section looks at initiatives that could be applied across the entire town centre and so are considered to be more strategic in nature. In contrast to this, the second section explores a range of site-specific projects that could lead to improvements within the town centre.

## Town Centre Wide

### TC 1 – Shop Fronts and New Development

All shop fronts within the town centre should be sensitively designed and of high quality to reflect the historic context of both individual buildings and the overall character of the town centre being largely contained within a conservation area.

A large part of the town centre is contained in the Conservation Area and any new (re)development should be introduced sensitively. New development should be innovative and contemporary in design but should respect, and make a positive contribution to, the scale, massing and proportion of existing buildings and spaces.

This will be achieved by applying the principles set out in the Shopfronts and Signs Supplementary Planning Guidance in all development control decisions.

### TC 2 - Artworks

A programme of artworks could be enabled in the form of small scale, detailed elements to be included in paving, signs or street furniture, responding to the historic context of the town centre. Well considered, bold and contemporary artworks could also be considered at the town centre's gateways to ensure that a series of memorable arrival points and strong identity for the town are created.

### TC 3 – Lighting Strategy

As part of a lighting strategy for the town centre, pedestrian routes, public spaces and key buildings should be lit to enhance the appreciation of the key buildings and create a secure night time environment. Proposals for lighting should have regard to West Berkshire's Quality Design Series Supplementary Planning Document: Part 5 External Lighting' (adopted 2006).

### TC 4 – Wayfinding System

A wayfinding information system, based on map panels and direction signs would help to create a unique and coherent identity for the town centre which connects the streets, spaces, arrival points and people. As people travel around the town centre, a range of information products would help guide them from place to place, improving the image, identity and user experience of the town centre for the benefit of residents, businesses and visitors. These could be designed specifically for Thatcham, where all signs are also designed at a comfortable reading height. Linked to this, the removal of unnecessary/unsympathetic signs should be considered.

## Site Specific Projects

### TC 5 - Town Centre Design and Development Guidelines

These guidelines should outline key urban design principles related to the design of infrastructure, building and street relationships, parking location, building heights (minimum – maximum), materials, pedestrian and cycle movement systems. Such guidelines would need to be specific enough to ensure that key principles are respected and at the same time flexible enough to allow for design innovation. They would be key to setting the design standards that will guide future development within Thatcham town centre.

The guidelines should be developed on the basis of wide public consultation to ensure a broad consensus and support among both conservation and commercial interest groups in the town.

### TC 6 - Conservation Area Appraisal/Review

A clear, comprehensive appraisal of the character of Thatcham Conservation Area that covers most of the existing defined town centre commercial area would provide a sound basis for development control and for developing initiatives to improve the area. Planning Policy Guidance 15: Planning and the Historic Environment stresses the need for local planning authorities to define and record the special interest, character and appearance of all conservation areas in their districts. If funding is sought for grant-aid in the future, such as a Townscape Heritage Initiative (THI), an appraisal is necessary to demonstrate the value of the area.

The principal purpose of such a review would be to provide a framework for balancing the objectives of maintaining the area's historic character and identity with facilitating appropriate development to encourage economic growth and long term sustainability.

### Bath Road/Chapel Street Corridor

Given the importance and prominence of Bath Road and Chapel Street, any future (re)development along this east-west corridor provides an opportunity to increase the environmental, visual quality and experience of the approach to the town centre. As the major route through Thatcham and across the northern end of the town centre, the environment of Bath Road and Chapel Street (A4) influences the perception of the town as a whole.

#### BRCS 1 - Bath Road and Crown Mead

Enhance the public realm, surface crossing point and pedestrian access and environment from Bath Road across to Crown Mead. Although the crossing point which provides a vital link between the range of community facilities on Brownsfield Road and the town centre is in the right place, its design is very much based on the 'cattle pen' approach to pedestrians and their safety.

Removal of all guard railing in this area, including up to Park Lane, could be considered with a view to creating a more pedestrian friendly environment that stimulates a better quality setting for the impressive listed Poplars building. The landscaped verge/strip outside Crown Mead is not necessarily needed and the parking area could be incorporated so that it could be used more efficiently.

#### BRCS 2 – Bath Road Rear of Properties

Collectively, the rear of the High Street properties located along this part of Bath Road (no.'s 21-1 High Street and 4-13 The Broadway) present an indistinct and poor roadway edge. It is important that the rear of these properties contribute positively to the public realm and streetscape. Public funded streetscape improvements involving coordinated boundary treatments, established tree planting or even artwork could help develop a more attractive environment.

Due to the high number of the rear of properties to be found within the town centre, it will be important that all applications for (re)development consider carefully all aspects of proposals (apply greater design controls).

#### BRCS 3 - Bath Road/Chapel Street/Broadway

The listed Barn and adjacent former Auto Crash Car Repairs building (no.1 Chapel Street) form part of the gateway experience to the town centre at the convergence of Bath Road, Chapel Street and The Broadway. On the edge of the town centre both buildings are subject to recent planning approvals for conversion to a shop and housing scheme respectively.

There is a clear need for the redevelopment of these sites to reflect their gateway location, forming a strong and vibrant northern edge to the town centre, improving north-south pedestrian connections, presenting a memorable arrival point and protecting the setting of buildings of architectural merit.

Notwithstanding recent planning permissions and given their gateway potential discussions should be held with the developers with a view to revisiting the future of both these sites.

#### BRCS 4 – Chapel Street South

As a long term aspiration, the collection of perimeter buildings on the southern side of Chapel Street, between The Moors and The Broadway (no.'s 3-31 Chapel Street), should be seen as a development opportunity, becoming an extension to the town centre with a distinct mixed use frontage.

The age and style of the area's architecture varies. Revitalisation of this area with the introduction of a greater mix of uses provides the licence for bold contemporary architecture and urban design, which would in effect substantially increase the visibility of the town centre from along the A4.

### High Street

The aspiration for the High Street should be to produce an elegant and uncluttered streetscape which respects the traditional medieval street pattern and architectural setting of this significant route. The High Street should be unified along its entire length by using consistent natural materials and detailing. Sweeping vistas are afforded by the gradually curving High Street and the established footways and carriageway provide a clear organisation of pedestrian and vehicular zones which should be retained.

#### HS 1 – High Street West/Bath Road

This triangular area is an important gateway to the town centre from the west. However the raised planters, bollards, proliferation of signs and way the Indian Spice Restaurant building presents its side and rear to this aspect fails to address this prominent location in its design. The environmental quality of the area is poor and detracts from any sense of arriving at the town centre.

The area should be improved through the streetscape, with artworks in order to enhance the experience of this prominent location. A threshold to the town centre created by a change in carriageway materials, for example with a setted or stone dressed asphalt carriageway in this area could be one way of establishing and marking the entrance to the town centre from along Bath Road.

In the long term, the current lack of architectural definition could be addressed by incorporating the adjacent buildings into a mixed use redevelopment (no.'s 37-31 High Street). This would serve as an entry to the town centre and provide a striking image and point of interest at one of the town centre's key gateways.

### **HS 2 – High Street**

Within the existing street arrangement there is scope to narrow the carriageway maintaining the east - west one way traffic flow and to broaden the pavement treatments along the High Street, applying a simplified design with natural materials (e.g. granite setts). Existing parking could be reorganised to reduce the visual dominance of parked cars while maintaining significant parking provision. For example, improvements could be made by arranging parking bays along the southern side of the street only, keeping the right hand turn at the western end of the High Street. Key crossing points should be maintained and subtly defined to enhance pedestrian movement.

### **HS 3 – High Street North**

High quality frontages occur along the majority of the length of the High Street. The qualities of some of the properties however are insensitive to the form, scale, proportion and style of the town's medieval origins and character, especially no.'s 25-21 and 7-5A High Street. These have been identified in view of the potential to contribute to the improvement of the town centre, though it is acknowledged that this can only be achieved with the agreement of individual property owners. The redevelopment of these sites would make the High Street more attractive. New shop fronts should also be sensitively designed and of high quality to reflect the historic context of both individual buildings and the wider area.

### **HS 4 – High Street South/Car Park**

The existing pedestrian link between the High Street and public car park to the south could be opened up as a one way vehicular link that increases the accessibility within the town centre. One of the shops currently displays goods in front of the shop on the footway and this would need to be addressed.

### **Broadway Heart**

The Broadway area is already the shopping, cultural, and civic heart of the town centre. With the Broadway Green at its southern end, this area contains Thatcham's principal buildings and spaces. The following proposals focus on the creation of a stronger cultural heart to the town centre, especially around Broadway Green and the improved integration of the town centre's attractions through the provision of high quality public realm and pedestrian linkages.

### **BH 1 - The Broadway North/Millennium Cross**

A review of the street design and traffic island at the northern end of The Broadway should be considered with a view to decreasing the size of the 'tail' and allowing vehicles to make a right turn into the High Street. The mature Oak tree provides a valuable and attractive focal point which will be retained and the Millennium Memorial relocated to a prominent site along The Broadway, such as within Broadway Green. The setting to the historic Buttercross could also be enhanced with removal of the circular seating which hides it from view and therefore undermines its importance in both the streetscape and history of Thatcham.

### **BH 2 – Public Conveniences**

This prominent location at the convergence of views from along the High Street, The Broadway and busy Kingsland Shopping Centre walkway, and next to the historic Buttercross and Millennium Memorial demands a more positive and well designed feature and use. The site should be considered for redevelopment with options explored either for its retention and redesign of the building (more glazing) to bring alternative and more attractive uses, or to remove the building altogether and replace it with a centrally located feature which acts as a focus for views along the approaches and as a meeting place.

### **BH 3 – Broadway Green**

Broadway Green is tired and needs revitalisation. It could be redesigned and extended as an attractive key public space. This space could accommodate outdoor market activity and festivals with permanent sculptural art or canopies to create a sense of place at the central focus of The Broadway. Part of Broadway Green should be laid as gardens to provide a contemplative area for residents, shoppers and visitors. The existing edge planting provides a barrier to movement and a visual barrier and any redesign needs to ensure that access is not unduly restricted or frustrating for people wanting to enjoy the space.

An extension eastwards would help achieve a larger public space and offer the opportunity for increased outdoor activity, being clear of the shadows of buildings and open to the sun's path. This would be achieved by unifying the eastern side of The Broadway with the Green, incorporating both soft (planting) and hard (paved) landscaped areas. An extension would also complement the potential redevelopment of no.'s 40-43 The Broadway (see below) directly opposite the Green on the eastern side.

The existing parking bays to the east of the Green would be removed and vehicular access restricted to appropriate servicing of properties only. Traffic entering The Broadway from Station Road to the south would continue to circulate around the southern end of the Green and northwards along the western side of The Broadway. A street redesign at the northern end of Broadway Green would incorporate appropriate turning space for vehicles.

### **BH 4 – 40-43 The Broadway**

The building parade which includes no.'s 40-43 The Broadway has been identified as an opportunity site. It provides a potentially large redevelopment site that could bring well considered development, active ground floor frontages and sensitively designed shopfronts that draw residents and visitors to the southern extents of the main shopping centre.

### **BH 5 – 21-29 The Broadway**

Active frontages are important for any town centre in order to create life, vibrancy and ensure activity over time. This is particularly important when creating high quality public realm and ensuring that it feels safe and is well used. There is currently a concentration of inactive frontages at the south western end of The Broadway. To improve the overall legibility of the town centre, these frontages could be improved, especially in the light of the significant length of properties which comprises 29-21 The Broadway and the fact that they face onto the key public space of Broadway Green. Good overlooking of Broadway Green through providing more active frontages and natural surveillance on both sides will help deter potential crime and disorder, generating higher footfall levels.

### **BH6 – Access to Car Parks**

Providing easy, safe and attractive pedestrian access onto The Broadway will be a key objective. Currently, the existing vehicular and pedestrian accesses adjacent to both Co-op stores on the eastern and western sides of The Broadway provide a poor environmental quality. The access to the car park behind the larger Co-op food store on the western side of The Broadway is especially difficult for pedestrians due to the absence of a reasonable footway. Both accesses suffer from inactive frontages which are unwelcoming and would benefit from environmental improvements.

With this in mind, recommendations have been made to extend the primary shopping frontage within the town centre to include these particular properties.

### **BH 7 – The Broadway Northern Gateway**

Adding to these opportunities and challenges, it will be important to keep in mind the long term potential of the site where the Nawab Indian Restaurant, Guru Hairdressing, L'Amour Florists and former Wyatt's Butchers (currently vacant) are located. Again, the properties are identified as a key opportunity site and frontage capable of forming part of the revised primary shopping area within the town centre.

While there is some architectural merit to the Nawab building on the corner and the Wyatt's Butchers which is listed, the other buildings are of little merit. Consideration could be given to redeveloping the site for higher density mixed use purposes which responds to the experience and 'scale' of the principal gateway into the town centre. Such a redevelopment would not only enhance the physical legibility and identity of the area, with a feature development and more welcoming entrance, but would also add activity to this key section of The Broadway during the day and night.

Throughout The Broadway street furniture should be kept to a minimum to provide unimpeded access along the busy footways and spaces. Careful consideration should be given to the selection of species and spacing of trees to ensure that views of the shops along The Broadway are not overly blocked and that good levels of visual inter connectivity are achieved.

### **The Moors**

To strengthen the role of The Moors as a north-south connection, pedestrian movement and active frontage along this route should be considered. Given the important entrance to the Waitrose store and flat car park, in the context of the existing situation and redevelopment proposals of the wider Kingsland Shopping Centre site, it will be important to enhance the quality of the public realm in this area and make the most of the entrances along this route.

### **TM 1 – The Moors North**

Public realm improvements at the northern end of The Moors should consider enhancing pedestrian access and crossing points from the town centre to the east especially to the large attractive key public open space which contains an equipped play area for children. A new entrance point will need to be created at the public space which responds to the desire line developed as a result of any new crossing point introduced along The Moors.

### **TM 2 – Kingsland Centre**

Considering its uses, urban grain and development potential, the site of the Kingsland Shopping Centre which includes the Waitrose store is a site within the town centre which has most scope and potential to accommodate change, and reinforce a new identity/character that complements the rest of the town centre.

The proposals granted outline planning permission in June 2007 respond to the need for additional, larger format retail floorspace to improve the vitality and viability of the town centre.

The outline proposals see the comprehensive redevelopment of the site located between The Broadway and The Moors. Retail proposals include the resiting of the Waitrose store, new large stores and a variety of smaller scale shops, with a combination of underground and surface car parking. Also proposed are town centre living and new access points onto The Moors. Development on this site will be mixed-use and provide a variety of building sizes which will create a cluster of large and smaller scale units which broaden the attractiveness of the town centre as a shopping destination. The proposals, if realised in full will bring new life to this area introducing higher densities of use and activity that should support existing town centre uses.

When considering acceptable proposals for the detail of new buildings, spaces and routes in line with implementing the proposals it will be important to ensure that they offer extremely well considered designs which are of a form, proportion and style complementary to the existing urban form.

Pedestrian experience and navigation should be enhanced by providing, easy, safe and attractive public realm and links between the new buildings, car parks, The Broadway, Chapel Street and The Moors. In overall terms, the redevelopment should develop a sense of belonging and continuity within the area rather than becoming a separate destination to the town centre.

To make the outer edges of the town centre more welcoming and attractive along The Moors, the possibility of providing shop or housing frontages should be explored in more detail. In addition, parking could be consolidated within well designed multi-storey car parks to free land for buildings and new public spaces. If the possibilities are limited as a result of the planning consent, landscape and public art alternatives to maintain a soft appearance to both sides of the route could be explored.

### **TM 3 – Waitrose Entrance**

Should redevelopment of the Kingsland Shopping Centre and Waitrose store not take place, or be delayed, the existing entrance from The Moors should be acknowledged as a key arrival point to the town centre creating a strong sense of place. This will limit the feeling of experiencing a service route at the back of the store. A strong welcoming image should be created at this arrival point. Resiting the recycling facilities within the wider site should also be achieved as part of a package of environmental improvements.

### **Church Gate and Church Lane**

Despite being on the edge of the defined town centre area, the Church Gate and Church Lane character area has a quiet and peaceful atmosphere and feels distant from the activity of the surrounding areas. The area contains some of the town's finest buildings and is of great historical significance and sensitivity. The area is generally well maintained and the environmental quality of the Lane and spaces is good, though the carriageway surface along Church Lane is in a poor condition.

### **CGCL 1 – Church Gate and Church Lane**

The management of this area should generally follow a programme of conservation. Sensitively designed new developments, where appropriate, will allow the area to make a fuller contribution to, and achieve greater integration with, the rest of the town centre. This will be achieved through close adherence to conservation controls. Views to and from the Church of St Mary should be protected to reinforce its position as an important landmark on the edge of the town centre. The use of signs and architectural lighting to emphasise the fine buildings could be considered to improve legibility and the attractiveness of the area.

### **Station Road Approach**

The approach to and from the railway station at 1.5km to the south east of the town centre winds through a predominantly housing area where the age and style of the area's housing architecture varies. Given the predominance of housing along the route and distance from the town centre there are limited opportunities for future redevelopment. The Kennet Leisure Centre represents a major leisure destination located along the route.

For these reasons, the strategy for improving the Station Road Approach should be geared towards improving the legibility and understanding for those either on bus, foot or by bicycle getting to or from the station to the town centre.

#### **SRA 1 - Railway Station**

High quality information should be provided near the station's entrance about the town centre to enhance access and encourage people either on foot, by bike or by public transport to explore the town centre and its hidden assets at their own pace. On arrival at the station, visitors should be greeted with a detailed map of the town centre to help orientate themselves and plan their next steps. An overview diagram will help to build a mental map of the wider town and its setting, and highlight attractions such as the Kennet and Avon Canal and Nature Discovery Centre.

#### **SRA 2 – Station Road**

The wayfinding system, in the form of signs and information needs to span the complete journey from the railway station to the town centre making the route as clear and easy to understand as possible. Key locations recommended for better wayfinding treatment include:

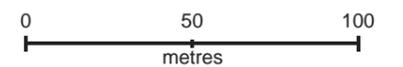
- Station Road and The Moors mini roundabout on the edge of the town centre;
- Station Road and Stoney Lane junction next to the well used Kennet Leisure Centre;
- Station Road and Urquhart Road mini roundabout;
- Station Road and Pipers Way roundabout which is the first decision point on leaving the station and travelling towards the town centre.

Town Centre Prioritised Infrastructure Projects

-  Improved Town Centre Arrival Point
-  Public Art/Sculpture
-  Carriageway Treatments to Announce Town Centre
-  Priority Public Realm/Street Redesign
-  Parking Rationalisation/Street Redesign
-  Enhanced & Extended Public Space
-  Potential Redevelopment Site
-  Kingsland Shopping Centre Redevelopment Footprint
-  Frontage in Need of Enhancement
-  Boundary in Need of Enhancement
-  Key Listed Building & Setting
-  Conservation Area
-  Key Visual Link
-  Major Pedestrian Desire Line



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### Priority Infrastructure Projects Summary

Based on the findings of the audit and analysis and responses from the key stakeholder workshop, the recommended priorities for action within the town centre are set out in the following table.

The top priorities reflect the role of the gateways as focal points for the image, identity and activity and in articulating the presence of the town centre which needs to be brought out. Visible change at these strategically important locations will bring confidence to the local community and to potential investors and provide the platform on which a sustainable pattern of growth and change can be built.

Improvements along the Bath Road and Chapel Street approach (A4) will help develop a new and improved 'front door' to the town centre where the current lack of gravitas and architectural distinction can be addressed. The northern end of The Broadway represents one of the pivotal locations within the town centre.

It is here that a critical mass of improvements involving street design and public realm improvements, in the control of the Council, complemented with new development can be achieved.

The Broadway Green is the town centre's most important public open space.

The consolidation and improvement of the retail 'offer' is vital. It is the key to revitalising the town centre. The shopping core will effectively be 'thickened' out at the centre with the realisation of the plans for the Kingsland Shopping Centre. The redevelopment of this key site should create a shopping environment which combines the character of the existing street layout with new high quality shops and services. The challenge is to fit the new shopping into the fabric of the area and to develop a configuration that matches the need for modern retail space with respect for the scale and character of the town centre.

### Priority Infrastructure Projects Summary

#### Infrastructure Project Code Description and Key

- A cosmetic/minor improvements
- B hardscape/paving
- C landscaping/street trees
- D lighting
- E street furniture
- F wayfinding – signs/information
- G major improvements/design

#### Priority

1-5 High to Low

- 1 High
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5 Low

Reference	Project Description	Code	Priority	Indicative Costing
<b>Bath Road/Chapel Street Corridor</b>				
BRCS 1	Bath Road and Crown Mead	A B C	2	£197,750
BRCS 2	Bath Road Rear of Properties	A C	1	£69,700-£144,700
BRCS 3	Bath Road/Chapel Street/Broadway	B D E F G	1	£76,025
BRCS 4	Chapel Street South	B C D F G	5	£88,750
<b>High Street</b>				
HS1	High Street West/Bath Road	A/G B C D E F	1	£72,700-£147,700
HS 2	High Street	B D E F G	3	£128,400
HS 3	High Street North	G	4	£15,000
HS 4	High Street South/Car Park	A B F	4	£7,000
<b>The Broadway Heart</b>				
BH 1	The Broadway North/Millennium Cross	B C D E F G	1	£104,000-£111,000
BH 2	Public Toilets	A/G D E F	2	£182,000-£357,200
BH 3	Broadway Green	B C D E F G	1	£118,600-£203,600
BH 4	40-43 The Broadway	G	3	-
BH 5	21-29 The Broadway	A	3	£15,000
BH 6	Accesses to Car Parks	A B D F	3	£32,850
BH 7	The Broadway Northern Gateway	B D F G	1	£30,950
<b>The Moors</b>				
TM 1	The Moors North	A B F	5	£93,750
TM 2	Kingsland Centre	B C D E F G	1	-
TM3	Waitrose Entrance	A C D F	1	£5,000-£12,000
<b>Church Gate and Church Lane</b>				
CGCL 1	Church Gate and Church Lane	B D F	4	£53,000-£55,000
<b>Station Road Approach</b>				
SRA 1	Railway Station	E F	2	£14,250-£21,250
SRA 2	Station Road	F	3	£8,000

## New Centrally Located Community Facility

The Thatcham Vision First Action Plan 2007 (The Vision) identifies several priority projects, which seek to strengthen Thatcham as an independent and thriving market town, to provide a focus for the community and to improve the appearance of the town centre.

One of the priorities for the town is to investigate the feasibility of locating a major new community building in the town centre: this forms an element of the brief for this Design Appraisal. As part of our report, we have considered: the need for such a community facility; the form it could take and potential sites to accommodate it.

The Vision, which was based on an element of community consultation, sets out the following requirements:

- a larger and centrally located library;
- meeting rooms for use by the community and businesses;
- offices for use by a range of community groups;
- an internet café;
- a public counter / one stop shop for local public services, including West Berkshire Council, Thatcham Town Council and the police;
- landscaped garden area;
- external spaces for events e.g. markets and performances;
- new facility must meet the highest environmental specifications to serve as an example to the wider community.

The Vision also suggested a number of optional, but desirable features:

- a larger multi-use public space for use by community groups;
- a sound-proofed room for band practices with recording facilities;
- ancillary retail units to generate revenue.

The Stakeholder Consultation event held on 16 January 2009 as part of this Design Appraisal (see Participation in the Design Appraisal section), revealed that a new community facility for Thatcham was not a high priority for many of the attendees. Each of the three groups identified five or six top priorities which they felt needed to be addressed in the town centre. All three groups wanted better signs and information and unsympathetic shop fronts and signs to be removed.

A common theme amongst two of the groups was that community facilities should be improved with one group suggesting there should be a town hall and larger library facility within the town centre, possibly located at the Priory.

### Benefits of Centrally Located Community Facility

In our view, the provision of a modern, multi-purpose community facility located in the town centre, fronting onto, or with good connections to The Broadway or High Street would support the town centre function, increasing pedestrian footfalls, patronage and linked trips. Such an initiative would be supported by Government advice contained in PPS6 which seeks to increase the vitality and viability of town centres by locating a diverse range of town centre uses, including libraries and community facilities at the heart of town centres.

The value of such a facility to the centre will very much depend on its scale and the uses it accommodates. Our engagement with stakeholders during the Design Appraisal process suggests that there is no clear consensus on this point.

### Thatcham's Existing Library

The Thatcham Vision states that "a new library is considered vital, as the current library provision is grossly inadequate." The existing library has a footprint of 190 m<sup>2</sup> yet the national standards for library provision confirm that a library of 750m<sup>2</sup> is needed to serve the population of Thatcham, estimated to be 25,000, based on a minimum space standard of 30m<sup>2</sup> per 1000 population.

The existing library is located in a relatively poor location away from the heart of the town centre and separated from the centre by Bath Road (the A4), which significantly reduces the convenience of linked trips by foot to the town centre.

Although the existing library is located within a cluster of community uses, including a medical centre, dental practice and Town Council offices, visits to these other facilities will, in our judgement, be limited as the health and administrative facilities are used infrequently on an as and when needed basis.

The site of the existing library is constrained in size and by its relationship to the surrounding buildings, which we consider would prevent any form of meaningful extension or update. Relocation therefore appears to be the only option in order to achieve a larger library facility to meet the needs of the whole community.

A modern library could be the key element within any new community facility as this would be of benefit to the entire community of Thatcham and, in our judgement, is the use likely to generate the highest number of visits.

A replacement library would be a sufficient "anchor" to the new "community facility" to potentially support other uses (for example internet café, rooms for use by community groups (U3A, homework club, local societies)) creating a genuine "hub" for the community. Without such an underpinning facility it seems to us unlikely that some of the other elements referred to (new Town Council offices, one-stop shop for Council services, multi-use public space) would generate sufficient activity to significantly benefit the centre or justify the substantial investment required. The Design Appraisal has identified 12 vacant ground floor premises in the town centre that could be suitable for adaption to smaller scale facilities which would benefit the local community, for example an internet café and/or one stop shop could occupy a vacant retail unit, subject to obtaining the necessary planning consents. However, whilst this could assist in providing an alternative use for one of the vacant retail units (a number of which occupy prominent and strategic locations within the centre) it would not benefit the centre to the same degree as a larger, multi-purpose community building. We also consider that a West Berkshire Council public counter/one stop shop; community meeting rooms/halls and an internet café could also be included to support the primary function:

### Potential Sites

The plan opposite identifies five potential sites that could accommodate a community facility. The table on page 79 sets out the advantages and disadvantages of these five sites. A summary of our analysis for each site is given below.

#### Site A - Bath Road/High Street West

This triangular site, at the western end of the High Street is a key gateway site with excellent prominence on the High Street and Bath Road that could accommodate a striking building to act as a marker for the arrival at Thatcham town centre for those approaching via Bath Road from the west.

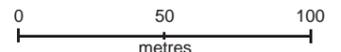
A community use on this site could help to increase pedestrian footfalls at the north-west of the High Street. However, the site is relatively remote from the Kingsland Shopping Centre and The Broadway.

Whilst part of the site (the current hardscaped open area) is in public ownership the remainder is occupied by private businesses which are trading and the site appears to be in multiple ownership. This indicates that acquisition of sufficient land to deliver a viable site may be complex.

Potential Sites for a New Centrally Located Community Facility



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#### Site B - The Barn and former Auto Crash Repairs

The Barn and the former Auto Crash Repairs premises are situated in prominent positions on the Bath Road and, as noted elsewhere in this Design Appraisal, have potential to create a memorable arrival point for visitors approaching Thatcham along the A4. The A4 (Bath Road) also acts as a barrier to convenient pedestrian connectivity. However substantial public realm and pedestrian priority schemes would need to be carried out to make this site feasible in development terms and an attractive proposition for a community facility.

Separate planning permissions have been granted for: demolition of the crash repair centre and construction of a residential scheme; the conversion of the Barn to a retail unit. The approved scheme for the crash repair centre has not been implemented and the site is currently being marketed as vacant premises. In our opinion, the approved residential development is a missed opportunity for this site as it will not provide a high quality building to signal this key gateway to Thatcham. The approved conversion of the Barn is logical but we consider that this site could provide an opportunity for an alternative proposal to come forward which would do more to reinforce the town centre.

The Barn is listed and this will limit its suitability to accommodate a multi-use community facility. It could be re-developed in conjunction with the adjacent site although it may not be ideal to have a community facility spanning two buildings.

#### Site C - Kingsland Shopping Centre

A community facility could be incorporated within the proposed redevelopment of the Kingsland Shopping Centre. The creation of primary shopping frontages will be the priority of the developer, and any community space could be expected to occupy secondary locations, possibly on upper levels. In practice, upper levels can suffer from a lack of prominence and do not necessarily attract the same level of footfall as facilities located at street-level.

The site is in private ownership and development proposals are at an advanced stage with outline planning permission having been granted that does not include a community facility. The planning permission was granted subject to a Section 106 Agreement which required various financial contributions to be paid if the outline permission is implemented (subject to approval of Reserved Matters). There may be relatively limited scope to re-negotiate the terms of the S106 Agreement. In the event that alternative proposals come forward however there may be scope to negotiate in respect of the inclusion of space for a community facility. Negotiations could also be progressed with the developer a commercial basis outside the context of the S106 Agreement.

#### Site D - The Priory and Environs

The Priory, in Church Lane has been suggested at the Stakeholder Workshop by one group as a potential site for a community facility. We have examined the site, the building and the opportunities and constraints that it would provide.

The Priory, a former residential dwelling, is set within a large landscaped garden with attractive walls on its boundary. The property is listed as Grade II and is situated within a conservation area. Accordingly, alterations to the property, outbuildings and boundary walls will require listed building consent.

The former dwelling was designed and built to front onto Church Lane, which in its current form does not visually connect to the town centre.

The Priory has a built footprint of 264m<sup>2</sup> and the internal layout, designed as a dwelling with a series of small rooms, reduces the suitability of the building for a community use. Any alterations to, or extension of the property would need to be subservient to the host property and sympathetic to the setting of the listed Church of St Mary.

The Priory already contains community uses, including the pupil referral unit, as well as accommodation for West Berkshire Council's children's services and social services teams.

Due to the current form and function of Church Lane, The Priory lies in a backland environment and is physically disconnected from the town centre in such a manner that it does not provide any greater level of prominence than the existing library site. To integrate the site with the town centre it would be necessary to create an opening in the boundary wall and "open" the site to the centre. This would also require land-owner agreement from the Co-operative as access from the centre would require users to cross their car park.

In our view, The Priory building should be retained as a Listed Building contributing to the architectural character of the centre. Adaption or extension of the building to form a community facilities building would be possible (dependent on the uses to be accommodated) however the success of the site in contributing to the overall vitality and viability of the centre would be dependent on establishing a physical and visual connection via land at the rear of the Co-operative.

#### Site E - 40 - 43 The Broadway

A community facility on this site, which currently contains two vacant units, has the potential to complement the recommended enhancement of Broadway Green. It is located close to the heart of the town centre and close to the Kingsland Centre.

A community facility in this location would be expected to increase footfalls to the south of Broadway Green, which would enliven the main community space.

The site is not of sufficient size to accommodate a new library but could be used, for example, to provide an internet café, one-stop shop for Council services of information centre. An internet café could spill out onto a widened pavement or enhanced green, it would benefit from the afternoon sun and could be an attractive opportunity.

The site is likely to be within one or two private ownerships. Due to the current level of vacancies, these properties offer potential to accommodate a facility in the short-term.

#### Funding Sources

Funding of any proposed community facility will be a critical item and central to the ability to deliver the facility.

As noted elsewhere, there are a variety of sites and buildings within and around Thatcham town centre. Whilst the sites themselves may not be inherently suitable for a new, multi-purpose community facility they will have a hard/economic value which could be realised and the proceeds directed to a new community facility, subject to positive decision being made in this regard by each land-owning body.

We have identified The Priory, the existing library and the Parish Hall on Chapel Street as existing buildings in public ownership where current facilities could be re-provided (in whole or in part) in a new community building. We would recommend therefore that a detailed dialogue is pursued with the owners and that a valuation exercise is undertaken to establish the alternative use value of each site. This would not commit the owners but would establish the potential revenue which could be generated from this source to fund a new facility.

Other options that need to be explored are public funds, the use of land swaps, private developer contributions from planning obligations and the dispersal of other public assets.

### Advantages and Disadvantages of Potential Community Facility Sites

Opportunity Site	Advantages	Disadvantages
<b>High Street West/Bath Road</b> 1,408m <sup>2</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Prominent gateway location along the A4</li> <li>Opportunity to provide striking building and architectural definition to town centre</li> <li>Potential attraction to revitalise the High Street and increase footfalls in this area</li> <li>Accessible location</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Private ownership</li> <li>Long term aspiration – whole site is unlikely to come forward in the short term without assistance</li> </ul>
<b>The Barn and former Auto Crash Repairs</b> 1,413m <sup>2</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Prominent gateway location</li> <li>Opportunity to create a memorable arrival point and a vibrant northern edge to the town centre</li> <li>Opportunity to protect and enhance the setting of buildings of architectural merit (listed Barn)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Private ownership</li> <li>Both sites subject to recent planning consents</li> <li>Barn is a listed building</li> <li>Limited parking and barrier effect of Bath Road/Chapel Street (A4)</li> </ul>
<b>Kingsland Shopping Centre Redevelopment</b> n/a	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Central location within the town centre</li> <li>Highly accessible and visible location adjacent to The Broadway</li> <li>Ample car parking</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Unlikely to be able to have community facility use at ground floor level due to high value retail uses at this level</li> </ul>
<b>The Priory and Environs</b> 4,460m <sup>2</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Significant size redevelopment opportunity</li> <li>Priory in public sector ownership</li> <li>Re-use of a listed building</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Physically 'off-centre' and therefore low key in terms of an attraction on the outer edges of the town centre</li> <li>Poor connections and accessibility off Church Lane</li> <li>The Priory is a listing building - the suitability of the internal arrangements to user requirements and working within the integrity of the building and setting</li> <li>Historic boundary wall to the east, which would require a new opening to be created to integrate site with town centre</li> <li>Site to the immediate north is in private ownership</li> </ul>
<b>40-43 The Broadway</b> 1,000m <sup>2</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Would complement redevelopment of The Broadway Green as the town centre's key public space</li> <li>Activates the space fronting on to Broadway Green</li> <li>Close to public car parking</li> <li>Would serve to draw residents and visitors to the southern extents of the main shopping area – increasing footfalls</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Private ownership</li> <li>Could not accommodate a larger multi-use community building</li> </ul>

### Plan for taking the Options Forward

In our view, given the absence of consensus on either the need for a new facility or what it should provide, further detailed discussions need to be held with the key stakeholders most directly linked to the provision of a new centrally located facility to ascertain the level of commitment on their part. These stakeholders include West Berkshire Council (Library Service), West Berkshire Council (Children's Services) and Thatcham Town Council. Without a firm commitment from at least one of the stakeholders the prospect of a new multi-purpose community facility is significantly diminished.

Once the degree of commitment of these key stakeholders, their ability to commit funding and resources and their potential willingness to release value from their existing land assets is known, a more detailed assessment of existing and potential sites (including valuation) should be commissioned. A wider level of engagement with other bodies who may be able to contribute funding, resources or who would have an aspiration to use the facility would then be justified and, in our judgement, would elicit a more meaningful level of participation if it was felt that there was a commitment to delivery of a project. These wider groups could include:

- Thatcham Town Council;
- West Berkshire Council;
- West Berkshire Safer Communities Partnership;
- Thames Valley Police;
- Thatcham's Churches;
- Thatcham Volunteer Bureau;
- Community Groups and Clubs.

Once baseline agreement has been reached on:

- the need for a new community facility by key stakeholders;
- the composition of such a facility;
- potential sources of funding;
- a preferred site.

An architectural feasibility study would need to be prepared. This would examine the feasibility of the preferred site to accommodate the identified community uses and facilities. The study would consider land values and build costs and provide a realistic time and cost plan for delivering the facility.

We consider that further community consultation should be built in at key stages to confirm the community's aspirations for the new community facility and their views on the most suitable preferred location, based on the site(s) identified by the stakeholders, and the architectural feasibility plan.

# 05

## Appendix 1: Summary of Stakeholder Workshop

## WEST BERKSHIRE COUNCIL

### THATCHAM TOWN CENTRE DESIGN APPRAISAL

#### SUMMARY OF STAKEHOLDER WORKSHOP



JANUARY 2009

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1. List of Delegates
2. Event Programme
3. Presentation Slides
4. Walking Tour Route Maps

#### 1. Background

- 1.1 This document summarises a workshop event held at Thatcham Town Council Offices on Friday 16<sup>th</sup> January 2009. The event sought feedback from key stakeholders who gathered to identify, examine and discuss the issues affecting Thatcham town centre and to consider the potential for change.
- 1.2 Thatcham town centre is currently the subject of a Design Appraisal which seeks to develop a broader understanding of the character and function of the town centre, to identify the issues faced by the centre and to consider how the centre might be developed in the future.
- 1.3 The event was facilitated by Turley Associates who have been appointed by West Berkshire Council to produce the Design Appraisal of Thatcham town centre. The workshop provided an opportunity for key stakeholders to provide feedback and give a steer on what they felt were the positive and negative aspects of Thatcham town centre.
- 1.4 23 key stakeholders, including representatives from key community groups, local businesses, Ward Councillors and Town Councillors were invited to the event. The event was attended by 16 key stakeholders (See Appendix 1 – List of Delegates).
- 1.5 Feedback from the event will be used to inform the conclusions and recommendations of the Design Appraisal report which, once completed, will be published on West Berkshire Council's website. The intention is that this 'evidence base' will then feed into the review of policies within the emerging Local Development Framework.

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## 2. Presentation and Walking Tour

- 2.1 The event was introduced with a short presentation from the Turley Associates project team (see Appendix 2 – event programme). A brief summary of the scope of the health check and design audit which make up the Design Appraisal was provided.
- 2.2 The presentation slides are attached at Appendix 3 for the benefit of those who attended the stakeholder workshop on the day as well as those unable to attend.
- 2.3 The Delegates were split into three groups and went on a short guided walk around the town centre, stopping at 8 key locations (Route maps attached at Appendix 4). Participants then returned to Thatcham Town Council Offices to discuss the key issues and report back to the wider group, drawing on their experiences and observations from the walking tour.
- 2.4 Feedback from this workshop is provided in the next section.



## 3. Workshop Feedback Summary

- 3.1 Following the walking tour of the town centre, each of the 3 groups discussed and answered 5 questions about the town centre. These included:
  - What do you like about the town centre?
  - What are the best features within the town centre?
  - What do you dislike about the town centre?
  - What needs to be improved?
  - What are the top priorities?
- 3.2 Summaries of this feedback are given below.

### What do you like about the town centre?

- 3.3 Generally the participants agreed that they liked the Broadway Green, although some groups identified improvements which could be made to the area (see below). The 'historic heart' of the town was also identified as something that was liked, with the non-linear High Street and the variation of historic and listed buildings with appealing facades (e.g Priory, St Mary's and URC churches, the Barn and traditional pubs).
- 3.4 Participants also liked the village/community 'feel' of the town which displays an 'intimate setting' and a slight 'quaintness' and 'quirkiness' to it. The centre was thought by many to be compact and well serviced with shops, with interesting retailing (e.g. Mandarin shopping arcade) and a good selection of varied restaurants. One group also identified the market in the centre as something which they liked.
- 3.5 Car parks in the town centre were thought to be well located. One group also mentioned that they liked the one-way gyratory system (although this was also mentioned as a dislike by other groups).

### What are the best features within the town centre?

- 3.6 Unsurprisingly, some of the best features of the town identified by participants overlapped with what they liked about the centre. One group described Thatcham as a 'hidden gem'. The Broadway Green was acknowledged by all groups as an attractive area which has more potential as a key green space within the town

centre. Also, the relationship of the Conservation Area (which has a number of attractive buildings) to the town centre was thought to be a positive feature that could be exploited more. Again, the church and the Priory were mentioned as buildings which had particularly pleasing aspects. The architecture of the High Street, its building ridgelines and brickwork were highlighted as a good feature, as was the Market Cross and Millennium Memorial.

- 3.7 Again, the provision of two 'good sized' car parks which are in close proximity to the High Street and Broadway was mentioned, as were the good bus links that the town centre has. Some groups also identified the toilet block building as a good feature, although it was acknowledged that it could be improved in design terms, put to alternative use or perhaps even provided elsewhere within the town centre - given the prominence of its location.

### What do you dislike about the town centre?

- 3.8 Almost all participants identified that there were no gateways into the town, with barriers at entrances and a general lack of signs making it hard to tell that 'You've arrived at Thatcham'. This it was felt resulted in many visitors not knowing it's there. Comments such as 'you could drive past and miss it' were made. It was generally felt that there is a lack of identification and information on arriving at the historic town (which may be the oldest continuously inhabited settlement in England – this could be a tremendous selling point for the town centre if found to be true).
- 3.9 Other issues were that the town centre has poor connectivity and lacks good pedestrian flows. An example was given by one participant that once you are in the car park you don't know where to go. Pedestrian access in the Kingsland Centre was thought to be poor, with poorly placed benches, bollards and planters creating pinch points and making it difficult for wheelchair users and those with pushchairs. Street furniture and road sign clutter were also identified by most participants as an issue, with some signs within the Conservation Area being described as 'garish and unsightly'. The 'utilitarian' façades on some buildings were also thought to be unsympathetic to the Conservation Area.
- 3.10 Another issue identified with the public realm was the dominance of the public toilet block, which some said they felt faced the wrong direction and others said was in the wrong location entirely and should be placed somewhere less prominent. Other specific areas that were disliked by participants were:
  - The area of 'wasted' land at the end of the High Street by Spice restaurant. Some liked the trees that were present but everyone disliked the planters

- The stretch along the Bath Road (A4) from the bottom of Park Lane to the corner at the top of Broadway which is dominated by the backs of properties and looks neglected
- The space in front of the toilet block
- The view of the recycling section in Waitrose from The Moors
- The Broadway Green's lack of visual permeability (safety implications)

3.11 Generally, people felt there was a good range of shops but that there was room for improvement within the town centre. More clothes shops would be welcomed, along with fewer charity shops and more specialist shops. It was also noted that there is a lack of shop floor space with available units generally being small and unsuited to the needs of many retailers.

3.12 The majority of participants felt that additional parking restrictions might create a negative aspect for the town and that car users should be encouraged. As mentioned above, the one-way gyratory system was disliked by some. One participant also commented that they felt the pavements on the east side of The Broadway are too wide. Another group thought that the build outs along The Broadway should be removed and that cars and pedestrians could potentially 'share space'.

#### What needs to be improved?

3.13 Below is a bullet point summary of the main improvements that were suggested:

- Signs around the town could be improved. Pedestrian signs are not clear and better signs could be provided (information about the town, directions to town from station approach etc.). A sign is needed at the railway station giving information about Thatcham and bus routes/timetables to the town centre.
- Improve 'entrances' to the town centre, possibly with welcoming signs/features such as an archway (sympathetic to Thatcham architecture) e.g. at the Waitrose car park entrance and westerly approach to High Street.
- Could it be confirmed (via Guinness Book of Records) that Thatcham is the oldest continuously inhabited settlement in England? If so, it was felt that this fact should be used to brand the town centre.
- Improving the public realm by removing street furniture and clutter. Remove planters near Spice, cut overgrown shrubs in the Kingsland Centre back, relocate

shopping trolleys from outside Waitrose to a location where they do not create a pinch point.

- The toilet block building needs to be relocated or possibly put to a different use. One group suggested it could be used as an information point for visitors to the town, whilst others thought the building could be redesigned using different materials to open the area up e.g. more glass in the façades.
- Promote historical aspects of the town, make more of the Conservation Area and improve the less attractive buildings. Improve the Barn (Grade II listed) on Bath Road (A4) and the building next to the Barn.
- Improve the streetscape along Bath Road (A4) where the backs of properties and servicing areas are currently visible.
- Improve elements of the Broadway Green e.g. remove the hedging which conceals aspects of the green and replace with railings.
- Improve pedestrian access and flows around the town centre e.g. pedestrian access from the north (residential area to town other side of A4); improve crossings at The Moors/Bath Road and Bath Road/Park Road; improve connectivity between the Priory and the town centre; and to provide access from the Co-Op car park onto the High Street.
- Remove 'paved finger' from the monument site at the northern end of The Broadway to allow traffic to go around it more safely and make a feature of the market cross area.
- Explore the potential for a local consortium for the town centre to give people a focus and vehicle for coordination of ideas and projects (including traders).
- Improve the public realm with better lighting
- Increase the number of specialist shops and hold different speciality markets within the town centre.
- Most groups wanted the majority of parking restrictions to be removed and the parking potential increased to enable 'shoppers to shop'. However, one participant suggested that parking restrictions (maybe 1 side parking only) could be introduced on the High Street.
- One group wanted the High Street traffic flow to be 'revamped' whilst another mentioned the possibility for partial pedestrianisation along the High Street and The Broadway. Another group thought the build outs along The Broadway could be

removed and a different 'space sharing' relationship between pedestrians and vehicles explored.

#### What are the top priorities?

3.14 Each group identified five or six top priorities which they felt needed to be addressed in the town centre. All three groups wanted better signs and information about the town, with possibly the installation of 'Welcome to Thatcham' at key locations. However, participants felt that unsympathetic shop fronts should be removed. Participants wanted the town to be better promoted and to draw out the attractive aspects of the town to make the most of them e.g. by physically defining the extents and special qualities of the designated Conservation Area. This also tied in with identifying the town's 'unique selling point', which one group suggested may be the selection and variety of restaurants.

3.15 Improvements could be made to the Green on The Broadway. Suggestions included removing the hedge and replacing it with railings to open the area up, improving surfaces in the area, improving the market and relocating/redesigning the public toilets. Participants wanted the commercial viability of the town centre to be revitalised with an improved town centre, incorporating the redevelopment of the Kingsland Centre.

3.16 A common theme amongst two of the groups was that community facilities should be improved with one group suggesting there should be a town hall and larger library facility within the town centre, possibly located at the Priory. Some of the groups thought that parking should be made easier, with fewer restrictions on the High Street and possibly free parking for a two-hour period at Waitrose. Finally, one group thought that the creation of a consortium for Thatcham was a top priority. This could be linked to the existing vision steering group.

#### 4. What Next?

- 4.1 Feedback from the event will be used to inform the conclusions and recommendations of the Design Appraisal report which, once completed, will be published on West Berkshire Council's website. The final report will contain a more detailed account of the feedback received from key stakeholders, including those who were unable to attend the event on 16<sup>th</sup> January.
- 4.2 The Design Appraisal report will be used by West Berkshire as part of their Local Development Framework (LDF) evidence base to inform future policies which will help shape Thattham Town Centre.

#### Thattham Town Centre

##### Design Appraisal Stakeholder Event – 16 January 2009

Attendance list:

Peter Allen	Thattham Town Council
Cllr Rodney Arnold	Thattham Town Council
Cllr P Bale	West Berkshire Council
Cllr Richard Crumly	West Berkshire Council and Thattham Town Council
Cllr Lee Dillon	West Berkshire Council and Thattham Town Council
Jackie Edwards	Southern Market Traders Co-Operative
Cllr Sheila Ellison	Thattham Town Council
Richard Halderthay	Green Issues
Cllr Owen Jeffery	West Berkshire Council and Thattham Town Council
Helen Johnson	U3A
Mark Kinhead	Chelstone Management
Bryan Lyttle	West Berkshire Council
Sarah McCullough	West Berkshire Council
Cllr Terry Port	West Berkshire Council and Thattham Town Council
Susan Powell	Safer Communities Partnership
Sue Whiddett	Thattham Volunteer Bureau





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