



# Thaxted Neighbourhood Plan

## POLICIES

**ISSUE DRAFT 11 : 28/12/2017**

Project conducted by a Steering Group of local people  
and supported by the Parish Council

2017 - 2033



# Thaxted Neighbourhood Plan

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# Chapter 1 Introduction

## 1.1 WHAT IS A NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN ?

1.1.1 Neighbourhood Plans were introduced following the 2011 Localism Act as a means of getting local people involved in planning for the future development of their area. In a move away from regional strategies the opportunity became available for a degree of 'bottom up' control based upon the wishes and needs of local communities.

1.1.2 Local plans represent the third tier of planning in England. In what is inevitably a hierarchical system, central government policy in the form of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) takes precedence over other more local planning policy documents but the policies of the NPPF are of a general nature designed to apply to the country as a whole. At district level the planning document of greatest significance is the Local Plan. In Uttlesford the current Local Plan which should determine the form, location and scale of development is still (at the time of writing) currently the 2005 adopted Local Plan. A new draft Local Plan was presented to an Examination in Public but was rejected by the inspector and a revised draft Plan is in the course of preparation. The Thaxted Neighbourhood Plan (the NP) is therefore being prepared in tandem with the Uttlesford Local Plan. It will provide a framework for the way that development is undertaken at a 'micro' level. It is based upon a detailed assessment of the physical characteristics of the village and the wishes of local people and is intended to both direct and control future development to align with what is needed rather than having it imposed by a rather more remote authority.

1.1.3 There are now (2017) in the order of 350 neighbourhood plans that have been adopted nationwide. They are statutory planning policy documents and therefore provide a very useful means by which communities can influence where development takes place. Once adopted, developers, local planning authorities and planning inquiry inspectors must take account of them. They will have gone through a thorough process of consultation and scrutiny and will therefore have full effect as guiding planning policies.

## 1.2 WHY DOES THAXTED NEED ONE?

1.2.1 Thaxted is undoubtedly a special place. It is one of a collection of picturesque small towns and villages in north Essex and south Suffolk whose heritage and landscape are genuinely special. It stands side by side with Finchingfield, Clare, Cavendish, Long Melford and Lavenham in representing the essence of rural England. It is essential that it is looked after for future generations and that future development is properly managed. Thaxted is however constantly under pressure from developers seeking to bring to it a scale of housing development that is entirely inappropriate in the context of local infrastructure, landscape quality and heritage value. It has already seen the impact of inappropriate development on Sampford Road and the continual extension of Wedow Road; the former imposing on the setting of the grade I listed church and the latter generating traffic flows with just one wholly inadequate outlet. The community came together to oppose, at a two and a half week appeal inquiry, proposals for the development of a further 120 houses off Walden Road which would have been intensely damaging to an important area of landscape and would have imposed unbearable strain on the already over-burdened infrastructure of the village. The success in getting that appeal dismissed encouraged the Parish Council and local people to seek to pre-empt

further attempts by developers to impose this scale of development and development that was so obviously in the wrong place.

1.2.2 Thaxted must however evolve and development is both inevitable and necessary. What is crucial is that that development is of a scale that is manageable and above all that it is in the right place. In this Plan we have identified opportunities for development which the community and our professional consultants believe are appropriate and which have the potential to further enhance the quality of our already exceptional environment.

### **1.3 HOW HAS THE PLAN BEEN PUT TOGETHER?**

1.3.1 Neighbourhood plans should reflect the views of the local community. The Thaxted NP is therefore based upon the outcome of an intensive process of public consultation involving questionnaires to every household and three public exhibitions. It is also however, backed up by a very considerable amount of local research and by the findings of experts commissioned to consider specific matters that have a bearing on the form and location of development options.

1.3.2 .Work on the NP has been co-ordinated by a Steering Group made up of local volunteers. The costs incurred in the administration of the process and in the commissioning of professional advice have been funded by the Parish Council, Uttlesford District Council and by Locality, an agency of the Department for Communities and Local Government. It is however the work of local people supported by an evidence base. The approach to the formulation of policies has been an entirely objective one. The policies reflect the wishes of the community and the recommendations of independent professionals.

### **1.4 CONTENT**

1.4.1 The purpose of a neighbourhood plan is to provide policies that will guide development at a local level. Those policies are supported by a narrative which explains in more detail the intentions of the local community and the steering group that interpreted them. It is however, necessary for intending developers and planning authorities to properly understand the context in which those policies are set. A large part of this document therefore, is devoted to explaining the results of the community engagement and the specific studies that have been undertaken. The reasoning behind the policies is as important, if not more important, than the policies themselves.

1.4.2 A lot of concerns emerged from the public consultation that could not be translated into planning policies, i.e. the control or allowance of development would not directly influence some of the things that mattered most. This included in particular highways and parking issues. In order to address these matters the NP has nonetheless highlighted them with directions to the Parish Council and other relevant bodies to take action to pursue processes towards their implementation.

1.4.3 As the evidence base for this project developed it became apparent that the issues and findings that were emerging could be categorised under five general headings. The NP is therefore divided into five chapters — Heritage and Conservation; Housing and Design; Landscape and the Countryside; Tourism and the Economy; and Infrastructure.

1.4.4 The Heritage chapter is based to a large extent on the findings of three principal studies. The first is a report by heritage consultants, Grover Lewis into the setting of both the Conservation Area

and individual listed buildings. This document deals principally with Thaxted's hinterland - the countryside that immediately abuts the central area. The policies and findings relating to the central area are then based on the Conservation Area Appraisal undertaken by Uttlesford in 2012 and a comprehensive analysis undertaken specially for the NP by local volunteers. The weight of public opinion was very heavily in favour of supporting the conclusions of all three of these documents.

1.4.5 The housing chapter was based on a specially commissioned housing needs survey designed to identify the local housing requirement in terms of number, size and tenure. In terms of identifying specific sites for development the policies and conclusions are based on the work of Grover Lewis and our landscape consultants, Liz Lake Associates, together with the questionnaire responses as to where local people would find development to be beneficial or at least, acceptable.

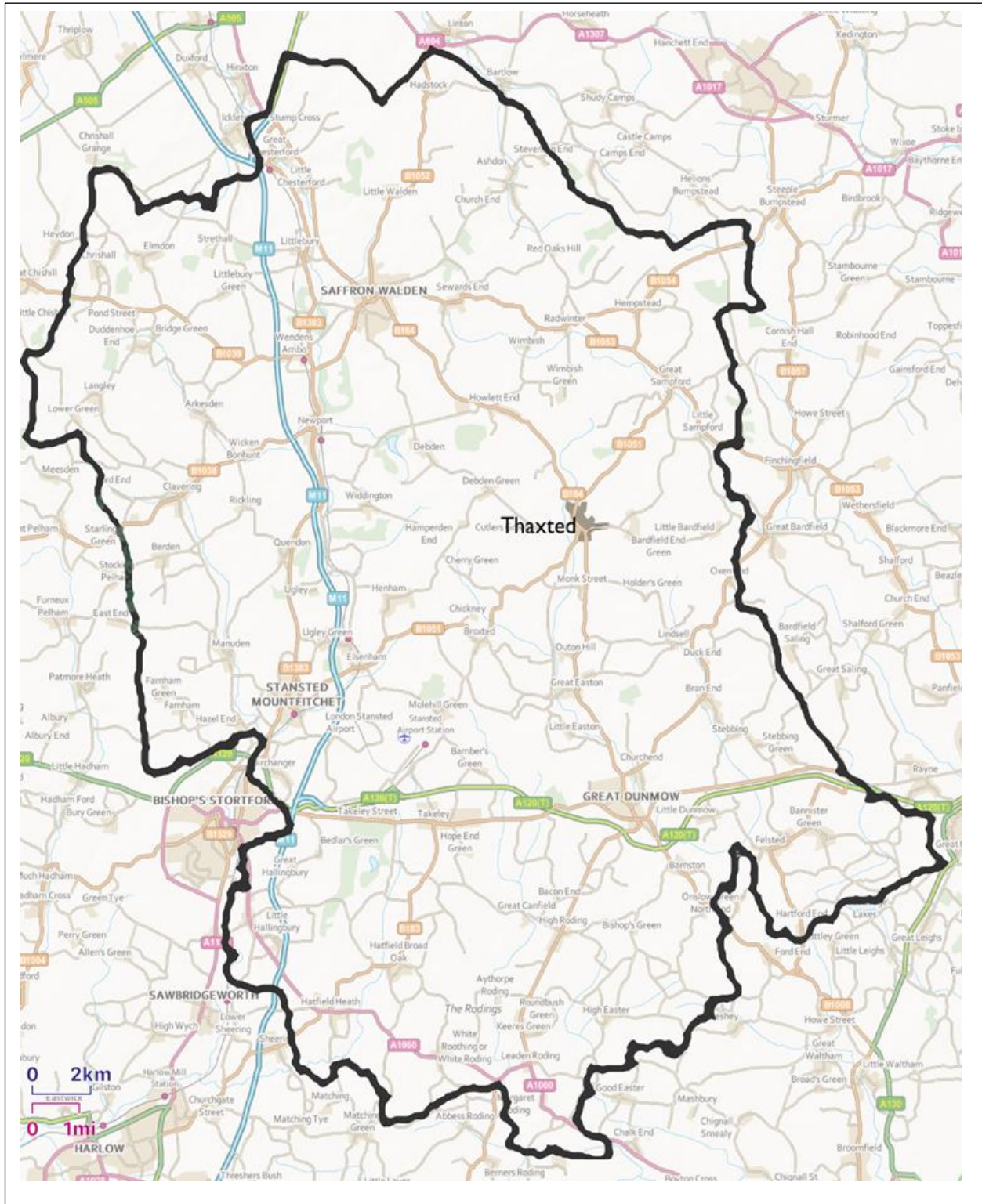
1.4.6 Landscape is a particularly important topic for Thaxted people. A very thorough analysis of the landscape that surrounds the village was therefore undertaken by Liz Lake Associates which looked at the impact development would have on different sectors around the village. This analysis has formed the basis for both general and site specific policies all of which received a high approval rating from the local community.

1.4.7 Thaxted's remote location and its lack of infrastructure are seriously limiting factors in the development of a local economy. What businesses exist are small and largely satisfy the demands of a very local need. The principal factor in the local economy is tourism. Every encouragement has to be given to the promotion of the village to the tourist market. There is however a limit to the influence planning policy can have in developing the tourist market other than in preserving the heritage qualities that draw visitors in. Narrative has however been provided on the subject of tourism and the work that the local community itself can do to increase the volume of tourist visits and tourist 'spend'.

1.4.8 The final chapter on infrastructure is wide-ranging. It is largely based on consultation both through questionnaires and specific meetings with educationalists, healthcare workers and local clubs and societies. A significant part of the community aspirations that emerged cannot really be satisfied through the development process but directions are made as to the work that needs to be undertaken by interested groups to address the concerns and needs of the community.



***Thaxted within the wider Uttlesford context – MAP 1***



## Chapter 2 Scope of the Plan

### 2.1 GEOGRAPHY AND EXTENT

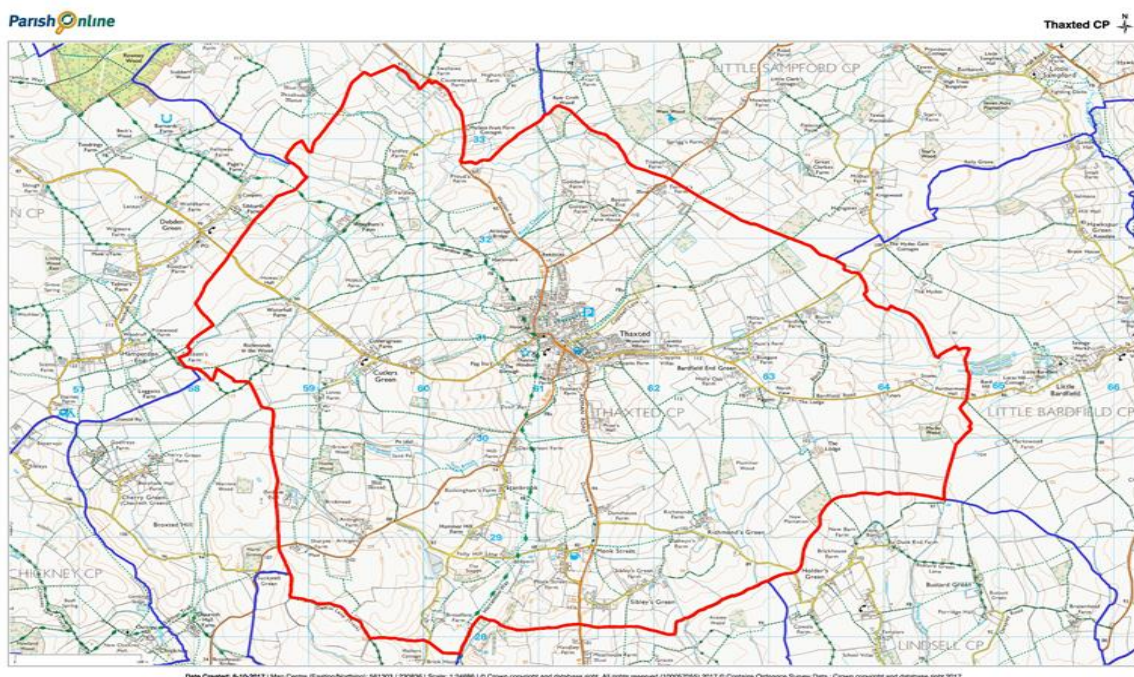
2.1.1. Thaxted is a small rural community in north-west Essex. It is characterised by its historic environment and rural setting which is preserved largely due to its relative remoteness. It is located approximately six miles to the south-east of Saffron Walden and about the same distance to the north of Great Dunmow connected to both by the B184. Stansted Airport similarly is approximately six miles distant approached via Broxton on the B1051.

2.1.2. The nearest railway station is at Elsenham (approximately five miles) although rail travellers to London would normally travel to Audley End, Stansted Airport or Bishop's Stortford for a fast service. Bus connections are limited and little used. The nearest A roads are approximately seven miles away and access to the M11 motorway is at Bishop's Stortford (eight miles) for southbound traffic or Stumps Cross (twelve miles) for northbound traffic. This serves to underline the remoteness of Thaxted's location despite the fact that it is only some forty five miles from central London.

2.1.3. The parish boundary extends well beyond the central area of the village (some 3,880 hectares) and includes one or two small scattered hamlets set within a rolling countryside almost exclusively arable in nature. The Neighbourhood Plan covers the entire extent of the Parish but given the extent to which the population, buildings and general activity are concentrated within the village core it principally deals with this area.

2.1.4. The Parish Council, as a relevant body under s. 61g of the 1990 Town and Country Planning Act made application, under Regulation 5 of the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012 (as amended), to Uttlesford District Council in December 2015 for the parish of Thaxted to be designated as a neighbourhood area in accordance with the boundary outlined below:

#### ***Thaxted Parish Boundary – MAP 2***



## **2.2 POPULATION AND DEMOGRAPHICS**

2.2.1. In the 2011 census the population of Thaxted was stated as 2,845. This was up from 2,526 in the 2001 census. There has however been considerable new development since the census and the population is currently at around 3,000.

2.2.2. The age profile indicates a slightly older population than the national average which probably reflects the remoteness of the village and its lack of employment opportunities. Notwithstanding this, levels of employment are higher than both the national average and the average for Essex. It is also a relatively affluent population with high levels of home ownership and the number of households deemed to be in the managerial, administrative and professional categories is 20% above the national average.

## **2.3 KEY ISSUES**

2.3.1. The over-riding characteristics of Thaxted are its heritage value and the quality of its living environment. It is not a 'model' village nor is it perfect in terms of its design or facilities. It is however very beautiful and of very considerable importance in the context of our national heritage. It is also a largely sustainable community but only in the context of its current size. Community services (healthcare; education; roads; recreation; etc) are generally operating at capacity and whilst plans are being made for expansion, the scope for this is limited by physical and budgetary constraints. New schools, new roads and new community buildings can only be developed with funding generated by very major house building programmes which would in turn destroy the intrinsic character of the local environment and its historical context. Thaxted is too important to be overwhelmed and destroyed by new development around its perimeter. The principal issue therefore is what form of development can Thaxted accommodate?

2.3.2. It is apparent that the impact of further large scale housing development on the land surrounding the centre would have disastrous consequences for the village and the setting of both the Conservation Area and key heritage assets. The village has been under pressure from developers proposing inappropriate schemes which would bring no benefits and only damage what already exists. This Plan has to prevent that type of development.

2.3.3. Thaxted does however have a clearly defined built environment established by Local Plan development limits which follow the usually clear definition between urban and rural landscapes. Within the built environment however, there are still opportunities for development; development that would not be damaging to the village and in some cases would bring positive improvement. This Plan therefore seeks to permit development on those sites but to prevent it where it is inappropriate either in terms of scale or in terms of the damage it would do to historic setting. The heritage value of Thaxted is of such great importance that its protection should always outweigh the dubious benefits of new housing provision usually of a type that is unsuited to the needs of the existing local community.

2.3.4. It is critical that development that is permitted is not only in the right location but is also of the right type. It is accepted that there is little demand for employment uses in Thaxted. The communication infrastructure is entirely inappropriate for the operation of modern businesses other than those that are very small scale. It has also become apparent that what limited demand there is for housing from the local community is for small units, not four and five bedroom houses affordable only to those moving from London and other high value areas who will then commute back by car to a place of work close to where they came from. It is important also that new housing fits with the

existing environment and does not jar with the Thaxted vernacular. Design policies are therefore included to establish a form of development that does not conflict with what already exists.

2.3.5. There are also many smaller matters that in a sensitive environment such as Thaxted are important for its future wellbeing. This includes alterations to existing buildings, street furniture, car parking, the protection and enhancement of green spaces and the protection of retail frontages. These are all covered.

2.3.6. One of the greatest concerns for Thaxted residents is the number of heavy lorries using the wholly inappropriate road network. Whilst the scope for the planning process to bring about restrictions is limited this Plan makes a strong commitment to pursue a policy of control with the Highways authority.

## **2.4 CONTENT**

2.4.1. The format of the Plan reflects the key issues. It is therefore divided into principal chapters covering:

- Heritage and Conservation
- Landscape and Countryside
- Housing and Design
- Tourism and the Economy
- Infrastructure.

## **2.5 EVIDENCE BASE**

2.5.1. The aim of the Plan is to ensure that Thaxted develops in a way that meets with the aspirations and demands of the community as a whole. Of course individuals will always have opposing views and there will be dissenters, but the aim has been to satisfy the expressed wishes of the majority. Consultation has been widespread and thorough and the policies and accompanying narrative have been written based upon the feedback that has been received.

2.5.2. The consultation has taken the form of three public exhibitions attended by a total of 493 people; detailed questionnaires to every household (with a total of 342 completed responses); business questionnaires; and a general invitation to make comments at any stage of the process, with all emerging documents available for inspection on the Thaxted NP website. This has been supported by a number of specialist reports including:

- a Housing Needs Survey;
- a Report on Heritage Setting;
- a Landscape Appraisal;
- a Comprehensive 'Street by Street' Appraisal of the Central Area.

These important documents have been relied upon to a considerable extent in the formulation of the Plan and all have received a very high approval rating by the community as a whole.

2.5.3. A lot of other material has been written about Thaxted and in the preparation of this Plan regard has been had in particular to The Thaxted Design Statement; The Conservation Area Appraisal

2012; and the Historic Settlement Character Assessment 2009; all documents which have been adopted by Uttlesford District Council as Planning Authority.

## **2.6 LIFE OF THE PLAN**

2.6.1. The Neighbourhood Plan is designed to run alongside the Local Plan and will therefore remain in force until 2033. It is inevitable that circumstances will change during that period but it is hoped that the needs of the community for whom the policies and text have been written will guide development such that it continues to be appropriate and manageable.

## Chapter 3 Our vision for Thaxted

*“The town as a whole is very perfect, chiefly because there is not one house in it that would appear violently out of place”*



Nikolaus Pevsner

In the spirit of Pevsner, the future of Thaxted will be secured for future generations by protecting the Medieval buildings at its heart and ensuring that the rural setting and landscape in which they are so perfectly sited is not despoiled. We will therefore encourage change and alteration only when it enhances the Conservation Area, and resist development that is harmful. This protection of our heritage is fundamental to our vision of Thaxted in 2033.

We will improve the infrastructure and facilities for Thaxted residents with sympathetic and careful development. We will also improve the experience of tourists who visit this unique town, thus encouraging more visitors and boosting the local economy. There will be modest and appropriate growth in the housing stock, but care will be taken over the form, scale, and location of development based on a proper understanding of this historic place. New housing development will take account of the needs of local people. The choice of houses will improve and there will be more opportunities for people to be able to stay in Thaxted through all the stages of their lives.

Residents will also benefit from improved community facilities and increased capacity at the school and doctors' surgery. There will be restrictions on heavy traffic going through Thaxted, thus protecting fragile historic buildings and improving the safety of and air quality for residents. All remedial and development projects will be sustainable.

Over this period, Thaxted's historic heritage and setting will be preserved for the generations to come. Its reputation as a centre of culture and history will grow, and the local economic base will be strengthened. The sense of community and common purpose will be enhanced by the opportunities offered by new recreational facilities and a new communal space where Thaxted people can meet. It will be a town for the old and the young.

This is our vision for Thaxted. It is a holistic ambition. The policies in this Neighbourhood Plan document can help us to achieve it in part, but for the full realisation of Thaxted's potential and the protection of Thaxted's heritage will require consistent, determined, and vigorous efforts by the council and community.



## Chapter 4 Heritage and Conservation

### 4.1 BACKGROUND

4.1.1 Thaxted is defined by its heritage. It is unquestionably one of the finest small medieval towns in the country. Dominated by its 14th/15th century church which stands at the top of the hill, houses dating from the Middle Ages flow in almost unbroken rows down to its heart. Many of these dwellings were re-fronted in the Georgian era and the use of a variety of colour-wash treatments today creates an exceptional and typically East Anglian streetscape. The nucleus of the village is the broad span of Town Street, still used today as a market place and, at its western end, the remarkable Guildhall.

4.1.2 Thaxted's development was related to its importance as a centre for the cutlery trade. The scale of its church (the largest in Essex), its fine guildhall and the half-timbered merchants' houses along Stoney Lane are testament to the wealth that this industry generated. A secondary industry, that of weaving also developed and the continuous row of medieval cottages along Newbiggen Street and the workshop buildings to their rear in Vicarage Lane again provide a largely unspoilt reminder of the shape of the village during the medieval period.

4.1.3 The importance of Thaxted has been recognised by many writers and a considerable number of authoritative and detailed appraisals have been undertaken, most of which remain relevant today. The Royal Commission on Historical Monuments for North West Essex in 1916 provided one of the most comprehensive commentaries on its buildings while a study by Donald Insall and Partners commissioned in 1966 provided much practical guidance for the future development of the village. In recent years a number of further academic studies have been undertaken but it is the plaudits of such influential writers as Sir John Betjeman, Nikolaus Pevsner, Alec Clifton Taylor and Simon Jenkins that provide proper recognition of the importance of this special place.

4.1.4 Much the greater part of the central area is contained within the Conservation Area and, in the Conservation Area itself are 148 Listed Buildings out of a total of 215 within the parish as a whole. This includes seven listed at Grade I. It is not so much individual buildings however that have determined Thaxted's historic and timeless character but their collective impact. Pevsner wrote in the 1950s: "The town as a whole is very perfect because there is truly not one house that is violently out of place". Thanks to the protection afforded by the Conservation Area and statutory listing that statement largely holds true today. The centre of the village retains its character and has been largely unaffected by poor quality 20th and 21st century development.

4.1.5 Of equal importance however, is the landscape in which Thaxted is set. It is of outstanding quality in its own right with river valleys, mature tree plantations, historic field patterns and undulating agricultural land. As a setting for the village centre however its importance is magnified considerably. The spire of the church rising to 181 feet, and John Webb's windmill set on a promontory in the landscape are very significant features seen in views from all points around the centre. Not only do they act as a focal point of outstanding historic and architectural quality but are, from most directions, properly seen within their rural context. As well as these specific views there are many places where high quality landscapes immediately abut the village centre and this provides what is today a rare juxtaposition of historic core and surrounding fields without intervening modern suburban development. Thaxted saw a significant amount of new housing development during the



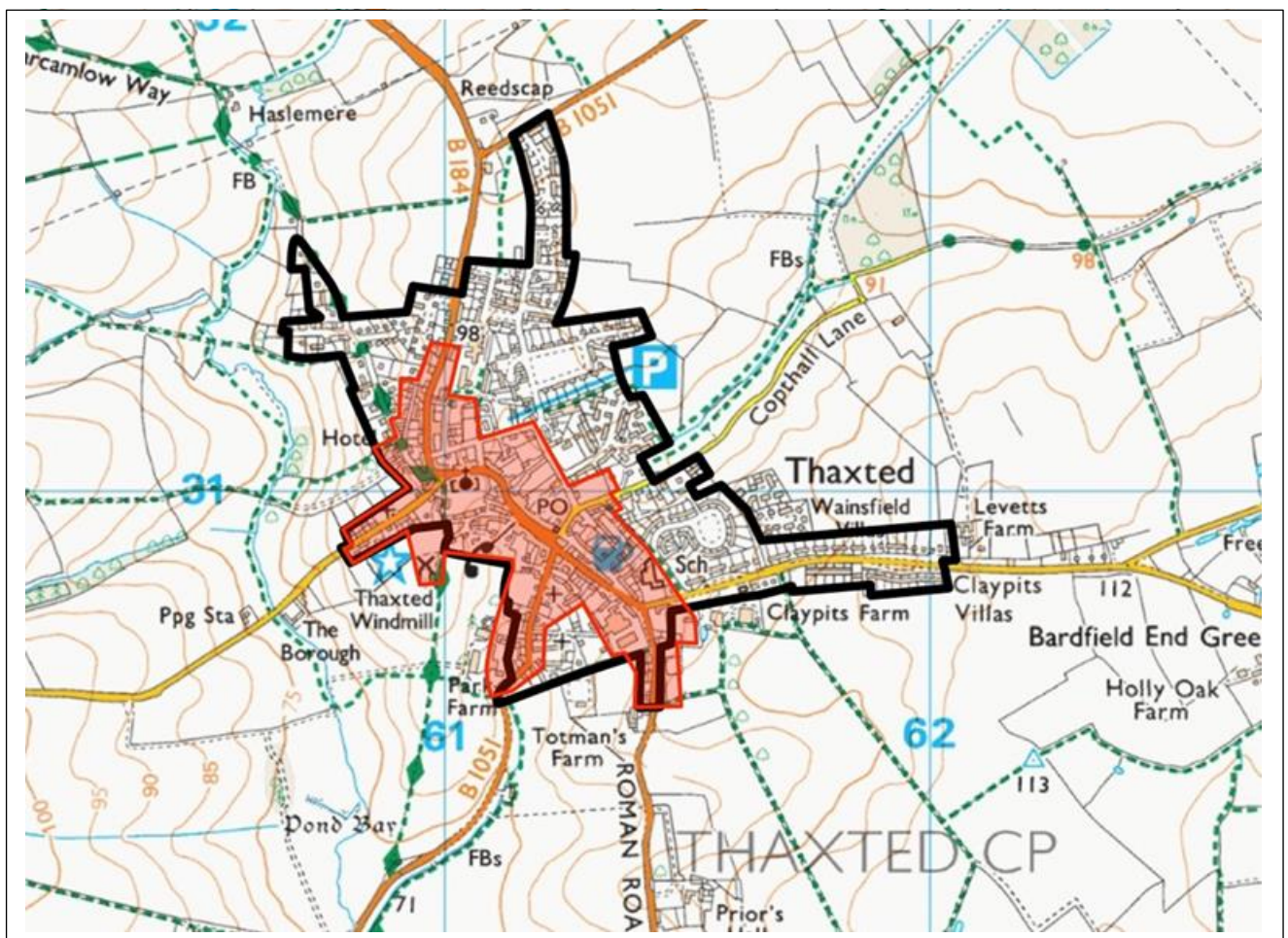
middle of the 20th century but to a large extent this has blended well and has had very little effect on the setting of the Conservation Area and historic views. Development carried out in the 21st century (most notably Thatcher's Grange and Little Maypole) has however been less kind and has had a damaging effect on the approach to the village from the north.

4.1.6 The centre of Thaxted has therefore retained its historic character remarkably well and the Conservation Area and listings afford it a level of protection for the future. Improvements can still be made however and this does provide the opportunity for sensitive development within the village core. What is of greatest concern for the future however is the threat to the surrounding landscape and the damage that this could do to the setting of such a well-defined historic boundary.

## 4.2 STATUTORY DESIGNATIONS

4.2.1 The Thaxted Conservation Area covers a large part of the centre of the village concentrating principally on Town Street, Watling Street, Newbiggen Street, Bolford Street, Park Street and Mill End. Also included are the minor though historically important thoroughfares such as The Tanyard, Bell Lane, Vicarage Lane, Stoney Lane and Mill Row. The boundary was very slightly amended in 2012 and the present limits are shown on the plan below.

***Conservation Area boundary (shaded red) and extent of Development Limits (black line) MAP 3***



An accurate representation of the Conservation Area boundary can be found on page 46 of the Grover Lewis report at <http://www.thaxtednp.com/documents>, and on the Uttlesford web site.

4.2.2 For its size Thaxted also has a remarkable number of Listed Buildings. This includes the seven that are listed Grade I. These are:

- The Church of St. John the Baptist
- The Guildhall
- 2, Stoney Lane
- 3, Stoney Lane
- 4, Stoney Lane
- Clarence House
- Clarence House Garden Wall

4.2.3 There are a further eight that are listed as Grade II\*:

- The windmill
- The Recorder's House
- 25, Town Street
- Park Farmhouse
- 1, Stoney Lane
- The Priory, 38, Town Street
- 16, Watling Street
- The Manse

### **4.3 EVIDENCE BASE FOR THE NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN**

4.3.1 A lot has been written about Thaxted including several comparatively recent studies. In formulating policies for the Neighbourhood Plan we have drawn on a number of studies that have been undertaken, both recently and, to the extent that they are still relevant, from the more distant past. In preparing the central area analysis that accompanies the Plan we have consulted the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments (England) North West Essex written in 1916 but which still provides some of the best descriptions on historic buildings. We have also referred to Pevsner's *The Buildings of England – Essex* and to *Thaxted – An Historical and Architectural Survey* prepared by Donald Insall and Partners in 1966.

4.3.2 More recent relevant studies include *Historic Settlement Character Assessment Thaxted 2009*, commissioned by Uttlesford District Council; *Thaxted Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Proposals, 2012* also prepared on behalf of Uttlesford District Council; *The Thaxted Design Statement* prepared by local residents in 2010 (and subsequently adopted by Uttlesford as a supplementary planning document); and a report commissioned by English Heritage (now Historic England) and written by LUC – *Evaluating the Impact of Housing Development on the Historic Environment* which took as one of its case studies Bellrope Meadow in Thaxted.

4.3.3 In terms of national and local planning guidance we have had regard to the National Planning Policy Framework 2012; the Adopted Uttlesford Local Plan 2005; the Draft Historic Environment policies of the emerging Uttlesford Local Plan; and the Historic England publication *The Setting of Heritage Assets, 2015*.

4.3.4 As a part of the Neighbourhood Plan process two further studies which relate specifically to heritage and conservation were prepared.

4.3.5 A report on Heritage Setting was commissioned by the Steering Group from Grover Lewis Associates, a firm of heritage specialists. Their report specifically considers Thaxted's heritage in terms of its setting within the wider countryside and was designed to assess the significance and relative importance of heritage assets that could be affected by potential development and the degree of harm to their significance that this might cause. Their report follows the assessment procedure set out in The Historic Environment Good Practice Advice, Planning Note 3: The Setting of Heritage Assets (GPA 3) published on 25th March 2015 by Historic England. It considers the setting of Thaxted's Conservation Area as well as its two most visible assets, the church and the windmill in terms of views from each approach into the village and then looks at the consequences of development on specific sites. At the time of its preparation Uttlesford District Council had just undertaken its 'Call for Sites' as a part of the development of its new Local Plan and a number of sites had been put forward for development. The report was therefore able to assess the impact of development specifically in relation to some of those sites.

4.3.6 It was also thought necessary to undertake an appraisal of the central area. This was carried out by a group of local volunteers all with a particular interest in the heritage of their village. The result is a very comprehensive assessment looking at Thaxted on a street by street (almost a house by house) basis identifying what is important and where improvements could take place. It also sought to identify any opportunities for development that would improve the quality of the historic environment.

4.3.7 The final strand of the evidence base is derived from the response to the public consultation. Many comments in relation to heritage matters were made at the various public exhibitions and presentations and responses to questions relating to heritage matters contained within the questionnaire survey have been analysed and taken fully into account in the drafting of heritage policies.

#### **4.4 KEY FINDINGS**

4.4.1 The conclusion of virtually all the studies that have been carried out is that Thaxted has retained the character of its historic core remarkably well. Its key landmarks are so important individually and its collective whole so historically complete that little has been allowed to happen to despoil it. Buildings are generally in good condition and in the main, alterations, extensions and adaptations have been carried out in a style that is in keeping with the original construction. Unsympathetic decisions have been taken and these are identified in some considerable detail in the various studies but these generally relate to shop fronts, inappropriate colour treatments and poor-quality signage.

4.4.2 The most comprehensive assessment of the central area is derived from the Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Proposals prepared by Uttlesford District Council; and the Central Area Assessment prepared by local volunteers. The latter has a broader scope in that it additionally covers the built area outside of the Conservation Area. Both documents though, highlight the importance of the largely uninterrupted historic streetscapes; the 'jumble' of ancient rooftops and chimneys; the key buildings in key locations providing both glimpsed views and open vistas; well-located areas of 'green space'; and the dominance, above all else, of the church spire. There is however a

commonality in both reports and also in the public response, to matters that detract from central Thaxted's character. These can be summarised as follows:

- On street car parking
- The large volume of heavy traffic
- Inappropriate shop fronts and signage
- Colour schemes on buildings which jar with their neighbours and which are inappropriate in an historical context
- Some elements of street furniture
- A few instances of inappropriate alterations especially to fenestration

4.4.3 Whilst the central area has been found to have its shortcomings much the greater concern surrounds the peripheral areas. It is the surrounding landscape that provides the setting for the Conservation Area, its gateways and the more distant views of the church and windmill which probably represent Thaxted's crowning glory and which give the village its context. The impact of recent development on Sampford Road and at Little Maypole have served to emphasise just how damaging new development, carried out without due regard to heritage setting, can be.

4.4.4 The results of the questionnaire survey underline the importance of these views to the local community. This is particularly true of the Grover Lewis report and the 2009 Historic Settlement Character Assessment for Thaxted. Again these documents emphasise the importance of views of Thaxted as seen from the surrounding landscape and highlight in particular the views approaching from Bolford Street, Dunmow Road and Sampford Road whilst the importance of the approach from Broxton via Park Street is in the immediate juxtaposition of historic settlement and agricultural landscape.

4.4.5 Of course, there is considerable overlapping between the findings from the heritage analysis and those of other themes covered under this Plan. The separate Landscape study carried out by Liz Lake Associates and the work on highways and housing development have a significant impact on the conservation of Thaxted's heritage and every attempt has been made to consider all topics in the round. We have sought to weigh up and balance the benefits of policies within different categories and to ensure that the requirements of one area do not unduly compromise the objectives of another. Some compromises will inevitably have to be made but the heritage character of Thaxted is of such great importance that it will inevitably apply a brake to some other aspirations.

## **4.5 CONSERVING THE BUILT HERITAGE**

4.5.1 In determining policies related to the conservation of Thaxted's built heritage it is important to appreciate that much already exists in terms of protection afforded by existing planning policies. The Conservation Area boundary is widely drawn and there are over 200 statutory listings. More general policies in the emerging local plan and in the NPPF will also have a controlling effect on development.

4.5.2 Similarly, a number of obvious potential improvements are beyond the scope of a Neighbourhood Plan. They may, for example, relate to works that require the cooperation (and financial commitment) of an individual owner but which cannot be enforced by planning policy. A number of these are referred to in the two principal studies that have been carried out into the character of the central area.

4.5.3 There are however controls and guidance which can be applied more generally and which for one reason or another are not dealt with elsewhere.

4.5.4 There is concern over non-listed buildings within the Conservation Area which are not subject to the same degree of scrutiny when alterations are carried out. There are at present no Article 4 Directions for Thaxted in relation to restricting development rights in these circumstances. It is considered important that Article 4 Directions should be brought into effect in relation to alterations involving extensions; alterations to roofs and chimneys; windows and doors; and boundary fences/walls. This is in line with Uttlesford's objectives for Thaxted.

Application shall therefore be made to Uttlesford District Council seeking Article 4 Directions in respect of non-listed properties in the Conservation Area, covering works involving alterations to both buildings and their associated boundary walls and fences.

**POLICY HC1 -Exclusion of Permitted Development Rights:**

**Following the service of the Article 4 Direction, permitted development rights shall be removed in respect of all buildings within the Conservation Area whether they be listed or non-listed and applications for appropriate consents shall be submitted to Uttlesford District Council as planning authority**

Such a policy was proposed under the Thaxted Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Proposals 2012. It was set out in some detail at paragraph 1.66 but has not been implemented. In order to properly conserve the character of the Conservation Area it is considered necessary to put appropriate Article 4 Directions in place and to ensure their enforcement.

4.5.5 Historically, Thaxted has been praised for its colourful street scenes. Houses have been decorated randomly but have generally created a harmonious overall effect. Owners have given consideration to the way in which their house will blend with neighbouring properties. Recently however, (perhaps due to the availability of a wider range of paint colours) there have been one or two instances of colour schemes that do not fit with their surroundings; that jar with their neighbours; and destroy the overall harmony of the street-scene. These are in the main, related to just a small number of non-traditional colour washes on walls or to colour combination on individual houses. In both cases however the adverse impact on the character of the village is significant. It is proposed therefore that an approved colour palette should be introduced which can still provide a considerable scope for originality but which would exclude the extremes.

Application shall also be made therefore to Uttlesford District Council seeking Article 4 Directions related to the control of elevational treatments to buildings within the Conservation Area and specifically that colours used should comply with an agreed palette range to be determined by the Conservation Officer.

**POLICY HC2 –Colour Treatments:**

**Following service of an Article 4 Direction planning applications with details of proposed colours will be required for the re-painting of external elevations of both listed and non-listed buildings within the Conservation Area. Such applications shall be assessed on the basis of their conformity with traditional colours.**

Such a policy is supported by comments in the Central Area Assessment, the Conservation Area Appraisal and responses by the local community to survey questionnaires (where 69% were in favour of controls).

#### **4.6 THE IMPORTANCE OF SETTING**

4.6.1 The Historic England publication *The Setting of Heritage Assets* emphasises the importance of setting in the appreciation of heritage assets. It sets out a comprehensive approach to the way in which development that impacts on views should be assessed. As explained, Grover Lewis Associates were commissioned to undertake an analysis of the views around Thaxted that are associated with heritage assets and to assess the nature of the impact that development would have. Their report, together with the Historic Settlement Character Assessment and the results of the community engagement, has informed the policies related to heritage setting.

4.6.2 These policies concern views of (and relevant views from) the Conservation Area and specific heritage assets seen from, and towards, the village's hinterland. Views within the Conservation Area and, to an extent, parts of the built area beyond it will be largely fixed by existing conservation policies. The policy set out below is designed to protect the setting of the centre in the context of its wider landscape.

4.6.3 In terms of the major approaches to Thaxted, Grover Lewis Associates have identified Bolford Street, Park Street and Dunmow Road as offering a 'high' or 'very high' degree of inter-visibility between the Conservation Area and its countryside setting. They have also referred to 'a series of unimpeded panoramic views towards the tower and spire of the parish church across large arable fields' from Sampford Road. Whilst the views from Sampford Road have to a degree been compromised by inappropriate recent development it is important that these gateway views be preserved.

4.6.4 The views expressed in the Grover Lewis report are supported by the 2009 Historic Settlement Character Assessment. This report divided the land surrounding Thaxted into sectors and considered the impact of development within each sector. The Bolford Street 'gateway' falls within both sector 6 and sector 7 and it is suggested that development 'would detrimentally impact on the western parts of the historic core' and would 'be highly damaging to key views of the church and windmill'. The Park Street 'gateway' falls partly within sector 6 but also within sector 5 where it is suggested that development beyond existing development limits 'would impact on the southern extent of the historic core' due to its proximity in this approach.' In respect of the Dunmow Road 'gateway' development is only contemplated in respect of redevelopment of the petrol filling station and the Molecular site (now being redeveloped), whilst in respect of Sampford Road, which falls within sector 2, it is stated that development 'would have detrimental impacts on views of the church spire, the dominant landmark building in Thaxted thus diminishing the sense of place and local distinctiveness in this location.' Additionally, the report makes the same comment in relation to possible development on the land to the west of Walden Road. It is believed that if development is restricted to an area within the extent of the development limits as shown in the Uttlesford Adopted Local Plan 2005 then the sensitivities of setting and views as outlined above will be addressed.

#### **POLICY HC3 – Heritage and Development:**

**Development within the parish shall only be permitted if it respects the setting and significance of heritage assets and the character and appearance of the village. Regard shall be had in this respect**

to the findings of the Grover Lewis report; the 2009 Historic Settlement Character Assessment; and the Central Area Assessment and development that is harmful to heritage assets themselves or their setting and significance or to the character of the Conservation Area and its surroundings shall be refused.

For all applications within the Conservation Area and in respect of applications for built structures outside it, a Heritage Statement shall be required which shall be informed by the three documents referred to above.

This policy is based upon the assessment undertaken by Grover Lewis Associates supported by the Historic Settlement Character Assessment together with views expressed as a part of the public engagement process.

#### **4.7 STREET FURNITURE AND SIGNAGE**

4.7.1 In any historic urban setting street furniture and signage can have either a significantly detrimental impact on character or it can positively enhance it. Thaxted is not excessively cluttered by street signage and some of its street furniture is in keeping with the local environment. The retention of old street lights is applauded in the Conservation Area Appraisal and the Central Area Assessment offers approval of some elements of the 'heritage style' signage in Town Street. Town Street is not without its problems however and the Thaxted Design Statement specifically states that 'Signage, especially in Town Street should be rationalised'.

4.7.2 There is little doubt that modern County Council Highways Authority signage has a damaging effect on the historic environment. It is recognised that some is essential but greater consideration needs to be given to Thaxted's heritage in the future placing of signage. Repetition of signs should be avoided and electronic flashing signs have no place at all in an historic landscape. Comparatively recent signage in relation to residents' parking in Stoney Lane is excessive in terms of both size and number and little thought was given to the quality of this important cobbled thoroughfare. It is appropriate therefore to seek a degree of control on signage in the village centre.

**Thaxted Parish Council should therefore discuss with Essex County Council as the relevant highways authority, a scheme of signage rationalisation within the built area of Thaxted to include a reduction in the overall number of signs; signage that is more appropriate to an historic setting; and the removal of all electronic flashing signage.**

Signage in relation to commercial premises is also a matter for concern and it is important for the future to avoid the more inappropriate displays that currently exist on a number of shop fronts. It is important that a degree of control is applied. Illuminated signage in window displays specifically, should be avoided.

#### **POLICY HC4 – Signage in the Conservation Area:**

**All forms of signage within the central area shall be kept to the minimum in terms of both size and number and shall not detract from the character or appearance of any heritage assets. Prior consultation on any proposed new signage should take place with the Parish Council and Uttlesford's Conservation Officer following which (when the appropriate Article 4 Direction is served) an application should be made for appropriate consent. Internally neon or equivalent illuminated signage of any type shall not be permitted.**

This policy is supported by the Thaxted Design Statement, the Central Area Assessment, the Conservation Area Appraisal and the results of the community questionnaire. (91% thought placing of street furniture, signage and advertising was important).

4.7.3 Some elements of Thaxted's street furniture are well considered particularly that outside the Community Information Centre. There are elements though, that are less harmonious. The standard modern bus stop sign outside the post office is entirely out of keeping and some of the more recent street lighting such as that in Margaret Street while relatively inoffensive within its particular location should not be repeated elsewhere. There is also a proliferation of litter bins and some rationalisation is necessary. The Conservation Area Appraisal sought the removal of the bin sited between the old pump and the post box outside the post office. This should be undertaken immediately. Similarly the issue of planters is a difficult one. There was support for more planters in the community questionnaire but it is important that any extra planters are located appropriately so as to enhance rather than detract from the streetscape. Along Bardfield Road they could provide a significant enhancement but it is debateable whether they contribute anything in Town Street and as stated in the Central Area Assessment are quite out of keeping in front of the Guildhall.

**Street furniture shall be kept to a minimum and will be of high quality design and materials appropriate to the heritage environment. Specifically the litter bin placed between the letter box and the village pump outside Wayletts shall be removed in accordance with the recommendation in the Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Proposals 2012. Planters will be of a similar high quality and should be placed sensitively so as to enhance rather than detract from their particular setting. The positioning of planters should be discussed with Uttlesford's Conservation Officer.**

This requirement is supported by the Central Area Assessment and the community questionnaire which gave strong support to its conclusions. Implementation is to be the responsibility of Thaxted Parish Council.

#### **4.8 SHOP FRONTS**

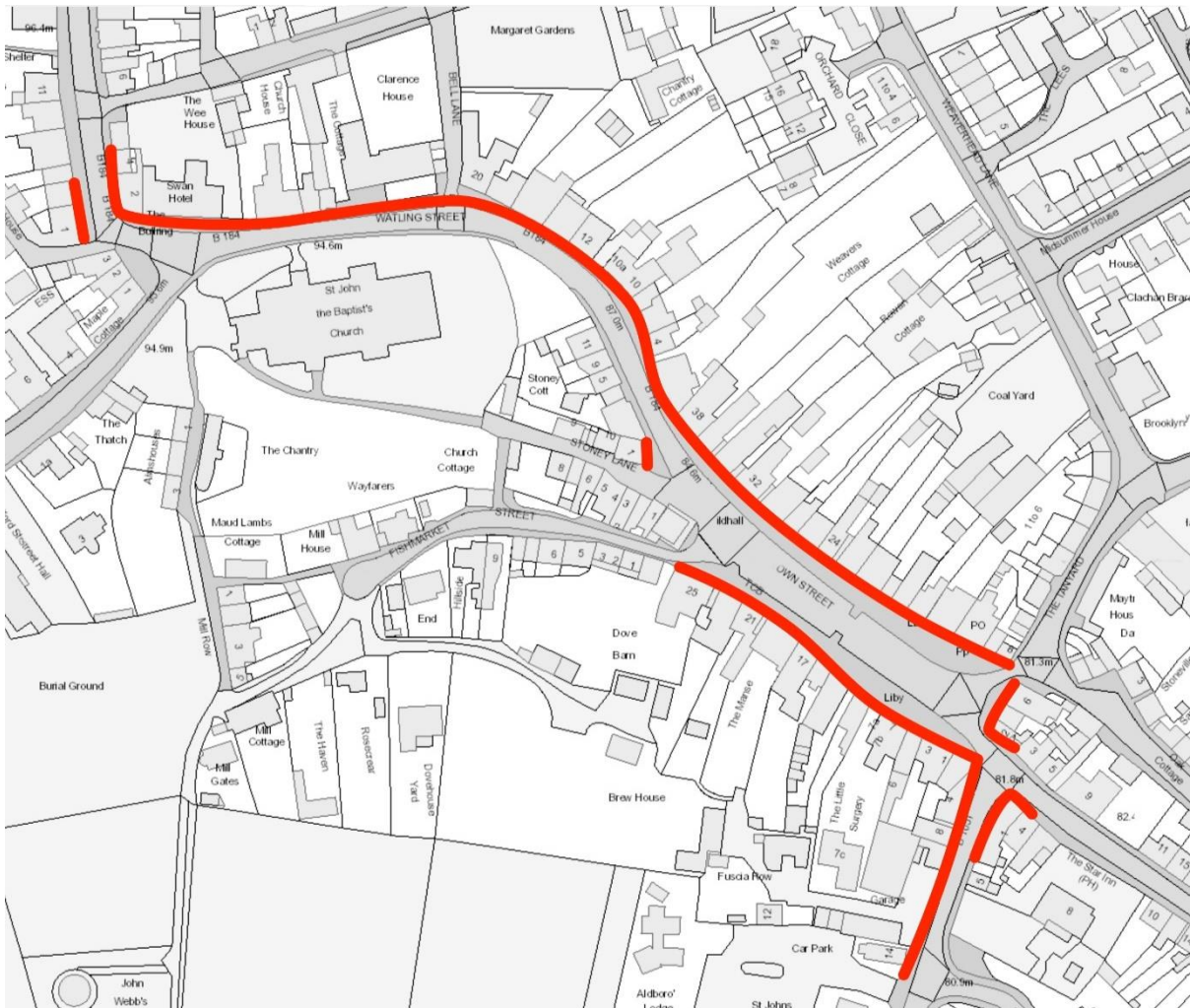
4.8.1 Shop fronts bring to life the character of any urban environment. They are an important part of the village's heritage. Sadly, Thaxted has lost a number of important shop fronts to residential conversion over the years and it is important to retain what remains. Questionnaire responses indicated 92% in favour of protection for retail frontages.

##### **POLICY HC5 – Retention of Shop Fronts:**

**In order to preserve the character and appearance of the Conservation Area, other than in exceptional circumstances, shop fronts within the commercial centre as defined on the map below shall be retained and shall contribute to the character of the streetscape.**



## Map of Thaxted Commercial Centre – Retail Frontage



### POLICY HC6 – Protection of Retail Uses:

In order to maintain the character and appearance of the defined commercial centre of the Conservation Area change of use from A1 (retail) or A3 (food and drink) shall not be permitted within the Conservation Area and specifically, development involving the conversion of A1 or other commercial uses at ground floor level to residential shall be refused.

4.8.2 It is however important also, that the signage and display windows are in keeping with the character of the village. Several shops at the bottom of Town Street are out of keeping with their surroundings. Every encouragement should be given to the owners to have appropriate signage and shop window display.

4.8.3 Shop fronts can be controlled through advertising display regulations particularly in relation to those within the Conservation Area. It is important that greater care is taken in the granting of consents in relation to shop fronts.

#### **POLICY HC7 – Changes to Shop Fronts:**

**All changes to shop fronts within the Conservation Area shall preserve and enhance the significance of heritage assets and their setting and the character and appearance of the surrounding street scene. Applicants are encouraged to submit designs to Uttlesford's Conservation Officer and Thaxted Parish Council for prior discussion. Illuminated neon or equivalent signage will not be permitted.**

This policy is supported by the Conservation Area Appraisal and the Central Area Assessment for which there was strong support in the community questionnaire.

#### **4.9 TRAFFIC AND PARKING**

4.9.1 In the context of any heritage assessment car parking is problematic. Parked cars and other vehicles will always interfere with the proper appreciation of an historic streetscape and, purely from a heritage perspective, their complete removal out of sight will always be the preferred option.

4.9.2 In Thaxted the two streets where car parking is most contentious are Newbiggen Street and Stoney Lane. Newbiggen Street has the potential to be one of the most complete medieval streetscapes in the country but is currently spoilt to the point where it is of little significance, by the continuous lines of parked cars on both sides. Environmental quality however does have to be balanced against driver and residents' amenity and a compromise policy is proposed under the Highways sub-section of chapter 8 of this Plan.

4.9.3 Stoney Lane however, with its cobbled surface and Grade I and II\* listed former merchants' houses, is such a significant feature within the central area (see the findings of the Central Area Assessment) that there can be no place for compromise and all forms of car parking (including residents) should be prohibited. Again this will be dealt with under Highways.

#### **4.10 GREEN SPACES**

4.10.1 Open space and the protection of undeveloped land will be dealt with elsewhere but there are instances where open spaces contribute to the quality of the historic environment and their preservation is doubly important.

4.10.2 The Conservation Area Appraisal and the Central Area Assessment have both identified areas of land which contribute to the character of the village. Similarly, this was a topic that attracted considerable public interest with many comments in the questionnaire responses and at public exhibitions. The following are considered to be of greatest importance in a heritage context:

- Churchyard of the Church of St. John the Baptist
- The adjacent memorial garden
- The graveyard, graveyard extension and land leading to the windmill
- The graveyard of the United Reformed Church
- Margaret Street Garden
- The Conservation Garden in Margaret Street
- Clarence House garden (private)
- Brooklyns garden (private)
- Walnut Tree Meadow and land adjacent to Copthall Lane

4.10.3 There are other areas of open space which will be protected by appropriate policies elsewhere for reasons of public amenity but it is specifically proposed that the above areas (identified on the plan overleaf) are protected for their heritage contribution.

**Map of Local Green Spaces – MAP 4**



**POLICY HC8 – Local Green Spaces:**

In order to protect the character of the Conservation Area and its surroundings the sites listed above and shown on Map 4 are designated as Local Green Spaces in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework and planning permission will be refused for any form of development other than items of a purely garden nature. The Recreation Ground is also protected as a Local Green Space under Policy IFS5 in recognition of its importance for sport and recreational use.

This policy is supported by the Conservation Area Appraisal, the Central Area Assessment and supported by local residents.

#### **4.11 THAXTED STATION**

4.11.1 One area of specific concern is the former Thaxted Station site near Stanbrook. The station formed part of a branch line from Elsenham and was known as the 'Gin and Toffee' line because of its connections with Gilbeys and Lees sweet factory. It is an important part of Thaxted's history and the days when it was operational are still remembered by a number of local residents. It closed in the 1950's but the engine shed and waiting room remain as reminders of the days of steam when Thaxted was served by a rail link. These landmark buildings are not listed and there is concern over their future.

4.11.2 Various planning applications have been made in respect of potential development on the site which have either been refused or have not proceeded. It is important that any future development on this site fully respects the heritage value of these buildings preserving not only the buildings themselves but also their setting and context. It is proposed that an application should be made to Uttlesford District Council to have these buildings locally listed.

#### **POLICY HC9 – Thaxted Station:**

**Any development at Thaxted station should be limited in scale and should involve the retention of both the engine shed and the former waiting room. The setting and significance of these buildings should be preserved with clear space around them to provide a proper appreciation of their historic context.**

## **Chapter 5      Landscape and the Countryside**

### **5.1      BACKGROUND**

5.1.1 The landscape that surrounds Thaxted is a vital part of the character of the village. Not only does it provide a setting and context for the historic core but it is also important for its own sake. In views from its rural hinterland the skyline is dominated by Thaxted's two most prominent landmarks – the church of St. John the Baptist and John Webb's windmill. They are the features that most define its character. Of equal importance is the setting that the landscape provides for the village as a whole. The association of medieval core and the almost immediately adjacent agriculture is a rare feature that adds significantly to the quality of this historic settlement. The landscape itself however, is also of great significance. Its historic field patterns, ancient pathways, river valleys, woodland and hedgerows collectively represent a rural environment of great value.

5.1.2 The issue of landscape as a heritage setting has been covered in the Heritage and Conservation section earlier, and this is based largely on the findings of a report commissioned from Grover Lewis as well as other professional reports. In order to obtain a better understanding of the landscape in its own right however, a Landscape Character Assessment was obtained from Liz Lake Associates, a highly regarded local Landscape Architectural practice. Their brief was to undertake a full commentary on the landscape features in a wide area surrounding the village centre but then to provide an assessment on a parcel by parcel basis of the potential for different areas to accommodate future development.

5.1.3 There is a degree of overlap between the principles of the Liz Lake report and those that formed the basis for the Grover Lewis report. The two documents are, however, complementary and the conclusions of each can be readily compared.

5.1.4 The narrative and policies contained within this chapter are largely based upon the findings of the Liz Lake report which received a very high approval rating in the community questionnaire.

### **5.2      GENERAL CONCLUSIONS**

5.2.1 The Liz Lake report provided first a detailed summary of the natural features of the landscape generally. This was based on a combination of fieldwork and a review of other studies that had been carried out previously. Their assessment was then set against a background of relevant Town Planning policies and specific designations.

5.2.2 The review was supported by a very comprehensive collection of landscape photographs and an accompanying map showing each viewing point. This photographic record is held on disc and is available for inspection at the Community Information Centre. It is of considerable assistance in understanding the analysis undertaken and the conclusions drawn in relation to the review of individual parcels.

5.2.3 In general terms however, the conclusion of the Liz Lake report is that Thaxted is surrounded by landscape of outstanding quality. In relation to the areas to (and views from) the north-west;

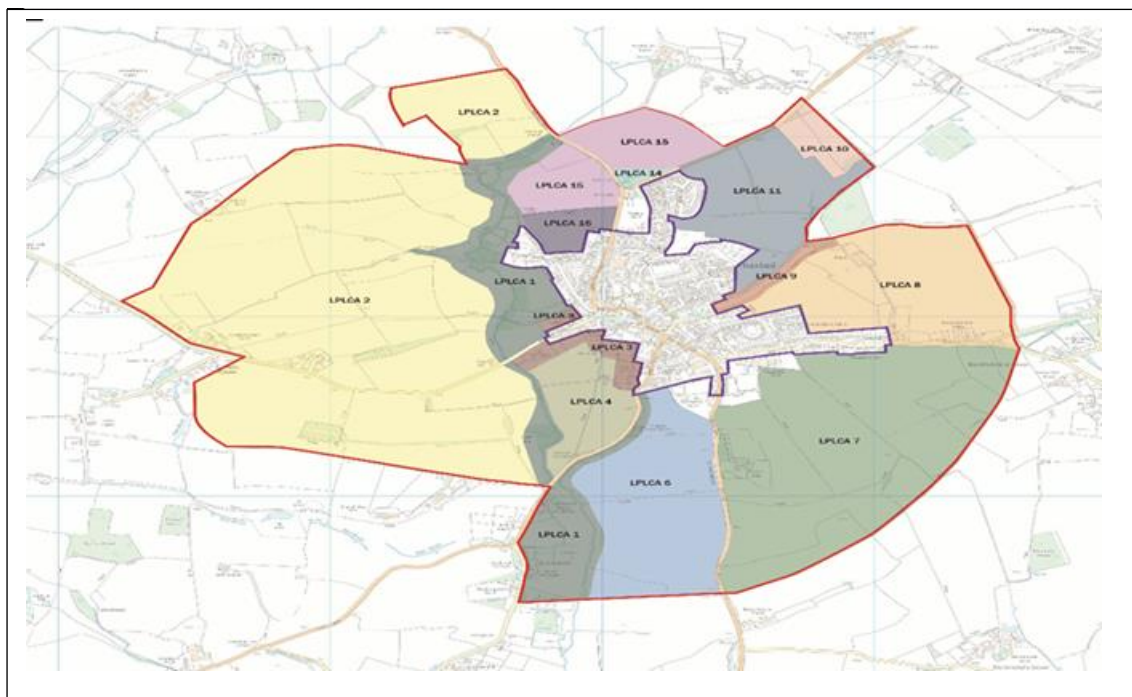
west; south-west; south; and south-east it concludes that “certain views of the nucleated settlement, punctuated by the landmarks of the church and windmill and surrounded by expansive undulating countryside, are exceptional and iconic”. It is recognised that from the east; north-east and north, views are ‘more restricted by intervening topography, vegetation and built-form’ whilst specific criticism is levelled against recent housing development that has taken place – ‘In places a harsh urban-rural interface is apparent where recent development abuts the surrounding countryside’.

### 5.3 THE LAND PARCELS

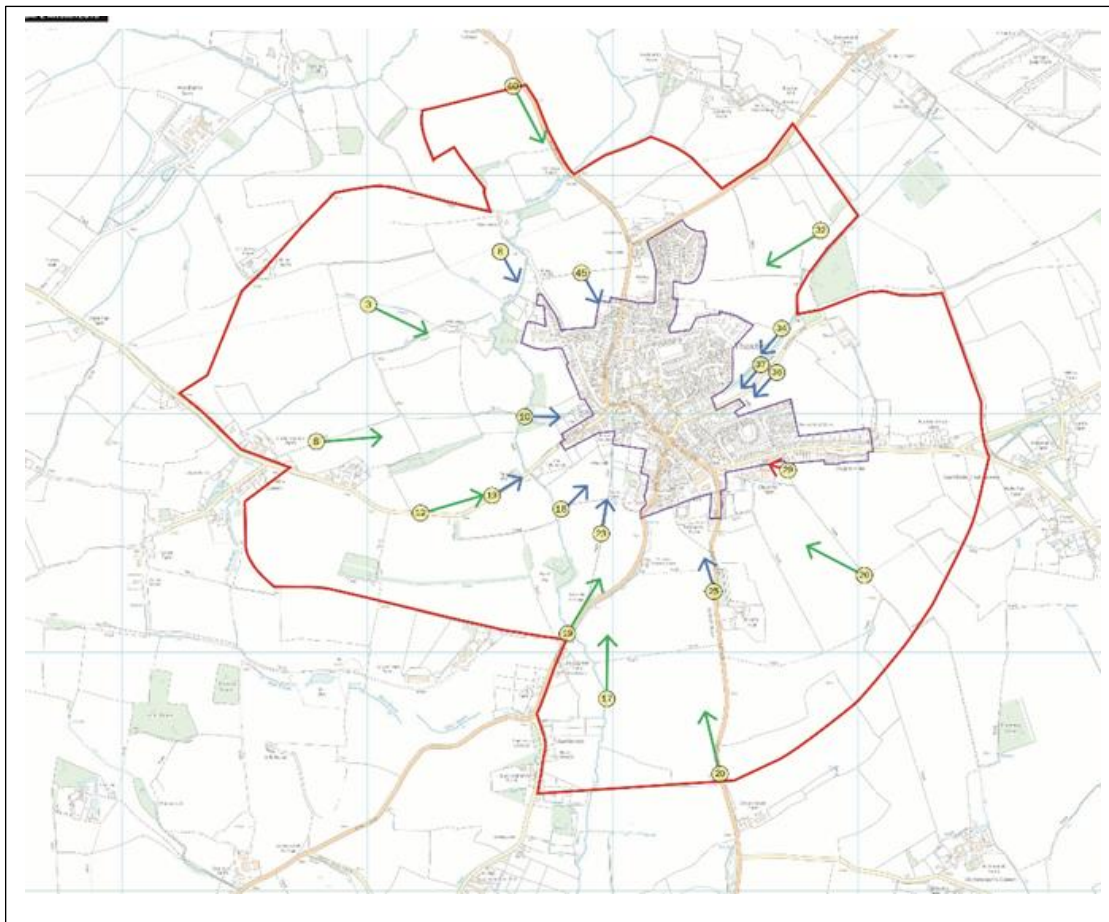
5.3.1 The landscape around Thaxted was divided into 16 different Local Parish Landscape Character Areas (LPLCAs) by Liz Lake Associates. Each area was considered in detail and the findings were set out in individual proformas found at an appendix to their report. Separate proformas also analysed each of the key views around the periphery of the village. The view data is both descriptive and analytical with categorization based on both significance and sensitivity to change, with a scoring system based on 1-5 with 5 being the most significant and the most sensitive to change. The analysis of each of the individual character areas is similarly assessed and is based on low/medium/high ratings for both overall landscape quality and sensitivity to change. Conclusions are then drawn as to an assessment of ‘Overall Landscape Capacity for Change’ (through development) with rankings of ‘low capacity’; ‘low-medium’; ‘medium’; ‘medium-high’; and ‘high’.

5.3.2 Other supporting information includes suggested landscape planning guidance and landscape management guidance which will form the basis of general landscape policies for this Neighbourhood Plan.

5.3.3 The 13 parcels that form the LPLCAs having a low or medium/low capacity for change are shown on the map below (**MAP 5**)



Key views with an overall score of 4 or 5 are then shown on the map below (**MAP 6**)



5.3.4 The overall capacity for each of the LPLCAs to change together with a few specific quotations which serve to describe the character of each are as follows:

1. “Strongly undeveloped enclosed green rural character”. **Low capacity for change.**
2. “Open, visually exposed landscape with far reaching radial/panoramic views”. **Low capacity for change.**
3. Varied but “strong peri-urban character with windmill as key landmark feature”. **Low capacity for change.**
4. Part of “open rural approach to the village”. **Low capacity for change.**
5. Varied “peri-urban character... Small pastoral fields, areas of unkempt grassland, recently planted parkland and private gardens associated with peripheral farmsteads” plus bowling green and tennis courts. **Medium capacity to change.**
6. “Strongly undeveloped open rural character”. **Low capacity to change.**
7. “Strongly undeveloped open rural character... Open landscape with far-reaching panoramic views”. **Low capacity for change.**
8. “Generally rural character” but “directly abuts the eastern edge of town in the vicinity of Barnards Field and Bardfield Road as well as incorporating ribbon development further east along Bardfield Road... [and the] disused depot off Cophthall Lane”. **Low-medium capacity for change.**

9. "Cophthall Lane: route of ancient pathway... Narrow tree-lined Crispey Brook... Wet meadow pasture". **Low capacity for change.**
10. "Strongly undeveloped rural landscape character... Small linear fields... Historic field pattern... Small-scale intimate landscape". **Low capacity for change.**
11. "Undeveloped rural landscape character, diluted by harsh urban interface". **Low-medium capacity for change.**
12. "Area of naturally regenerating scrub/woodland". **Medium capacity for change.**
13. "Playing fields... Childrens' play area... Areas of hard-standing and soft landscape associated with care home". **Medium capacity for change.**
14. "Small fields, paddocks, and private gardens associated with Goddards Farm". **Low capacity for change.**
15. "Intensive arable farmland... Strongly undeveloped rural landscape character". **Low capacity for change.**
16. "Intensive arable farmland... Undeveloped rural landscape character has been diluted by urban interface... Offers views of the church spire". **Low capacity for change.**

5.3.5 This analysis of both views and individual parcel character provides a very clear view on where development could and should not take place within the area surrounding the village core based on landscape quality. There are only three LPLCAs where the capacity to change is considered to be 'medium' and in every other parcel the scope for change is considered to be 'low' or 'low-medium', effectively advising against development in 13 out of the 16 parcels.

#### **POLICY LSC 1 – Protection of the Countryside:**

**The countryside will be protected for its intrinsic character and beauty and for its value as productive agricultural land, recreational use and biodiversity. In considering applications for development in areas outside of the 2005 Uttlesford Local Plan defined development limits, regard shall be had to the findings of the Liz Lake conclusions as summarised above and, other than for small-scale development in exceptional circumstances, development shall not be permitted in LPLCAs where the capacity for change is stated to be 'low' or 'medium-low' nor within viewing corridors identified as having scores of 4 or 5 for sensitivity or significance.**

#### **5.4 CONSERVATION AND ENHANCEMENT**

5.4.1 The Liz Lake report provides guidance as to objectives for a future landscape strategy, both in relation to conservation and enhancement, and it is proposed to adopt these as Neighbourhood Plan policies.

#### **POLICY LSC 2 – Development beyond the Development Limits:**

**Development, other than small scale projects of an exceptional nature, shall be limited to the area enclosed by the village development limits as shown on the Uttlesford District Local Plan (2005). 'Small scale' shall mean alterations and extensions of a scale commensurate with the scale and type of the existing building; replacement of buildings to a comparable size; and exceptional shall mean development connected with agriculture, rural recreation or affordable or special needs housing in circumstances where development does not conflict with other policies within this Neighbourhood Plan or the Uttlesford Local Plan. Exceptions to this policy are sites that are beyond the Development Limits but which have been specifically allocated for development under Policies HD4-3 in the Housing and Design chapter of this Plan. The exceptions relating to 'small**



**scale projects of an exceptional nature' shall not apply if such development would adversely impact on views defined in the Liz Lake study as having scores of 4 or 5.**

5.4.2 Recommendations are also made in relation to appropriate planning guidance for each individual LPLCA. It is proposed to adopt the Liz Lake advice as to planning guidance in relation to each area.

**LSC3 – Protection and Improvement of the Landscape:**

**Development proposals should be consistent with the landscape planning guidelines set out in Proforma 3 of the Liz Lake report dated September 2016 in respect of the relevant LCLCA. For convenience these are set out in Appendix 1 attached to this Plan.**

**In relation to any proposed development proposals will be sought which, through effective planning both protect and enhance the landscape features that contribute to local distinctiveness and sense of place. Wherever possible proposals will be sought which both improve the integrity of the landscape and reinforce its character through introducing new and/or enhanced elements where distinctive features or characteristics are absent.**

## **5.5 WILDLIFE HABITATS**

5.5.1 Thaxted's unspoilt and varied landscape is rich in wildlife. The following specific sites were identified in the questionnaire responses as being important as wildlife habitats and deserving of protection:

- Copthall Lane (stream and meadows)
- West Wood
- Essex County Council owned site next to The Mead (Chalky Meadow)
- Piggot's Hill
- Chelmer Valley/fields adjacent to Watling Lane
- The Churchyard
- Cutler's Green

5.5.2 The questionnaire also revealed that 95% of the respondents thought that it was important to manage/protect local wildlife sites. It is therefore essential that any potential development within an area of wildlife habitat value should be considered in the context of its importance for local wildlife.

**POLICY LSC 4 – Wildlife Habitats.**

**Where a site includes trees, ponds, ditches, banks, established grassland or other natural landscape features, planning applications will only be supported when they are accompanied by:**

- **professional survey reports identifying the landscape and biodiversity features of value on the subject site and adjoining land;**
- **plans showing how the subsequent layout and design of the development has been informed by the survey; and**
- **management plans to show how these features will be protected and sustained for the long term in the new environment or how features lost will be fully compensated;**

and these documents demonstrate that there will be no overall adverse impact on landscape or habitat quality.

The sites listed above are identified locally as being specifically relevant in the context of this policy.

## 5.6 IDENTIFIED DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

5.6.1 A number of development opportunities have been identified in Thaxted with details set out in the Housing chapter of this Neighbourhood Plan. Each of these sites has been considered in the context of landscape impact. Views expressed in the Liz Lake study and by the community following the analysis of questionnaire responses suggest that on these sites an acceptable form of development could be undertaken.

5.6.2 It is nonetheless, important that design issues are considered carefully in relation to landscape context. Built form, materials and overall design must compliment the landscape setting and must respect, and, wherever possible, enhance landscape views.

### **POLICY LSC5 – Visual Impact Appraisals:**

**In considering any potential development a landscape and visual impact appraisal will be required for all development proposals involving built structures outside the defined development limits. Design in terms of building heights, layout, materials, screening, planting and views should seek to preserve and where possible, enhance the surrounding landscape setting.**

## 5.7 OUTLYING SETTLEMENTS

6.7.1 This Neighbourhood Plan concentrates to a large extent on the village core and its hinterland. Also included within the parish however are a number of rural hamlets, principally:

- Stanbrook
- Cutler's Green
- Bardfield End Green
- Richmond's Green
- Sibley's Green
- Monk Street

5.7.2 These are entirely rural communities, in general with no significant public facilities. Development within them on anything other than a very small scale would therefore not only be unsustainable but would also potentially change their rural character.

### **POLICY LSC6 - Development in Outlying Settlements:**

**Housing development within these outlying settlements shall in cases of undeveloped land be limited to single units only or to extensions or replacement of existing dwellings subject to any proposals being able to satisfy other planning criteria. Development shall be restricted to appropriate infill sites only and infill shall mean land between two existing dwellings within these outlying settlements. Development of commercial units other than on previously used commercial sites shall be restricted to the conversion of existing buildings.**

## **Chapter 6      Housing and Design**

### **6.1      BACKGROUND**

6.1.1 In 2011 the population of Thaxted was stated to be 2,845. It has however, increased significantly over the last five years principally as a result of new housing development on Sampford Road (60 units) and further extension to Wedow Road and Barnards Field. Further new development is under construction on the former Molecular Products site and with a new 47 unit extension to Wedow Road.

6.1.2 A total of nearly 200 new houses have been constructed or have been consented in the past five year period .

6.1.3 Much of Thaxted's historic centre is protected by a Conservation Area, the limits of which are indicated in the Heritage and Conservation chapter above. Additionally, there are a total of 148 listed buildings within the Conservation Area which further restricts the potential for new development. Of equal significance however, is the landscape that surrounds the village. Other chapters of this Plan set out the special qualities of both the landscape itself and the setting that it provides for the historic core but save to say at this point that it acts again, as a significant constraint on development potential.

6.1.4 As part of the evidence base for this Plan reports were commissioned from landscape consultants and heritage consultants which underline the significance of Thaxted's hinterland and just how constrained the village is as a result. At the same time a detailed assessment was undertaken of the central area both within the Conservation Area and beyond it. For obvious reasons this also served to demonstrate the difficulties that new development posed.

6.1.5 Housing as a specific topic has formed a central theme in the Steering Group's engagement with the local community. By means of questionnaires and exhibitions the views of the local community with regards to housing have been ascertained. A Housing Needs Survey was also commissioned and this was undertaken by the Rural Communities Council of Essex (RCCE) who assessed housing needs based on questionnaire responses. The principal conclusion was that in fact, there was limited demand from the local community for additional housing.

6.1.6 In establishing policies for housing development within Thaxted there is now a strong evidence base which has considered physical, landscape and heritage constraints; the formal and informal views expressed by local people; and the results of an independently prepared report on local demand.

### **6.2.      CORE OBJECTIVES AND EVIDENCE BASE**

6.2.1 It is important first to state Thaxted's objectives in setting local housing policies and to summarise the key findings of the different elements of the evidence base that underpin those objectives.

6.2.2 The core objectives for new housing developments are:

- That they are sustainable and fully compliant with the social, economic, and environmental requirements of the NPPF but in the context of local circumstances;
- That they are of a scale and nature such that they do not impact on the town's character, surrounding countryside and tourism potential;
  - That they meet the needs of local people in terms of mix (both size and type), identified requirement/suitability and affordability;
  - That they are of high quality design, both sympathetic to and complementing Thaxted's distinctive character.

### 6.2.3 Our evidence base relevant to the issue of housing includes:

- A PARISH PLAN SURVEY (undertaken in September 2013)

With respect to housing, residents were asked: "If Thaxted has to accept further housing in the future what type of housing would you like to see and why?" The most numerous responses included:

- Bungalows for elderly people to move into
- Wide range and mix of housing to suit all needs;
- Affordable housing;
- Good quality accommodation for single people;
- Improved infrastructure;
- Good design appropriate to the character of the village.

- OPINION GATHERED FROM A PUBLIC EXHIBITION INFORMATION EVENT (25th / 26th February 2016)

- More bungalows for older people near the town centre
- No flats over two storeys;
- Any new housing should be of better quality and more aesthetically pleasing than that recently constructed;
- No more housing was wanted on Wedow Road because of existing traffic problems;
- Any more housing built in Thaxted would be unsustainable.

- OPINION GATHERED FROM A PUBLIC EXHIBITION (29th September to 1st October 2016)

The importance of Thaxted's landscape and historic setting was emphasised and any new housing should not compromise it;

Opposition to large-scale housing development was emphasised;

Preference for appropriate housing (affordable market; 1-2 bed starter homes; bungalows) for local people was emphasised – appropriate development for local needs;

The need for strategic thinking on school places and healthcare provision prior to the construction of more housing.

- OPINION GATHERED FROM A PUBLIC EXHIBITION (25<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> August 2017)

More one and two bedroom houses required for the young and elderly. Concern over the design of housing (developers taking their cue from large housing estates not traditional Thaxted design) and the height of new housing out of scale with existing housing stock.

- A HOUSING NEEDS SURVEY (APRIL 2016) CARRIED OUT BY THE RURAL COMMUNITY COUNCIL OF ESSEX (RCCE)

This included questions on residents' current living circumstances and their future housing needs.

The housing need requirement as stated by people having a housing need is shown in the table below in terms of unit sizes and timescales:

	Open Market	Shared Ownership	HA Rented	Private Rent
Identified No of Units	15	6	12	3
Size Breakdown	1x1 Bed Flat 1x2 Bed Flat 3x2 Bed Bung 3x3 Bed Bung 2x2 Bed House 4x3 Bed House 1x4 Bed House	1x2 Bed Flat 3x2 Bed House 2x3 Bed House	2x1 Bed Flat 1x1 Bed Bung 3x2 Bed Bung 6x2 Bed House	3x2 Bed House
Time Range				
0-2 Years	1x2 Bed Bung 1x3 Bed House 1x4 Bed House	1x2 Bed Flat 2x2 Bed House 1x3 Bed House	1x1 Bed Flat 1x1 Bed Bung 2x2 Bed Bung 5x2 Bed House	
2-5 years	1x2 Bed Flat 1x2 Bed Bung 1x3 Bed Bung 2x3 Bed House	1x3 Bed House	1x2 Bed House	2x2 Bed House
Over 5 Years	1x1 Bed Flat 1x2 Bed Bung 2x3 Bed Bung 2x2 Bed House 1x3 Bed House	1x2 Bed House	1x1 Bed Flat 1x2 Bed Bung	1x2 Bed House

The majority of respondents are in favour of a small development of affordable housing for local people.

The majority of respondents are looking for a two-bedroom house.

Many respondents considered that the infrastructure in Thaxted is inadequate and could not support large developments, citing the over-subscribed school and surgery and the inadequate Victorian drainage.

Housing in the form of starter units and two-bedroom houses is required for young people and first-time buyers together with affordable housing for local people.

RESIDENTS' QUESTIONNAIRE (January 2017)

**QUESTION 1: - Are there enough houses currently available in Thaxted?**

37% indicated that the current numbers were about right.

31% indicated that Thaxted could accommodate a few more whilst 29% thought that there was more than enough.

**QUESTION 2 - How many new homes should be built in Thaxted in the next 20 years?**

23% indicated no more than 10 the majority (38%) indicated a preference for no more than 50.

**QUESTION 3 - How should new housing be developed in Thaxted?**

The great majority (61%) was in favour of small infill developments of no more than 5 units.

**QUESTION 4 - Should the Neighbourhood Plan reflect the findings of the Housing Needs Survey that a significantly higher proportion of 1 and 2 bedroom houses rather than 3 and 4 bedroom houses is needed?**

The great majority (69%) agreed that it should.

**QUESTION 5 - Should the Neighbourhood Plan allocate the old allotment site on Bardfield Road (owned by the Parish Council) for rented social housing for Thaxted people specifically?**

The great majority (63%) believe that the Neighbourhood Plan should.

**QUESTION 6 - Should the Neighbourhood Plan allocate land for market housing?**

The majority (47%) thought that it should but 41% thought not

## 6.3 KEY FINDINGS

6.3.1 A clear residents' wish identified in the many public consultations and surveys is that development must be sustainable and in particular that infrastructure should already be in place or be provided with the development.

6.3.2 Particular reference was made to the possibility of an oversubscribed primary school, full patient capacity at the surgery and the inadequate drainage system which has been the cause of serious flooding in some locations

6.3.3 Public consultations and surveys have revealed that the great majority of people place great importance on the heritage of the village and its landscape settings and consider it important to reject developments which threaten the environment.

6.3.4 The consultations and surveys also indicated that any developments that were proposed should be limited in size to avoid creating a 'community within a community'

6.3.5 Over 90% of respondents to the residential questionnaire considered that new housing in Thaxted should be developed as small developments not large estates.

6.3.6 A strong residents' wish expressed in all of the public consultations and surveys was that any new housing development should have a significantly higher proportion of one and two bedroom homes than three, four and five bedroom homes. This would provide housing for small families, young people and older people looking to downsize.

6.3.7 The Housing Needs Survey findings indicated a need for both affordable and open market housing, primarily one and two bedroom homes.

6.3.8 In the consultations and surveys, residents were adamant that affordable housing should in the first instance be for local people (i.e. those with a connection to Thaxted). The results emphasised the need for the provision of small developments of affordable housing for local people.

6.3.9 The residents' responses showed that most people require new housing to be of good design and of much better quality than recent new housing built in the village. In addition, they should be constructed of traditional materials in the Thaxted vernacular (e.g. render not black weatherboarding) and be more aesthetically pleasing with gardens and amenity space commensurate with the style and size of the proposed dwellings and their location.

## **6.4 PRESUMPTION IN FAVOUR OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

6.4.1 The NPPF requires that housing proposals should be sustainable and deliverable and in order to comply with the economic and social strands of sustainability, necessary infrastructure should be in place prior to occupation.

### **POLICY HD1 – Presumption in favour of Sustainable Development:**

**The Neighbourhood Plan will support development proposals which demonstrate that they are economically, socially and environmentally sustainable judged in a local context. In particular, this means inter alia, that there is sufficient provision of services, facilities and infrastructure including Thaxted village primary school capacity and surgery capacity or that such facilities will be enhanced to serve the development. In terms of environmental sustainability any development proposals should not conflict with the findings of the Heritage Setting and Landscape Assessment reports that were prepared as a part of the evidence base for this plan.**

## **6.5 SCALE AND LOCATION OF NEW DEVELOPMENT**

6.5.1 The broad extent of the Conservation Area serves to restrict the potential for development within the central area and the sensitivity of the surrounding landscape and the context it provides

for the historic core, means that there are also few opportunities for sensitive new development on the perimeter of the village. The insensitive development already carried out on Sampford Road only serves to demonstrate how damaging inappropriate development on the edge of the village can be. The landscape and heritage work that has been undertaken has demonstrated that virtually no new development could take place within the peripheral landscape without serious harm to historic views; the context of the Conservation Area; or to the landscape itself. There is however scope for new housing development within the central area if it is small scale and sensitively designed. There is scope for environmental improvement even within the Conservation Area and appropriate development could in fact, serve to further enhance the appearance of this historic place.

**POLICY HD2 – Scale and Location of New Development:**

**HD2-1: All development proposals must respect visual sensitivity demonstrating regard to map 5; make a positive contribution to the character, shape and scale of the particular parish location; conserve or enhance heritage assets; respect streetscape, landscape, and important open spaces; and not adversely affect historic views into and out of the village as indicated on map 6.**

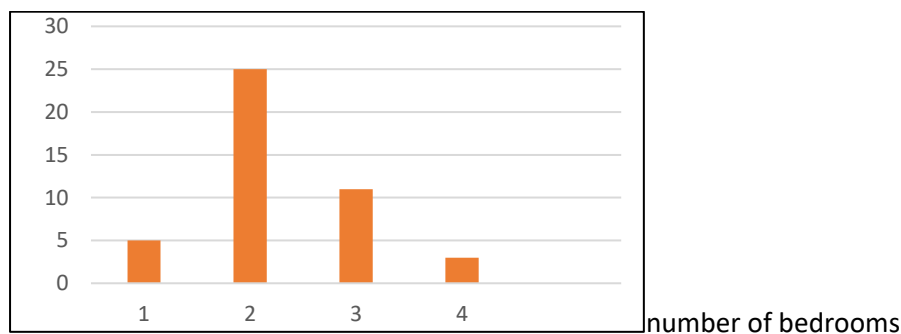
**HD2-2: In order to respect the existing environment and village character no one development should exceed 15 units unless it can be demonstrated that there will be no harm to the character of the village or surrounding landscape having regard to the findings and recommendations of the Heritage Setting study undertaken by Grover Lewis and the Landscape Assessment undertaken by Liz Lake Associates.**

**6.6. LOCAL HOUSING NEEDS**

6.6.1 It is essential to maintain Thaxted’s “sense of belonging” and in order to preserve a positive, sustainable environment housing developments must meet local needs. The housing mix should primarily, serve the identified needs of the existing population as it evolves and expands through the generations.

6.6.2 In consultations with residents the majority of respondents stated that there is currently not enough housing at affordable prices or rents in Thaxted. The prime demand is for one and two bedroom properties, starter homes and bungalows. This is also demonstrated in fig 18 below which has been extracted from the RCCE Housing Needs Survey Thaxted July 2016. This indicates 68% of respondents who have a need for housing require one or two bedroom properties.

*Figure 18 : Number of bedrooms required*  
Number of respondents with specific housing needs





6.6.3 Kevin Henry, local estate agents in Saffron Walden, have written to us confirming that first time buyers are asking for two bedroom homes whilst families require traditional three bedroom semi detached homes. In addition they stated that there is less demand for larger four bedroom family houses.

### **POLICY HD3 – Local Housing Needs**

**Housing developments must primarily meet the existing and future needs of the village. In considering applications regard shall be had to a housing mix which includes a target of 50% minimum of one and two bedroom properties, while single storey dwellings will be encouraged to accommodate the needs of the elderly.**

## **6.7 AFFORDABLE/SPECIAL NEEDS HOUSING**

6.7.1 Affordable housing should be effectively integrated into the village to ensure a safe and cohesive community. There should be good pedestrian links to the village core, primary school and surgery with a comprehensive range of footpaths and cycle ways. Survey work undertaken clearly and repeatedly shows that residents want a high proportion of new homes to be starter homes and for local single people, essentially one and two bedroom dwellings. There is clearly a need for additional affordable housing but it is important that such development is nonetheless appropriately and sensitively located. The intrusive development known as Little Maypole which dominates the landscape in the approach to the village from Saffron Walden, only serves to illustrate how damaging unconsidered development can be.

### **POLICY HD4- Affordable/Special Needs Housing**

**POLICY HD4-1 Affordable housing provision as required by Uttlesford District Council must be provided and be designed to be an integral part of the development as a whole.**

**POLICY HD4-2: The allocation of the affordable housing shall in the first instance be for people with a strong Thaxted connection.**

**POLICY HD4-3: Proposals for small scale affordable housing schemes on rural exception sites for people with a Thaxted connection on the edge of the village will be permitted where, by virtue of their size, scale and type, they are consistent with identified needs. They are also to be appropriate to the character of the village in terms of size, scale and design; will not adversely impact on the character of the village particularly in relation to views; and be acceptable in terms of other planning considerations. In addition they should be located within easy access of the village centre.**

## **6.8 HOUSING SITE ALLOCATIONS AND DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES**

6.8.1 As outlined in Policy HC3 development shall generally be contained within the development limits as shown in the 2005 Adopted Local Plan. This does provide a tightly defined boundary within which new development can take place. This does not however entirely prevent development within Thaxted. There are sites within the central area where development of an appropriate scale and design could in fact enhance the historic environment.

6.8.2 The results of the commissioned specialist studies show that the sensitivity of landscape and village setting militate against new housing on the periphery of the village. Within the village core however there is scope for development and the conclusions reached from survey work and from the Central Area Assessment suggest that with good design, environmental enhancements could be achieved through new development whilst at the same time providing for additional housing.

6.8.3 In our search for potential development opportunities we have reviewed the following sites which were put forward in Uttlesford District Council's 'Call for Sites in 2015. We have summarised the planning officers' comments in relation to suitability for development in the table below. The sites highlighted in green were considered to be suitable in principle, those in red unsuitable and those in orange were uncertain.

REF	SITE	CONCLUSION
01 Tha 15	Pathwoods Bardfield End Green	Unsuitable for development as would not contribute to sustainable development
02 Tha15	Keston Monk street	Unsuitable for development as would not contribute to sustainable development
03 Tha 15	Chelmer House	Planning permission has been granted for the demolition of the existing house and the construction of three chalet bungalows. An application for six houses on the site was dismissed on appeal primarily as a result of detrimental impact on the countryside.
04 Tha 15	Land south of Sampford Road	Unsuitable for development as urbanisation of a rural area and harm to the church setting.
05 Tha 15	Bardfield Road	Unsuitable for development as extends into open farmland and its elevated position would make it prominent.
06 Tha 15	East of Dunmow Road opposite Totmans Farm	Unsuitable for development as would extend the village into open countryside
07 Tha 15	Land south of Townfield Bardfield Road	Unsuitable for development as it would be inappropriate back land development
08 Tha 15	Land east of Dunmow Road to the north of Priors Hall	Unsuitable for development as it would introduce considerable development into open arable farmland in an elevated and prominent position on a main entrance to the town
09 Tha 15	Land east of Wedow Road	Unsuitable for development as would not contribute to sustainable development

10 Tha 15	Molecular Products Site	Has planning for 29 dwellings
11 Tha 15	Warners Field Depot	Unsuitable for development. Although a brownfield site it is an isolated site in the middle of the countryside and would introduce dwellings unrelated to the existing village
12 Tha 15	Levetts Farm	Considered suitable for development with careful attention to design and layout (up to 5 dwellings)
13 Tha 15	Land at Barnards Field	Unsuitable for development as this would be seriously detrimental to the character of the area and thus unsustainable
14 Tha 15	Claypitts Farm	Part of the site is brownfield and could be suitable for development subject to design and layout. The grassland area of the site should remain undeveloped
15 Tha 15	Land east of Park Lane	Unsuitable for development as the site has a high sensitivity to change, it would extend the village into arable farmland, would impact on the historic core of the village. It is therefore unsustainable
16 Tha 15	Land off Walden Road	Unsuitable for development as it would cause harm to the character and appearance of the area and harm to the setting of the church. It would not be sustainable development
17 Tha 15	Land east of the Mead	This site is owned by Essex County Council and any developer must be sensitive to the viewing corridor to the church spire. Development would extend the village into open arable land. Consideration would need to be given to the significant presence of varied flora and fauna present on the site.
18 Tha 15	Brooklyns	Unsuitable for development as the garden is an important open space to be protected from development. Planning permission was refused on appeal 9/17.
19 Tha 15	Land between Farmhouse Inn and Mayes Place Monk Street	Unsuitable for development as it would be unsustainable
20 Tha 15	Bardfield End Green	Unsuitable for development as it would be intrusive in the countryside

6.8.4 The conclusion comments on each site above are based entirely on the findings of the Uttlesford officers' analysis. In the majority of cases however development would conflict with the policies of the Neighbourhood Plan particularly in relation to landscape and heritage setting. 03 Tha 15 and 10 Tha 15 have subsequently receive planning permission and 12 Tha 15 and 14 Tha 15 are considered suitable for development. In relation to 18 Tha 15 planning permission was refused on

appeal. The remaining sites are considered unsuitable for development. Specifically, with regard to 17 Tha 15, this site is considered unsuitable in the light of a recent wildlife habitat survey but also due to highways constraints and the unacceptable burden that would be placed on an already overloaded local road network.

6.8.5 In addition to the above sites we have identified other sites in the village which may also be suitable for development so long as the form of that development is appropriate to the location. These sites and the suitable 'Call for Sites' sites together with a summary of the scope they each offer are set out below:

### 6.8.6 HOUSING ALLOCATIONS:

#### CLAYPITS FARM BUILDINGS



The existing buildings although well screened are unattractive and partially unused. Sensitive redevelopment of this 'brown field' site would be largely unobtrusive in the overall streetscape and not only make a significant contribution to the local housing supply but could provide a small element of regeneration to this corner of Thaxted which borders the Conservation Area. The sensitivities associated with the listed Claypits Farmhouse must be respected and access in particular, will need to be properly considered. It may be that an appropriate access can only be provided and any impact minimised on Claypits Farmhouse. There are also sensitivities associated with views to the church from nearby footpaths. It will therefore be essential to design into any new development layout a viewing corridor of the church spire from the footpaths to the rear of the site. The site is also elevated and at present screening is by way of cypressus trees which will need to be replaced with native species (but already mature specimens) so as to provide a new screen to the Bardfield Road. Given the elevated position development should also be limited to one or two storey and design, layout and landscaping will be critical. Standard modern estate housing should be avoided and the design should reflect the Thaxted character and vernacular. Development should be limited to the site of the existing buildings and silos. The number of units will depend upon design

and layout but it is not anticipated that there would be scope for more than 15 units. At least 50% should be small units (one and two bedrooms).

#### **POLICY HD5: Claypits Buildings Site**

**This site is allocated for housing development provided that the design and layout respect the sensitivities of the site as identified above and in the Central Area Assessment. Access, the preservation of views of the church, landscaping and the setting of Claypits Farmhouse are particularly significant factors in determining any application, as is the housing mix.**

#### **LEVITTS FARM**

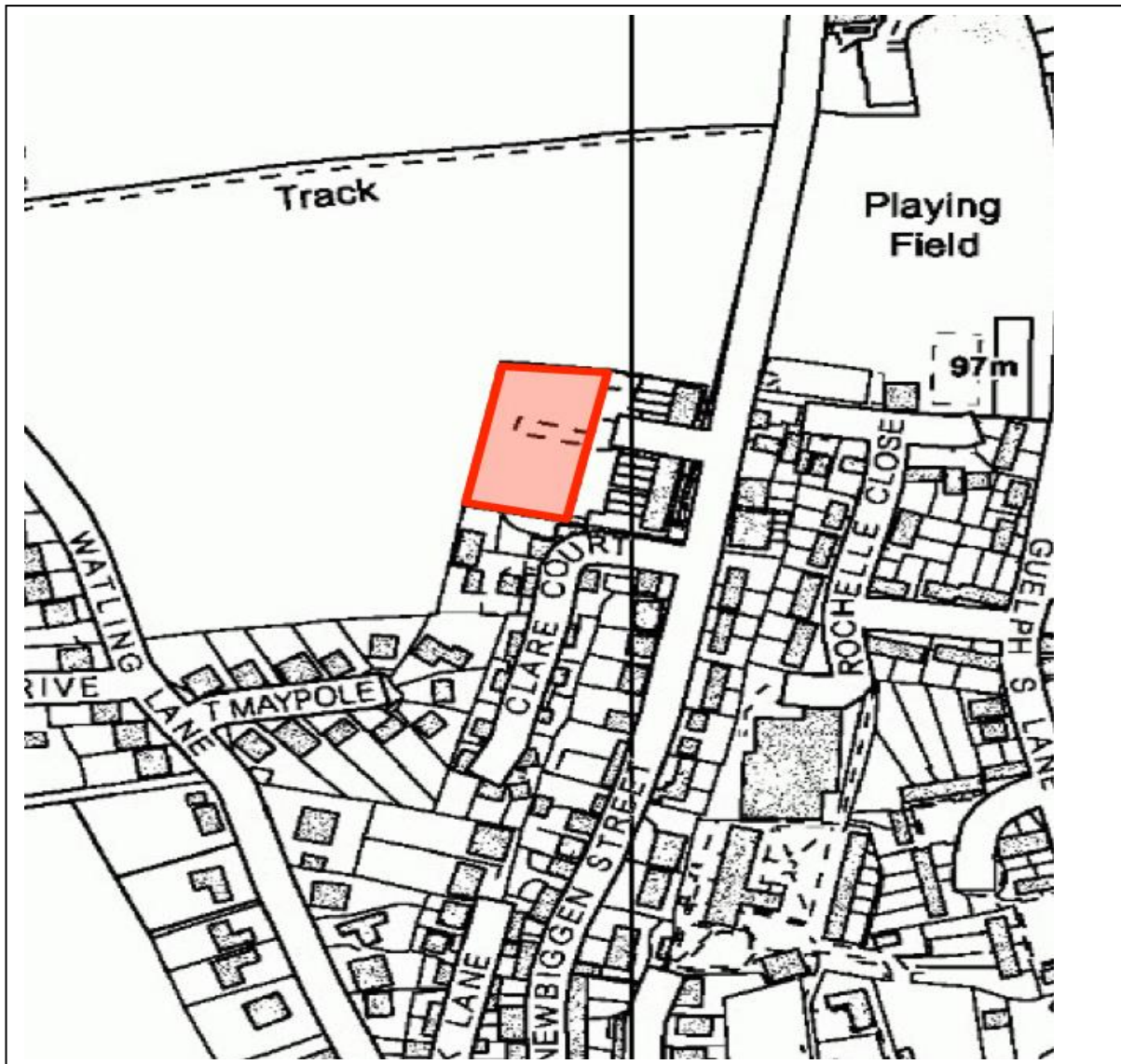


Although somewhat remote from local facilities there is scope for redevelopment of these redundant farm buildings, limited to perhaps three (depending upon design) larger units. In the context of the adjacent existing houses it is considered appropriate here to consider an exception to policy HD3 There will however be sensitivities associated with neighbouring properties and design and landscaping will be significant factors.

#### **POLICY HD6: Levett's Farm**

**This site is allocated for the development of three detached units in place of these former farm buildings provided the design satisfactorily respects the amenity of existing neighbouring properties.**

## THE RESCU SITE



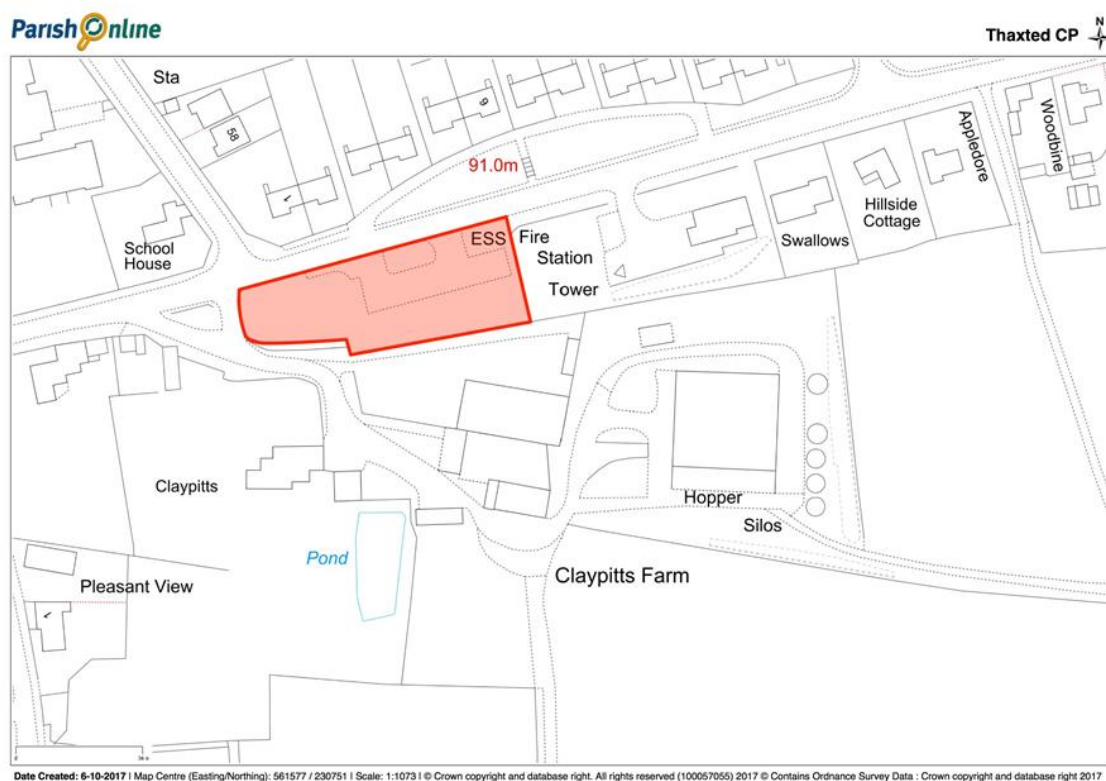
This site, located to the rear of the Little Maypole housing development off Walden Road, has something of a chequered history. It is outside of the village development limits but a planning permission was obtained on an exception basis for the development of a single storey respite centre to be run by a charity. In the final analysis it would appear that the development was not viable and the planning permission lapsed. Recently a planning application for the development of nine three storey private houses was refused principally on the grounds of design. The site could however accommodate some small-scale development if it was more sensitively designed with heights and finishes being the critical elements. The site is prominent in views associated with the Chelmer Valley and any development would need to fully respect the sensitivities of this location.

### POLICY HD7: Rescu Site

The land to the rear of the Little Maypole is allocated for the development of up to four dwellings subject to building heights being no more than one and a half storeys high. Dwellings should be sensitively arranged so as not to adversely impact on the amenity of neighbouring property. An exception to Policy HD3 in terms of the requirement for small units may be appropriate. A critical factor in any application will also be the provision of mature landscape to protect views across from the Chelmer Valley.

### 6.8.7 DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES:

#### COACH PARK, BARDFIELD ROAD



A piece of land fronting Bardfield Road and adjacent to Claypitts Farm Buildings is owned by the Parish Council and is currently in use as a coach park. It is little used however and discussion has taken place as to its future and particularly whether it could be incorporated into a redevelopment of Claypitts Buildings. It would certainly help to address the access problem associated with the latter development. To remove coach parking from Thaxted completely however, would be contrary to the tourism objectives of this Plan and it will be necessary in the event of any planned development to prove that parking for at least one coach can still be achieved either on the existing site or elsewhere in the village.

### POLICY HD8: Coach Park Site

Support would be given for limited infrastructure development on the Coach Park site provided that satisfactory arrangements can be made for continued coach parking . The site should however ideally be developed on a comprehensive basis with Claypits Buildings and could provide access to it.

### BRETHREN MEETING HALL



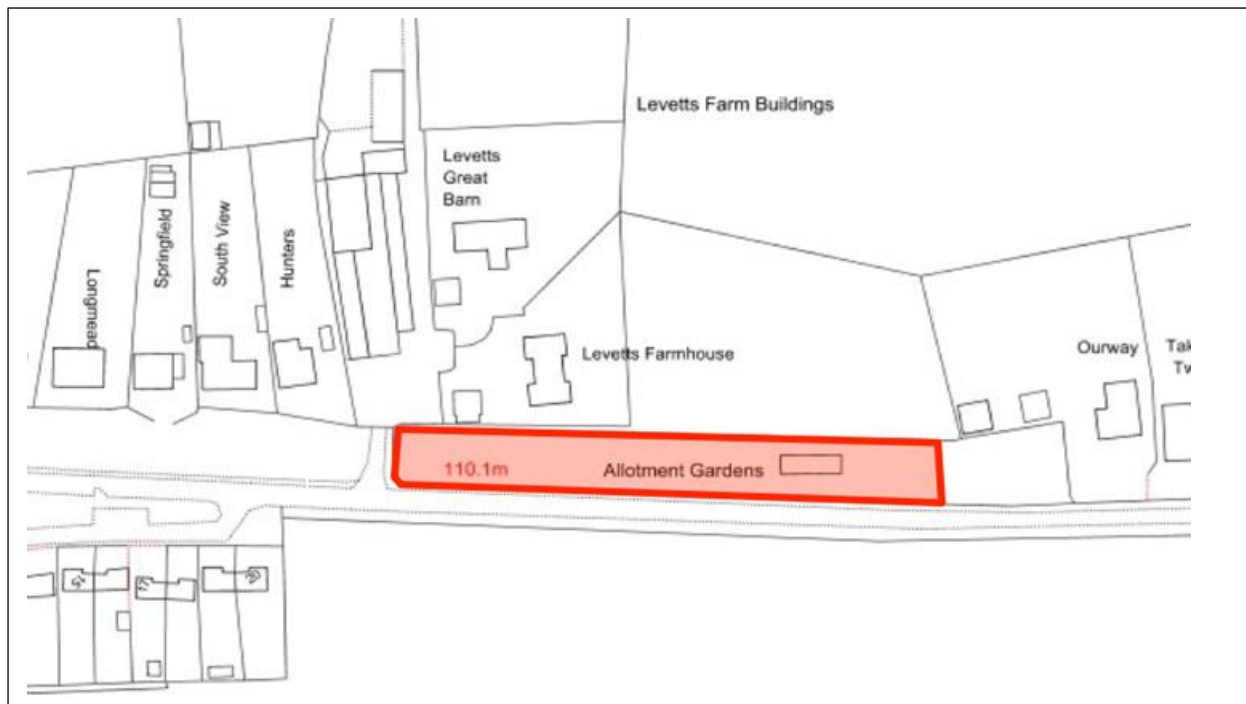
The site occupied by the Brethren Meeting Hall at the junction of Cophall Lane and The Tanyard is out of place with its surroundings in the Conservation Area within the centre of the village. The hall is a utilitarian building on a wasteful site. It is generally, unappealing and redevelopment could, with appropriate design, not only provide additional housing but also considerable environmental enhancement. Design will however, be critical and any development must respect the surrounding property particularly Bridgefoot Cottages. Modern housing in this corner of Thaxted has generally been carried out sympathetically and it is important that any development on this site follows this pattern.

### POLICY HD9: Brethren Meeting Hall:

In the event that the existing owners of the Brethren Meeting Hall wish to sell this site support will be given for its redevelopment for housing. It is anticipated that the scheme would not involve buildings of more than two storeys in height and will fully reflect the Conservation Area status of the site in terms of design and finishes. Unit numbers will depend on layout and mix but it is anticipated that 6-7 two bedroom units might be possible subject to the provision of adequate car parking.



## LAND FRONTING BARDFIELD ROAD ADJACENT TO LEVETTS FARM



This is a narrow strip of land fronting Bardfield Road and adjacent to the Levetts Farm site to the west and the old water works to the east. The site is owned by the Parish Council and their wish is for some affordable housing to be provided for people with a local Thaxted connection potentially by way of a Community Land Trust scheme. The site could accommodate four one or two bedroom dwellings. Although this is an infill site there will be sensitivities associated with the neighbouring properties each side. It is situated beyond the village development limits but can be considered on an exception basis as the intention is to provide affordable housing.

### **POLICY HD10: Land fronting Bardfield Road adjacent to Levetts Farm:**

**Support would be given to the development of up to four one or two bedroom affordable units on the land between Levetts Farm and the old water works site subject to the design respecting the amenity of the existing neighbouring properties. Provision would need to be made for a building for the local Scout group either onsite or elsewhere in the village.**

## **6.9 DESIGN PRINCIPLES**

6.9.1 The character of Thaxted is immediately identified in the various approaches to the village, most notably from Great Dunmow, Broxted, Debden and Saffron Walden. The church with its 181 feet high spire and the windmill are particularly prominent but of equal importance is the style and materials of its historic Conservation Area. The Thaxted Design Statement published in 2011 together with the recent Central Area Assessment provides a comprehensive narrative on the Thaxted 'style' but what is important is that any future development reflects the design principles that have been established over the past 500 years or so. There is of course variety in the Thaxted streetscapes but there is a dominant pattern of mostly two storey (the occasional important building

for a more affluent former resident extending to three storeys) buildings with rendered elevations and peg-tiled roofs. Up until the middle of the 20th century development generally conformed to this style pattern. Local authority housing then came to Thaxted which was generally of brick and lacking variety in its elevations. This was however contained within what was probably the least sensitive area of the village and now some 60 years on has melded well with its surrounding and has even become a feature within the historic character. Modern development has not been so kind however. The development of Bellrope Meadow was so out of keeping with the Thaxted style that it was singled out in a report commissioned by English Heritage (now Historic England) as an example of how modern development can adversely affect the historic environment. The neighbouring development at Thatchers' Grange while showing signs of high quality design and finishes was entirely unsympathetic to its surrounds and has destroyed important views of the church spire. Wedow Road is a narrow standard estate road containing a succession of bland houses all feeding into one single access point quite unsuited to the volume of traffic. There have however been a few examples of good small developments in the centre that properly reflect the Thaxted style and it is important that these set an example for future housing design.

6.9.2 It is important that there is a mixture of housing types, styles and materials but new developments should seek to preserve, enhance and extend the character of their surroundings. Traditional materials are essential. Elevations should be predominantly rendered with alleviation provided by elements of brick. Eaves heights should be no more than 5.9 metres and roofs should be of natural slate or clay tiles. Chimney stacks should where appropriate, be included to preserve the traditional style of roofscape which is such an important village feature. Layout and adjacency are however equal in importance to materials and building design. Standard modern suburban housing estate layouts are not appropriate for Thaxted. There is however scope for flexibility in terms of open space and garden allocation in areas where densities can be increased in terms of site cover (but not through increasing building heights). Car parking should be discreet and careful thought needs to be given to screening and the preservation of historic views.

#### **POLICY HD11 – Design Principles:**

##### **POLICY HD11 -1:**

**All new development proposals will preserve and enhance the distinctive built environment and character of the village of Thaxted. Applicants for development proposals with construction areas in excess of 300m<sup>2</sup> will be required to actively engage in consultation with the Parish Council and the wider community to agree design parameters before the submission of a planning application. Specifically consideration will be given to:**

- **In the Conservation Area recognition and reinforcement of the local vernacular architectural character (as specified in the text above) in respect of design, choice of materials, height, scale, spacing and layout. Weatherboarding is not a part of the Thaxted 'style' and its use as a cladding material should be limited.**
- **Beyond the Conservation Area any development should contribute sympathetically to the street scene with a choice of materials and finishes in keeping with other buildings in the vicinity and of appropriate height and scale.**
- **All development proposals must take full account of the Landscape Character Assessment, the Heritage Setting Assessment and the Central Area Assessment to ensure that harm is not caused to setting of individual heritage assets, the historic core of the village, the surrounding countryside and historic views into and out of the village**

- Retention and protection of existing trees and hedgerows and to ensure that any new boundary treatments reflect the distinct local character in respect of specification and design.

**POLICY HD11-2:**

New developments shall be of a high quality design and specification which will complement, enhance or conserve the village's heritage buildings and historic core. Design should:

Respect visual sensitivity and demonstrate regard to Map 5; make a positive contribution to the character, shape and scale of the particular Parish location; conserve or enhance heritage assets; respect streetscape, landscape, important open spaces; and not adversely affect historic views into and out of the village as indicated on map 6

- maximise safe communication/access routes between new developments and the existing village by linking into existing footpaths and bridleways.
- be locally distinctive in terms of design and comprise a layout in keeping with the general form in neighbouring developments and the settlement as a whole.

## Chapter 7      Tourism and the Economy

### 7.1      BACKGROUND

7.1.1 Thaxted is a community of some 3000 people. In the context of its location within a 50 mile radius of London, it is considered remote. It is 10 miles from the M11 at junction 8 for the southbound direction and 16 miles to junction 10 for northbound. It is 8 miles to the nearest A road and almost the same distance to the nearest railway station. Broadband speeds are poor and it is often impossible to get a mobile phone signal in the centre of the village.

7.1.2 The largest employers are probably the primary school, the doctors' surgery, the petrol filling station and Haigh's sand and gravel company about two miles out of the centre on the Broxted road. Most employment is, in fact, in support of small local businesses – retail, catering, building trades and agriculture although most local work is on a self-employed basis.

7.1.3 Thaxted has a valuable but underdeveloped tourism industry. The main economic activities of most of its working residents are conducted outside the village and commuting is thus a significant feature.

7.1.4 Shops, cafes, and restaurants in Thaxted rely on trade from the village's elderly residents, those who work from home in home-making or business, and tourism coming from surrounding towns and further afield as well.

### 7.2      TOURISM

7.2.1 If there is a single 'industry' in Thaxted now it is tourism. The village has, to date, retained its historic character well, with largely unbroken medieval/Georgian streetscapes and a number of specific tourist attractions, principally The Guildhall, the Church of St. John the Baptist and the windmill.

7.2.2 If tourism is to grow it will be necessary to enhance the quality of the visitor experience at these three attractions. The Guildhall and windmill both have small museums providing an insight into the village's past but their potential is significantly limited by restricted opening hours. The church is open all the time during daylight hours and is well used for specific events. Its potential as one of East Anglia's most important churches needs to be promoted more widely and visitors need to feel more welcome with a better selection of publications and, during peak periods, a stewarding rota.

7.2.3 The attractiveness and prosperity of any tourist destination however is dependent as much on the availability and quality of its support services and infrastructure as it is upon the attractions themselves. This includes retail and catering facilities, signage, car parking, and information. These facilities in Thaxted are not entirely lacking but there is scope for improvement.

7.2.4 Similarly, the quality of our streetscapes which act as a backdrop to the three principal attractions and add significantly to the enjoyment of visitors are threatened by inappropriate decorative treatment to individual houses and a lax approach to upholding the conservation principles associated with listed buildings and the Conservation Area.

7.2.5 At the same time the village is threatened by inappropriate housing development around its perimeter, impinging upon the setting of the Conservation Area and the individual landmarks. The sentiments expressed in the Heritage and Conservation chapter of this Plan in relation to development outside development limits therefore, are of direct relevance to tourism potential, the one key element of the local economy.

7.2.6 In the community questionnaire 86% of respondents indicated that they wished to encourage visitors. 71% did, in fact, believe that facilities for visitors were adequate but specific comments expressed referred to the need for greater exploitation of the Guildhall; more restaurants; a new museum; and a community art gallery. It may be that there is a belief that facilities are 'adequate' but also that there is still considerable scope for an improved offering. Any local economy needs investment to preserve, update and improve what already exists and also to add to what it presents to its customers. If Thaxted's economy is principally dependent upon tourism then it must both protect what it has and invest to improve the quality of its product.

**POLICY TLE1 – Enhancing Tourism:**

**Development proposals which enhance the quality of tourism through retail or catering provision or other services to visitors will be supported so long as the proposals are sympathetic to the historic environment and the setting of the village.**

**POLICY TLE2 – Works to Key Historic Buildings:**

**Applications relating to the church, the Guildhall, the windmill or other buildings of historic note (including the United Reformed Church) will be supported if they are for the benefit of visitors and so long as they are not damaging to the fabric of the building, its appearance (both externally and internally), or the appearance of the Conservation Area.**

**7.3 GENERAL COMMERCE**

7.3.1 Thaxted's principal employer until recently was a specialist chemical engineering company called Molecular Products. It was a successful business located within the central core of the village and eventually out-grew its site. In the absence of an alternative site in Thaxted it re-located to Harlow. Its relocation however probably had as much to do with the unsuitability of Thaxted as an employment centre as it did to the lack of available premises. The remoteness of Thaxted and its poor communications links do not meet the needs of larger businesses.

7.3.2 There is no other employer of a comparable scale to Molecular Products in Thaxted and it would be wrong to assume that the future allocation of land for employment now would allow businesses like Molecular Products to expand or that it would attract new employers. Molecular Products was a one-off (now lost to Thaxted), and it is highly unlikely, given the size of the village and its communication links, that any other business operator could be persuaded to relocate here.

7.3.3 For many years land off Sampford Road, behind the recreation ground was allocated for employment use without any interest being shown. Ultimately a compromise was reached and a live/work development was built. Few of the units though, now have a work element.

7.3.4 Thaxted is not therefore a source of employment. Indeed, in the community questionnaire 78% of respondents stated that they did not consider that it would be possible to find suitable employment within the village. Residents have to travel to work; often to Saffron Walden, Bishop's

Stortford, Cambridge, Harlow or London. Given the unavailability of train services and bus services using an inadequate road network, the great majority of commuting is by car (79% in the questionnaire) which renders further significant housing development unsustainable.

7.3.5 Greenfield land should not be allocated specifically for employment purposes although support would be given to development of a modest scale for a specific relocation provided that the development does not impact on the historic or countryside environment.

**POLICY TLE3 – Employment:**

**Small scale employment development which contributes to the local economy will be supported within the parish provided the proposal would not generate additional HGV movements through the village or conflict with other policies in this plan. In particular development will be resisted where it adversely impacts on residential amenity or represents inappropriate development in the countryside. Particular regard should be had to the Liz Lake landscape assessment, the Grover Lewis report on heritage setting and the Central Area Assessment.**

## **7.4 SMALL CENTRAL AREA BUSINESSES**

7.4.1 Many of the small-scale businesses that do exist in Thaxted are one-man enterprises based at a home address. This includes building trades, other craftsmen and all types of 'home workers'. Other small businesses are of a retail or catering nature and operate principally along Town Street and, to a more limited extent, on Park Street. A few small service sector businesses also operate within the village centre and their presence helps to bring a degree of vitality whereby one business will feed off another. It is important to preserve village centre businesses whether they are retail, catering or B1. The heritage chapter of this Plan has already expressed regret at the loss of shop fronts to residential conversion and the damaging effect that this has had on key streetscapes. In the community questionnaire there was also an overwhelming 92% support for the protection of shop-fronts. The preservation of shop-fronts though, as well as being important from a heritage perspective, is also critical to the commercial future of the village centre. The more business occupiers that are lost the less attractive the environment becomes for those that remain, resulting in a spiral of decline. Policy HC6 therefore is also supported from the perspective of local business viability.

## **7.5 FARM BUILDING CONVERSIONS**

7.5.1 There are one or two instances where businesses are operating out of converted farm buildings. The main locations are Hammer Hill Farm; Blunts Farm; Claypits; and Sharpes Farm. For certain types of operation this works well. In the absence of purpose-built workshops in the area, such buildings suit light engineering uses, general storage or where machinery is required as part of the operation of the business, such as landscape contractors.

7.5.2 There can be problems however where such buildings are inappropriately sited. An adjacent farmhouse or cottages may have to endure unacceptable noise, vibration or smells if it is next to an industrial use and, depending on the nature of the immediate road network, there can be a problem with the type and flow of traffic.

7.5.3 Whilst support should therefore be given to conversion to a productive use it is necessary to consider the nature of individual uses in the context of their surroundings.

#### **POLICY TLE4 – Redundant Farm Buildings:**

**The conversion of redundant farm buildings to alternative B1 uses will be permitted where it can be demonstrated that there is a specific need and that the nature of the future use will not adversely impact on neighbouring residential property, landscape quality or the local road network.**

### **7.6 BUSINESS RELATED PARKING**

7.6.1 A particular area of concern for businesses located in the centre of the village is car parking, both for staff and for customers/clients. Responses to the community questionnaire indicated that 58% considered that car parking provision for businesses was adequate and businesses themselves were equally divided as to whether or not parking was sufficient for staff. There were specific comments however about the loss of parking spaces in Town Street due to the creation of the pedestrian “build-outs”. Overall however 62% of respondents thought that there was sufficient parking for their customers. Most respondents to the Business questionnaires stated that their main source of business required travel by car (i.e. was not within walking distance)

7.6.2 Car parking is dealt with separately in the Infrastructure chapter of this Plan but for local village centre businesses it is important that there is a good and convenient car parking provision and ideally, that it is free of charge. The most convenient parking for retail customers is the on-street parking in Town Street (limited, not unreasonably, to 1 hour ). The construction of pedestrian ‘build-outs’ has led to the loss of some parking but in the community questionnaire responses 72% indicated that they thought that the ‘build-outs’ were beneficial and it would therefore be difficult now to take them away. It is important however to preserve what spaces remain and overall the conclusion appears to be that parking provision is adequate at present for most of the time.

7.6.3 In order to ensure that public parking is provided for the benefit of local businesses, local residents and visitors to the village, it may however be necessary to impose restrictions on the use of the two village centre car parks and this is dealt with in the Infrastructure chapter of this Plan.

### **7.7 THE FRIDAY MARKET**

7.7.1 A small but popular local market is held in Town Street every Friday. This is a useful and good quality source especially of fish, cheese and vegetables, for local people. 63% of respondents to the community questionnaire said that they used the market and it is important that it continues to prosper.

7.7.2 Surprisingly only 32% of respondents to the Business questionnaires felt that it was beneficial to their own permanent business.

7.7.3 Whilst the market undoubtedly expands the range of food available to shoppers in Thaxted there is perhaps potential for it to expand its offer with more speciality stalls. It has to be recognised that the Parish Council has a policy to ensure that there is no conflict with the operation of existing businesses. Encouragement should be given therefore to secure one or two other operators who could bring new food and other commodities to complement what is already available. This would

add to the overall vitality of the village centre on a Friday and bring more shoppers in from the surrounding villages.

## **7.8 WHAT MORE CAN BE DONE TO ASSIST THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY?**

7.8.1 A number of comments and suggestions were made by businesses as to possible improvements that could be made.

7.8.2 Perhaps most significant was to improve the mobile phone signal. 94% of respondents thought that the current position was inadequate and indeed for some networks there is no signal at all in many areas of the village.

7.8.3 The majority of respondents thought that their business benefitted from tourism. There were comments made however to the effect that not enough was being done to promote tourism. There were suggestions of increasing the number of specific events (re-enactments ; exhibitions in the Guildhall etc) and also a Tourist Trail with plaques outside buildings of interest.

7.8.4 Business rates were also inevitably mentioned as an issue.

## **7.9 WHAT FURTHER SUPPORT CAN BE PROVIDED AND BY WHOM?**

7.9.1 It is clear that more could be done by public bodies and perhaps voluntary groups and local societies particularly to address the matters raised above.

7.9.2 There must be lobbying principally by the parish and district council for an improved mobile phone reception.

7.9.3 It is also appropriate for the Parish Council and Uttlesford District Council to assist with the further promotion of tourism. The role of public bodies is a general one involving the production of publicity material and information and , for example, organising a "Tourist Trail" as suggested. These general initiatives will only work however if the "operators" of the individual attractions co-operate with the councils and with each other. This will involve the production of better publicity brochures and information on their part in some instances extending the opening hours.



## Chapter 8      Infrastructure

### 8.1      BACKGROUND

8.1.1 Thaxted has a growing population. In the last 15 years, the population has grown by 12.6% to around 3000. This is due to the influx of over 200 new houses - and more are being built. This has put a great strain on the infrastructure, which, for the purposes of the Neighbourhood Plan, we have identified as follows:

- Education;
- Healthcare;
- Highways (including traffic, parking, footpaths and public transport);
- Play space and sports facilities;
- Community buildings;
- Community groups and societies;
- Broadband and mobile phone connectivity;
- Library and information services;

8.1.2 The infrastructure is critical to the well-being of the community, and it is important that services are provided which satisfy local needs. Facilities must be within a reasonable distance, easily accessed by families and the elderly, and they must be well-kept and properly resourced.

8.1.3 It is not acceptable that the local environment, which provides the context for the health and well-being of residents, is jeopardised by the imposition by outside agencies of unreasonable levels of heavy traffic and aircraft noise. These were the things that exercised residents most in the NP Questionnaire.

8.1.4 The Campaign for the Protection of Rural England has said: “For too many people infrastructure has become something that is done to them, and often in their name”. The people who live in a community are often the last to be consulted about the infrastructure they want and need, if they are asked at all. This section of Thaxted’s Neighbourhood Plan is our way of redressing that balance. All the ideas, suggestions, likes and dislikes come from the residents, who clearly care passionately about their town.

### 8.2      EDUCATION

#### 8.2.1      PRIMARY EDUCATION:

##### 8.2.1.1      BACKGROUND AND EVIDENCE

8.2.1.1.1 Thaxted Primary School is the only school in Thaxted. It has places for 266 children aged from 4 to 11. The school is popular with parents, and the great majority of Thaxted children attend their local school at primary level.

8.2.1.1.2 The school has been rated ‘Good’ in its last two inspections (June 2013 and March 2017). It is well-regarded in the community, as well as by parents and pupils.

8.2.1.1.3 Although the school has places for 266 children, the population in Thaxted is growing and the school is in danger of being over-subscribed if it continues to grow. The pupil number forecasts from Essex County Council (ECC) have varied considerably over the last 24 months. The most recent forecast (July 2017) predicts that the school will be “approaching capacity” in 2021 -2022. This does not take into account the variation in numbers in different year groups nor the fact that one year group is already at capacity. The growth in pupil numbers is likely to continue to be uneven as children will be joining the school at all levels and some age groups will be at capacity before the ECC prediction.

8.2.1.1.4 The main reason for the predicted rise in pupil numbers is that, in the past 5 years, over 200 houses have been built or are currently under construction in Thaxted. Other applications are in the pipeline, and may succeed in view of Uttlesford District Council’s lack of a 5-year land supply. Uttlesford District Council (UDC) still presses for more houses to be built even though the strain on Thaxted’s infrastructure has been highlighted by ECC education officers Sarah Cutting and Neil Kinlock in their consultation reports on recent planning appeals:

- i. Report from Neil Kinlock, School Places Data and Intelligence Manager, ECC (re Planning Application UTT/14/1033 - Walden Road, Thaxted):

“Thaxted Primary School has insufficient capacity to accommodate additional pupil numbers ... and there are no other schools serving this age range located within reasonable travelling distance (of the development in Walden Road).”

- ii. Letter to UDC from Sarah Cutting, Economic Growth and Development Manager, ECC (re Planning Application UTT/15/954 - Sampford Road, Thaxted):

“If your council were to turn down the application, I would be grateful if the lack of education and transport provision in the area can be noted as an additional reason for refusal and that we are automatically consulted on any further application relating to the site”.

(Note: ECC revised its projected pupil numbers downwards for Thaxted Primary School in July 2017. This now estimates that the school will have spaces available until the academic year 2021-2022 and will then be only “approaching capacity”. As one year group is already at capacity, this does not seem very realistic. In addition, the new figures do not take into consideration the new housing proposed in the Thaxted Neighbourhood Plan or the housing proposed for Thaxted in the Local Plan. While this may be understandable as neither plan has been officially adopted, it is certain that more houses will be built in Thaxted. Moreover, a reduced population is not a view taken by other service providers in Thaxted, such as the Surgery which is planning an extension to cope with rising numbers. As the provision of infrastructure in Uttlesford is not keeping pace with house building pupil number forecasts by ECC should be kept under constant review in order that schools may plan for the future.)

### **8.2.1.2 OPTIONS**

8.2.1.2.1 It is understood that Thaxted Primary School did not make any provision for an increase in pupil numbers as the previous Head hoped that a new school would be provided to accommodate a bigger intake. With the pressure on school places throughout Uttlesford, this has looked increasingly

unlikely. In the absence of a school plan for expansion and the likelihood of the school being oversubscribed, clarification on the future for Thaxted Primary School was sought from ECC. A meeting was held with Joseph Chell, Lead School Organisation Officer ECC, Neil Kinlock and Anna Dawson, Property Department ECC, on the 24th June, 2016. It was confirmed that there would be no new school for Thaxted.

8.2.1.2.2 ECC had not made a final decision about the future of Thaxted Primary School as they were waiting for the outcome of the Uttlesford Local Plan. However, Thaxted was unlikely to be a priority for a new school building as provision is driven by housing numbers. As a new school would cost in the order of £8 million, a very large number of houses would have to be allocated to Thaxted to make this viable. Because of the nature and character of Thaxted as an historic medieval town of considerable importance, it was thought (and hoped) that this would be unlikely. ECC were aware that some action was needed in order to accommodate Thaxted's new residents. The options for Thaxted Primary School in the circumstances were:

- a) to bus children to other primary schools in the area;
- b) to expand the school on its current site.

8.2.1.2.3 In principle, ECC Education Department considers the transporting of young children to a number of alternative primary schools at some distance from their home address as particularly undesirable. However, it does provide a pragmatic solution to the problem and, in the case of a small shortfall in places at Thaxted Primary School, ECC would consider bussing primary children to Wimbish or Debden.

8.2.1.2.4 The Neighbourhood Plan Questionnaire sought the opinion of Thaxted residents on the issue of bussing primary school children. The question asked was: "How important to you is it that Thaxted children can attend primary school in Thaxted?"

- 85% of respondents said "very important";
- 10% of respondents said "quite important";
- 6% said this was unimportant to them.

8.2.1.2.5 The overwhelming view was that Thaxted primary aged children should be educated at Thaxted Primary School. Thaxted children between the age of 4 and 11 should be able to attend Thaxted Primary School if that is the school of their first choice. It is unacceptable that children of primary school age should have to be transported away from their friends and community in order to receive an education and every effort should be made to prevent this.

8.2.1.2.6 The new Head teacher has devised a mid-term plan to cope with the increase in pupil numbers. She is confident that the school can accommodate 10 separate classes (it currently has 9) with only minor alterations to the fabric of the school and little disruption to the education of the pupils. This would enable the school's notional capacity to increase from 266 to 296. This mid-term plan will allow the school flexibility and time to plan for the long term. A detailed exposition of the plan and approval by ECC and UDC Planning Department (if necessary) should be undertaken within the academic year 2017-2018 so that it can be implemented at short notice if the need arises.

#### **POLICY IFS1- Primary School Provision**

**No new housing development should therefore be permitted until assurances have been given by the school and the Education Authority that they will be able to provide places at Thaxted Primary**

### **School for the anticipated number of children that will be generated to prevent the bussing of Thaxted children elsewhere.**

8.2.1.2.7 The option of extending the school on the current site is not straightforward. The main school building is Victorian, though additional teaching space and staff accommodation has been added. The playground is small by modern standards so making any further inroads to the play space is not an option. There are possibilities of developing on an existing classroom which is not of the same standard as the rest of the school. The small plot of land opposite the school (which is owned by the school) could be used to facilitate this expansion on a temporary basis during the period of the build. Such a project would require careful planning and management, but it is not an impossibility.

8.2.1.2.8 Approximately £340,000 has been allocated to Thaxted for the purpose of providing additional places at Thaxted Primary School as the result of S.106 agreements with house builders. This money is collected by ECC and ring-fenced for the purpose for which it was intended. There is a time limit on this money and it has to be returned if it is not used. ECC officers also made it clear that as Thaxted was a 'grouped' school (with Wimbish, Debden, Great Sampford and Radwinter) the money could be used for the expansion of any school in the group if it was to facilitate places for Thaxted children. The Neighbourhood Plan Questionnaire clearly shows that this would not be acceptable to Thaxted parents.

8.2.1.2.9 ECC would need to fund an expansion of Thaxted Primary School as the S.106 money is only a 'contribution' towards providing additional places. It is clear that the expansion is possible, though not easy, but as Local Government finances are so stretched at the moment, they have to be satisfied money is well spent. ECC would be reassured that the expansion of Thaxted Primary School would be a good long-term investment if there were plans in place to increase the play and sports facilities for the children. A plan by the school to this effect would make a strong case even stronger.

8.2.1.2.10 Residents' support for the expansion of Thaxted Primary School is overwhelming. The Neighbourhood Plan Questionnaire asked residents: "How should future demand for primary school places be met?"

- 93% of residents responded that an extension should be built to the existing school;
- 7% of residents responded that children should be bussed to schools in other villages or towns.

8.2.1.2.11. A particular problem at Thaxted school however is with the delivery of children to and collection from the school. Cars cannot park outside the school gates and informal use is made currently of the coach park opposite.

#### **POLICY IFS2 – Primary School Expansion:**

**Expansion of the existing school is supported so long as development can be achieved without damage to the character of the original Victorian buildings or the Conservation Area. Support will be given as soon as this is practicable in order that no Thaxted child should be denied a place. Such support is however dependent upon the school being able to demonstrate that it has satisfactory arrangements in place for the delivery and collection of children to and from the school.**

## **8.2.2 SECONDARY EDUCATION:**

### **8.2.2.1 BACKGROUND AND EVIDENCE:**

8.2.2.1.1 There is no secondary school in Thaxted. In the recent past, Thaxted parents have had the choice of three secondary schools for their children at age 11:

- Helena Romanes School, Dunmow (6.2 miles from Thaxted);
- Joyce Frankland Academy, Newport (8.0 miles from Thaxted);
- Saffron Walden County High School, Saffron Walden (8.0 miles from Thaxted).

8.2.2.1.2 There has been a big increase in the population of Saffron Walden owing to the number and scale of new housing projects. This has led to an increase in pupil numbers, and Saffron Walden County High has now capped its numbers and, from 2016-17, will no longer take children from the surrounding villages. As it is now an Academy, Saffron Walden County High has autonomy over its admissions policy. As this is the only secondary school in the town, some Saffron Walden children will now have to be accommodated at the Joyce Frankland school in Newport. The number of secondary places at the Joyce Frankland Academy will be increased as a result of a new building project at the school, but these places are intended for Saffron Walden children who can no longer be accommodated at Saffron Walden County High. In both cases, Thaxted children have lost out, and there will be no choice of secondary school for Thaxted parents in the future: all children will have to go to Helena Romanes School in Dunmow. Most Thaxted children already attend Helena Romanes, but the element of choice has been removed.

8.2.2.1.3 Thaxted is within the priority admissions area for Helena Romanes School in Dunmow, and therefore places for Thaxted children when they reach Year 7 should be secure. However, the most recent ECC forecast, 'Commissioning School Places in Essex 2014-2019', indicates that pupil numbers at the school will grow year on year, and that admissions will exceed the current number of 270 from September 2017 onwards. This situation is not sustainable and, because of the large number of houses being built in Dunmow, the deficit in pupil places at secondary level can only get worse.

### **8.2.2.2 THE FUTURE**

8.2.2.2.1 There is a plan to expand Helena Romanes School, but a new site would be needed, and the finance required for a new school depends on the development of the existing site. The lack of a Local Plan leaves the future unresolved. At the time of writing, there is capacity at Helena Romanes, but it remains to be seen whether this will still be the case in the time that it takes to build a new school. In the meantime, ECC are looking at the possibility of bussing Thaxted children to Stansted. They are also in discussion with schools in Hertfordshire.

8.2.2.2.2 As Helena Romanes is the nearest secondary school to Thaxted, the Local Education Authority has a statutory duty to provide free transport for children attending the school. This would also be the case if children had to travel to schools further away because Helena Romanes School was full. However, journeys to Stansted and schools in Hertfordshire would take longer and could be tiring for children, as well as having an effect on the up-take of activities outside the school curriculum. Joyce Frankland Academy at Newport is closer, and Thaxted has had a strong connection with the school over the years, but the Local Authority would not provide or pay for transport. There are arguments for and against all schools for Thaxted children aged 11, but parents should have the

opportunity to make the choice of school themselves in the best interests of their child, and not have a school place forced upon them.

8.2.2.2.3 A dialogue should therefore take place with the Joyce Frankland Academy, which has autonomy over its admissions policy, to explore the possibility of some places being made available to Thaxted children when the school expansion is completed.

### **8.3 HEALTHCARE:**

#### **8.3.1 BACKGROUND AND EVIDENCE:**

8.3.1.1 Thaxted Surgery is situated within the centre of Thaxted with easy access to free parking in Margaret Street car park. The health care offered by the Surgery is particularly important to residents as Thaxted is an isolated, rural community 20 miles away from the nearest secondary care hospital. This makes some diagnostic testing and referrals difficult for patients, especially the elderly.

8.3.1.2 The Surgery is popular with patients and was rated top (out of 35 surgeries) in West Essex in the 2016 National Patient Satisfaction Survey. It has a strong Patient Participation Group who provide feedback on the patient experience to the Practice Manager, which helps to inform change and development within the practice. The Surgery and its doctors and staff are very much part of the local community.

8.3.1.3 The Surgery has a patient roll of 7,500 and serves many of the villages and hamlets surrounding Thaxted, as well as the village itself. For those living outside the town or with mobility problems, the Surgery offers a pharmacy service so that those patients have a 'one stop' visit. For others, the Surgery is supported by the Pharmacy in Town Street. This is an extremely popular asset to the town, receiving the only 100% approval rating in the Neighbourhood Plan Questionnaire.

#### **8.3.2 LIMITS OF THE CURRENT PROVISION**

8.3.2.1 The Surgery is too small for the current number of patients. With a patient roll of 7,500, the Surgery should have 609 square metres of floor space; it has only 384 square metres. This means that at peak times the waiting room is overflowing, with people in the corridors and spilling up the stairs. The surgery cannot put on extra doctors or nurses at peak times because all the rooms are already in use.

8.3.2.2. Thaxted has a growing population as the result of the building of over 200 houses in the past few years, with yet more to come. The situation at the Surgery, which is already critical, can only get worse. Assuming a patient growth of 1.5% per annum, the Surgery's future needs will be for premises of 700 square metres as a minimum requirement.

8.3.2.3 The doctors at the Surgery are keen to provide additional services but are hampered by the lack of space. They do their own phlebotomy, for example, and like to offer rooms to counsellors, district nurses and other health professionals, as well as services such as diabetic retinal screening, so that patients who struggle to travel can access them locally. This is not possible within the current building.

8.3.2.4 The Surgery is also involved in teaching and research. Thaxted doctors are currently involved with teaching Cambridge University medical students, which is excellent for patients as they benefit from up-to-date treatment and practice. Additionally, two Thaxted GP's are qualified to train GP Registrars, but lack the necessary space to allow this. Research is also constrained by limited space, which means that an important development within the practice cannot expand further.

### **8.3.3. OPTIONS FOR THE FUTURE**

8.3.3.1 It is clear that a larger building for Thaxted Surgery would offer considerable development opportunities for the doctors and medical staff, and would benefit all of its scattered patients. The Practice has a vision of Thaxted Surgery as a hub for medical services in the centre of Uttlesford. This will be a strategic asset to deal with the growth of patients in Uttlesford, and help to ensure that the rural population of Thaxted, 20 miles from the nearest secondary care hospital, can be effectively cared for in the community.

8.3.3.2 The Practice has been looking for a site for a bigger surgery for about 3 years, and has had regular meetings with the Parish Council to discuss various new-build options. This has proved to be difficult within an historic village like Thaxted. The medieval centre could not accommodate a large, modern building and the population is generally reluctant to support greenfield development. The Surgery was keen to work closely with the community and, in the end, decided to expand into the car park of its existing site. This has the advantage of being central, opposite to a free car park provided by the Parish Council, and will bring in people from the surrounding villages to Thaxted where they use other facilities and help to keep the town vibrant.

8.3.3.3 Thaxted Surgery's bid to NHS England's ETTF (Estates and Technology Transformation Fund) has been accepted. This means that the project will be fully funded. Architects' plans have been drawn up and discussed with the Parish Council and the Patient Participation Group. Discussions have been held with Uttlesford District Council Planning Department throughout the process and officers have been encouraging in their response. There remains full approval for the building application to be granted. If all goes well, the new build could start early in 2018 and take about 9 months to complete.

8.3.3.4 One of the main planning issues is the availability of parking for Surgery staff. The new site will have only two disabled parking spaces as the extension takes up all of the current staff car park. The public car park opposite is primarily for visitors and residents and does become full on occasions (see Highways section). The Parish Council is wary of reserving spaces for doctors, who will need to be able to come and go at short notice, with the car park's current limited capacity. However, constructive discussions have been held by the two parties and the Parish Council is investigating possible alternatives for parking for Surgery staff.

8.3.3.5 The potential benefits of the new surgery are great. A larger building would enable more weekend and out of hours services. There would be space for consultations with mental health professionals, other counsellors and nursing staff. Thaxted already has a dermatologist as a GP, and she and other local specialists would be able to use and develop their skills in a state-of-the-art treatment room at Thaxted Surgery. Residents mentioned other services that might be considered in the Neighbourhood Plan Questionnaire. These included physiotherapy, weight management and

dentistry. The Practice is keen to hear what the community want from their surgery and to work with them to provide the best possible service.

8.3.3.6 Development of the new surgery extension should not however have an adverse impact on the character of the area and the setting of the listed Christopher Cottage immediately adjacent.

### **POLICY IFS3: Thaxted Surgery**

**Development proposals to extend the existing surgery at Thaxted will be supported subject to the Conservation Area and the setting of Christopher Cottage not being harmed and satisfactory provision of parking for visitors and staff. The developer will be expected to fully engage with the community prior to the submission of a planning application via the provision of a development brief.**

## **8.4 HIGHWAYS**

### **8.4.1 TRAFFIC**

#### **8.4.1.1 BACKGROUND AND EVIDENCE**

8.4.1.1.1 The main highway through Thaxted follows largely the same route as in medieval times. It was not the B184 then, of course, but it does still cut through the heart of the historic centre of the town, and therein lies the problem. The main road through Thaxted is unsuited to the volume and weight of traffic that it carries. In the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group meetings with residents to seek their views on the future of the village, traffic came up time and again as the major concern.

8.4.1.1.2 Because of the cost, the despoliation of the sensitive boundaries of Thaxted, and the further intrusion into the countryside, a bypass is not the answer. Most residents realise that a road around Thaxted would, necessarily, mean several hundred more houses in order to finance it, (this was emphasised by comments made at the public exhibition in August 2017). This would swamp the medieval centre and overwhelm the infrastructure of the town. It would also lead, inevitably, and perhaps ironically, to an increase in traffic. A bypass would therefore conflict with the residents' feedback in relation to the scale of housing development and (depending on the route selected) the findings of the Liz Lake landscape appraisal.

8.4.1.1.3 The reason for the relatively recent increase in traffic is an obvious result of more housing in the Uttlesford area, leading to more cars on the road. This is exacerbated by the lack of a railway station or a comprehensive bus service in or near Thaxted. There has also been an increase in the size of HGV vehicles allowed to travel on British roads and an increase in the number of overlarge vehicles delivering to supermarkets and to building sites in Thaxted and the surrounding area. This can only get worse with 10,000 houses planned for Little Easton in the draft Local Plan plus 240 for Saffron Walden.

8.4.1.1.4 The M11 and the A120 are motorways/trunk roads specially designed to take vehicles quickly and easily to their destination without going through built up areas. They also provide a much safer and more suitable route for HGVs. The fact that some heavy vehicles prefer to take the route through Thaxted to get to their destination is hard to understand, but the damage they cause to ancient buildings, plus the pollution and the traffic jams are all too plain to see.



8.4.1.1.5 Thaxted has two major pinch points on the B184 through the town. One is at the bottom of Town Street where there is a junction with Park Street and the Tanyard, which has a blind corner. There have been numerous accidents here. The other pinch point is by the corner at The Swan public house opposite the church. This is such a tight bend, driving south on Newbiggen Street, that large vehicles often need to take two manoeuvres to get round it or end up on the wrong side of the road. Sometimes they block the road completely. This corner also forms a junction with Bolford Street and Watling Lane, which makes it even more hazardous. In the recent past, two houses in Newbiggen Street have been partially destroyed by vehicles trying to negotiate this corner.

## **8.4.2 SPEEDING**

8.4.2.1 Several traffic surveys have been carried out in Thaxted in recent years, including a 7 day survey in 2014 (Essex County Council Feasibility Study DC 1792). They show that there is not excessive speeding through the village, though traffic is slowing down by the time it reaches at the flashing 30mph sign rather than the restriction sign on Newbiggen Street . Traffic would be more likely to slow down in the built area of the street if the restriction sign was moved further out. If the restriction sign was moved beyond the junction, it would also make the intersection with Sampford Road safer, which is now much busier because of new housing.

**To improve compliance with the 30mph speed restriction in the built up area of Newbiggen Street and to improve safety at the junction with Sampford Road . The Neighbourhood Plan supports the relocation of the restriction sign beyond Newbiggen Street/Sampford Road Junction. Additionally the 30mph restriction should be extended to include Sampford Road as far as the junction with Burns Way.**

## **8.4.3 20MPH SPEED LIMIT**

8. 4.3.1 Many residents support a 20mph speed restriction for traffic going through Thaxted (82% supported this in the Neighbourhood Plan Questionnaire.) Although this is a tempting option to deal with traffic through built-up areas it is not certain that a blanket 20mph speed restriction would be accepted by the highways authority. There are other problems . 20mph areas come with an excess of signage including large amounts of road paint and other traffic calming measures. This would be seriously detrimental to the heritage value of Thaxted

8. 4.3.2 Recent analysis by the Department for Transport (DfT) in fact, shows that drivers were more likely to break the limit on a 20mph street than any other road. A total of 81% of vehicles in their survey broke the limit on low-speed roads with 15% travelling at 30mph or more. However, it was found that drivers will obey a 20mph limit when they are targeted - outside a school, for example. Lower limits work here because people can see the need for them. A 20mph limit in the vicinity of the Primary School might have the desired effect. A low limit here would obviate the necessity for a flashing 'school' sign, which is intrusive in a medieval Conservation Area. The DfT say that they have made it easier for Council's to introduce 20mph zones.

**The Parish council will therefore request a 20mph speed limit in the vicinity of the school and removal of the flashing electronic signage.**

#### **8.4.4 WEIGHT RESTRICTIONS**

8.4.4.1 95% of residents supported an HGV weight restriction on the road through Thaxted (Neighbourhood Plan Questionnaire). Some roads in Thaxted are too narrow for heavy vehicles, or corners are too tight or large vehicles cannot turn round; for example Watling Lane, Fishmarket Street and Stoney Lane. It is not sufficient to limit a weight restriction to these roads. A blanket weight restriction is necessary for Thaxted if the ancient buildings are to be protected and the quality of life of residents is to be lifted out of the current unacceptable level of air pollution, noise and danger posed by heavy vehicles on roads that were not designed to take such traffic. There are alternative routes for heavy vehicles on the M11 and the A120.

**The Neighbourhood Plan supports measures to lessen the impact of the increased volume of traffic and particularly the high number of HGVs on the ancient buildings and on the health and wellbeing of the residents. The Parish Council will therefore seek a weight restriction on vehicles passing through the village**

#### **8.4.5 PARKING**

8.4.5.1. Thaxted has two public car parks, one in Park Street and one in Margaret Street, the latter having the larger capacity. There is also a limited amount of car parking, limited to one hour, available for shoppers in Town Street. Generally this is thought to be adequate for most of the time (something which is borne out by the responses to the community questionnaire) but parking on Friday mornings when the market is in progress and when, for example, there is a major concert on at the church, parking can be difficult. Some increased capacity would therefore be welcomed.

8.4.5.2. One particular problem is with regard to the parking of commercial vehicles often for long periods of time other than in designated spaces and also people catching the bus to commute to Stansted Airport. For the present therefore it would seem that the availability of parking for short-term shopping or visiting use could be improved by imposing restrictions that would make long term parking more difficult.

**Restrictions are therefore to be imposed on the use of both Park Street car park and Margaret Street car park such that any use by commercial vehicles shall only be between 9.00 am and 4.30 pm. No vehicle, either private or commercial, is to be parked for more than 10 hours with no return within a one hour period. These restrictions are to be signed and enforced by the Parish Council as a part of their management of car parks in the village. There is a long-term objective to provide additional car parking in Thaxted.**

8.4.5.3. The importance of Thaxted relates first and foremost to its heritage, both in a conservation context and in terms of its tourism potential. Stoney Lane is at the heart of the Conservation Area and its adjacency to the Grade I listed Guildhall; its viewing corridor to the church; and the fact that it is the last remaining cobbled street, mean that it represents the principal focal point of the village. Within the last few years parking in Stoney Lane has been restricted to 'Residents Only' which has reduced the amount of vehicles using it but has, at the same time, had the unfortunate consequence of new and unnecessarily large signage to this effect. The Central Area Assessment however has recommended that such an important and historic street should be entirely free of car parking. The community questionnaire indicated a 75% support for the findings of the Central Area Assessment and additionally there was very strong support for the removal of all cars from Stoney Lane at the

public exhibition in August 2017. There was however a strong feeling that double yellow lines would spoil the character of the street scene and if an alternative means of enforcing the No Parking restriction could be found this would be welcomed .

8.4.5.4. A further parking problem exists in Fishmarket Street. Representations have been made by the vicar to the effect that a clear route of access needs to be left for hearses attending the new graveyard. This can easily be achieved by a small area of double yellow lines across the bottom of the route through to Mill Row.

**The Parish Council is to request that Stoney Lane should be designated as a No Parking zone throughout its length and the removal of all current signage. Double yellow lines are to be applied to the top of Fishmarket Street to permit access for hearses to the new graveyard.**

8.4.5.5. The most contentious car parking issue in Thaxted however relates to the parking of cars on the pavement along Newbiggen Street. Newbiggen Street is another historically important thoroughfare in Thaxted whose jumble of medieval cottages potentially offers an outstanding streetscape. It is however blighted by parking along its whole length, some wholly on the pavement and some partially on the road. Such an arrangement was introduced in 2014 as an experiment for two years only, following a study by Essex County Council. This however, has caused problems for both pedestrians and through traffic. In places, particularly where steps extend out from the front door of houses, it is impossible for wheelchairs or child 'buggies' to get through. Some residents of Newbiggen Street have nowhere else to park. Others however, have garages to the rear but some choose not to use them. Views were sought from the community as a part of the questionnaire survey. Three options were suggested – double yellow lines; residents' parking only; or maintaining limited 'on-pavement' parking. The results were as follows :

Residents parking only - 117 'most preferred' votes.

Double yellow lines on both side - 102 'most preferred' votes

Maintain limited parking - 70 'most preferred' votes

'Votes' were also invited for 'mid preference' and 'least preferred'. Whichever way the voting was analysed however, the overall preference was for residents only parking. In terms of comments a number of suggestions were made to the effect that the best solution would be to allow parking down one side of the road only but then impose restrictions to limit the amount of residents' parking permitted. This would seem to be the optimum overall solution. The option of parking restrictions and particularly the removal of parking from the pavement was strongly supported by comments at the public exhibition in August 2017.

**The Parish Council is to request that car parking should be limited to one side of Newbiggen Street only with double yellow lines on the other side. Parking shall be limited to residents of Newbiggen Street only on the basis of one car per household where the property has no garage or off-street parking. The choice of side and location of parking bays shall be determined following consultation with Essex County Council.**

## **8.4.6 FOOTPATHS**

8.4.6.1 Although the Parish of Thaxted is small (4.4 miles East-West and 3.7 miles North-South),

it has 35 miles of Definitive Byways, Bridleways and Footpaths. Some of these are shown as trackways in the Domesday map of Thaxted . The majority have come into being informally through historic use, rather than as a result of legal process, which has made their legal status difficult.

8.4.6.2 In 1949, legislation was passed that required Local Authorities to produce a Definitive Map of all Public Rights of Way in order to give them legal status. Essex County Council produced their map of this area in 1968, which was followed up with a survey of all known paths by the Thaxted Society in 1970. This in-depth study resulted in several long-established paths being added to the map, which were then made official.

8.4.6.3 The majority of paths and bridleways in Thaxted Parish were hard to find, few were used and many were overgrown and impassable. As walking became a more popular country pursuit, Essex County Council introduced a programme to engage the public in each parish to assist with the maintenance and signage of all non-highways and public rights of way. This was known as the Parish Paths Partnership (P3), which has been actively supported by Thaxted volunteers since its inception.

8.4.6.4 Under the P3 scheme, Essex County Council provides materials and specialist equipment from the highways budget. Contractors and some farmers have entered into an agreement with the Council to undertake major tasks, but most of the maintenance work is carried out by local volunteers.

8.4.6.5 Thaxted's P3 has brought back public rights of way to a usable condition and has installed signage along their routes. Essex County Council's initiative with farmers has meant that most cross-field paths are now reinstated and marked after cultivation. This gives walkers confidence that they are not trespassing and keeps them from wandering over growing crops. As a result of this work, almost all public rights of way are now regularly walked and their excellent condition has made them popular with walkers, which is of benefit to the local economy.

8.4.6.6 Recent P3 work along the River Chelmer footpath has included ditch crossings, steps up steep banks and improvements to drainage, as well as improved signage. Thaxted's P3 also organises public guided walks within the parish on most Bank Holidays. All this has encouraged visitors to Thaxted as well as helping to protect the countryside. It is valuable work.

8.4.6.7 Footpaths are a valuable resource and they need to be preserved for both recreational walking and convenience. They are particularly important also however for the access they provide to the countryside and the views that they open up. It is, therefore, important that the land around the footpaths retains its rural and historic setting. In the responses to the community questionnaire 74% thought that the protection and enhancement of footpaths was very important and 21% considered it fairly important. In considering any development careful consideration shall be given to the impact on footpaths specifically in relation to maintaining rural character and views that the footpath provides. Application to close or alter existing footpaths shall be refused unless, and only in exceptional circumstances, it would lead to an improved experience for the walker in terms of environmental quality. Encouragement is given to the creation of additional footpaths.

8.4.6.8 The Neighbourhood Plan supports the work of the Thaxted Parish Paths Partnership in helping to make local footpaths and bridleways more accessible to walkers and people who want to enjoy the countryside. As these public rights of way are an important part of Thaxted's rural history,

their preservation in the face of pressure to build in green field areas is of great significance for future generations.

#### **POLICY IFS4 – Footpaths**

**In any planning application considerable weight shall be given to the effect that development would have on local footpaths. Any new housing should have appropriate footpath access and should not damage the amenity value of existing footpaths.**

### **8.4. PUBLIC TRANSPORT**

8.4.7.1. The nearest railway stations to Thaxted are at Elsenham or Newport, both approximately 6 miles distant. The majority of rail users however prefer to travel to Audley End, Stansted Airport or Bishop's Stortford for the fast train services. Stansted Airport has relatively frequent bus links from Thaxted but otherwise public transport connections involving the railways are not easy and the distances to the principal railway stations inevitably mean that most people will travel there by car.

8.4.7.2. There are direct bus links to Great Dunmow, Saffron Walden and Stansted Airport. There is also a school days only service to Newport. The buses provide a useful service but to a large extent this is only at peak times. No survey has been carried out but observation indicates that buses during the daytime often run empty. In reality people in a remote community like Thaxted will always prefer to get into their car if they have one (indeed this has become a way of life) rather than wait for a bus which has a fixed destination. Nonetheless bus provision does need to be maintained at certain times of the day for those without their own transport or who rely on the bus service to get to work.

### **8.5 PLAY SPACE, RECREATION AND SPORTS FACILITIES**

#### **8.5.1 SPORTS CLUBS**

8.5.1.1 Thaxted does not have an extensive offering of sports clubs. This is really more to do with the size of the village however, rather than an unwillingness to participate. The Bowls Club is the largest group and they have impressive facilities which are well used. Cricket and football (both junior and senior) are also relatively strong and the latter are regular users of the Recreation Ground. There was however no direct participation by them in the Neighbourhood Plan process despite a consultation evening being set up specifically for clubs and societies. It has to be assumed therefore that they are content with their existing facilities and arrangements.

#### **8.5.2 THE RECREATION GROUND**

8.5.2.1 There is considerable affection for the Recreation Ground among the community generally and it is well used for dog-walking, 'kick-around' space and as a children's play area. In the community questionnaire 97% of responses were in favour of protecting it as a recreation area and there is overwhelming support for ensuring its future as public open space.

8.5.2.2. Strong support was also given in the questionnaire responses for continuing to invest in outdoor recreation facilities and at public exhibitions children's play equipment was particularly highlighted. 83% said that Thaxted would benefit from investment in outdoor recreation areas. Investment of course, will depend on the resources and priorities of public authorities (largely the

Parish Council) but it is clear that the Neighbourhood Plan should assist in allowing this to happen by both seeking to preserve the recreation ground in its open state and by permitting improvements to recreational facilities.

#### **POLICY IFS5 -The Recreation Ground:**

**The Recreation Ground shall be preserved and maintained as open space for sports and public recreation. Planning permission for development will be refused except in relation to works associated with the enhancement or replacement of facilities associated with sport or recreation, so long as they are consistent with the open nature of the Ground itself.**

### **8.5.3 OTHER AREAS OF PUBLIC OPEN SPACES**

8.5.3.1 There are other areas of public open space in Thaxted whose significance has already been covered elsewhere. It is however worth noting here that the community questionnaire responses gave support to the work being undertaken by volunteers in the development of the Conservation Garden in Margaret Street. 56% of respondents thought that it was essential that this area of garden be enhanced and preserved. In policy terms the protection of the area is dealt with elsewhere but that policy is also supported by a desire amongst the local community to preserve this and other public garden areas for the purposes of recreation as well as from a heritage perspective.

### **8.5.4 COMMUNITY BUILDINGS**

#### **8.5.4.1 PUBLICLY AVAILABLE HALLS**

8.5.4.1.1 Thaxted has a number of community halls available for public hire as follows:

- Bolford Street Hall
- Church Hall, Margaret Street
- Day Centre
- The Guildhall
- The Recreation Ground Pavilion

Although they all fulfill a purpose and provide adequate space for specific events none of them could be said to provide adequate facilities for all types of function. Respondents to the community questionnaire were asked to state whether they thought each building was appropriate for the activities that were carried out in them – simply ‘yes’ or ‘no’.

8.5.4.1.2 The Bolford Street Hall is the largest public hall and the most generally used. Whilst it is functional it is however, unquestionably, dated and very much of the mid 20th century era. It is not suited therefore to any event of a formal or ‘prestigious’ nature. 185 respondents thought that it was suited to the activities carried on and 45 thought it was unsuited.

8.5.4.1.3 The Church Hall is smaller and even more dated. It is doubtful whether even a major refurbishment would improve its appearance and functionality. It had the highest ranking of unsuitability with 89 respondents saying that it was unsuited to the function that it fulfilled.

8.5.4.1.4 The Day Centre is a modern building with good kitchen facilities. It had the highest suitability rating in the community questionnaire with 208 saying that it was well suited to its purpose and only 3 saying that it was unsuitable. It is however small and its usability is therefore limited.

8.5.4.1.5 The Guildhall is a splendid and historic building well suited to events which relate in some way to Thaxted's heritage or where a sense of historic prestige is required. It is however inconvenient being on several levels without proper disabled access and an awkward arrangement of rooms. It nonetheless received a good suitability rating with 192 indicating that it was suited to its purpose and only 21 saying that it was not.

8.5.4.1.6 The Recreation Ground Pavilion is isolated (although it has car parking) and suited really only to uses associated in some way with sport and outdoor recreation. It received a 177 suitability rating but in reality the scope of its potential is limited.

8.5.4.1.7. In conclusion therefore there is no one community building in Thaxted that can be said to be genuinely multi-purpose. The Bolford Street Hall provides the largest clear space and is probably the most practical. The Guildhall and Day Centre suit very well their specific 'markets' while the Church Hall is probably the most dispensable.

#### **8.5.4.2 THE FUTURE**

8.5.4.2.1 In circumstances where no one building can satisfy the needs of all types of event and the most functional buildings are dated, it is necessary to consider whether, in the long term, better provision can be made for the local community.

8.5.4.2.2. The easiest solution would be to refurbish Bolford Street Hall. This would however still have its limitations in terms of ceiling height, overall dimensions and a dated exterior. The Church Hall would, in that event, be left even further behind in terms of venue popularity. Even if it too was refurbished it would retain its outdated appearance and limited scale. It does however occupy a prominent and exceptionally well located site. It is adjacent to the main public car park in the village and is surrounded by allotments giving it the capacity to expand. If there was an opportunity in the future to re-provide Thaxted's community facilities the obvious solution would be to develop a large, new multi-function hall on the site of the Church Hall and the adjoining allotments. This could also provide an opportunity to expand car parking provision. The scope for such a project will depend on funding and overcoming ownership difficulties but a sale of the Bolford Street Hall site for housing development could contribute significantly to the cost. As far as the Neighbourhood Plan is concerned it can only enable such a scheme in planning terms in the event that financial and ownership issues can be resolved.

#### **POLICY IFS6- Community Hall**

**Support will be given to the re-development of The Church Hall and adjacent allotments for a new community hall and associated car parking provided that the external design respects the location of the site adjacent to the edge of the Conservation Area. Similarly, in the event that such a scheme was developed, support would be given to the redevelopment of the existing Bolford Street Hall for housing providing that the design, density, layout, heights and materials were consistent with the Conservation Area status.**

### **8.5.4.3 OTHER COMMUNITY BUILDINGS**

8.5.4.3.1 Apart from the halls for public hire there are other community buildings in Thaxted, principally the Community Information Centre/Library; the Youth Club; the Disabled Centre; and the various churches. Each of these buildings satisfies the needs of specific interest groups. The Church of St. John the Baptist is however, of considerable importance to the community generally rather than just as a place of worship. It provides the largest space within the village with a capacity to seat well over 400 people. It is well used by the local community and helps to bring prestige and tourism to Thaxted. The Thaxted Festival is a noteworthy annual event. It is important that support be given to the church in every reasonable way.

8.5.4.3.2 The United Reformed church is also a Thaxted landmark and has considerable potential as a community building. It suffers from having a very small congregation who lack the resources and manpower to fully exploit its potential. It is also suffering from deterioration to its fabric and serious structural faults. It is important that this building is preserved and its future may lie in greater community use particularly for staged events (theatre, cinema, opera house, etc) and every encouragement should be given to projects aimed at achieving this end.

### **8.5.5 COMMUNITY GROUPS AND SOCIETIES**

#### **8.5.5.1 ENGAGEMENT**

8.5.5.1.1 Thaxted has many small clubs and societies which add considerably to the sense of community. In the main however, they are self-sufficient and simply meet on a regular basis in one of the community venues. There is little that can be done to assist them and indeed little is needed, other than enthusiasm, to keep them going.

8.5.5.1.2 At an open evening arranged for local clubs and societies however, the local Scout group expressed a concern that they were liable to lose the use of their Scout Hut to a possible re-development of the site which is owned by the Parish Council for affordable housing. At present notice has not been served on them but in order to provide for their future and to give them a degree of certainty, it is necessary to try to provide for their future accommodation needs.

### **8.5.6 BROADBAND AND MOBILE PHONE SIGNAL**

#### **8.5.6.1 BROADBAND**

8.5.6.1.1 Broadband speeds in Thaxted have historically been notoriously slow. Recently however, the Parish Council and Essex County Council have worked with BT Openreach to bring super-fast connections to 80% of Thaxted households. For the remaining 20% however, there is little immediate prospect of achieving further improvement on the existing poor quality service. Responses to the community questionnaire indicate that broadband speed is important particularly in circumstances where the occupants of houses work from home. It is important therefore, that any new housing developed should have adequate speeds.



**POLICY IFS7 – Broadband:**

**New development proposals must demonstrate that they are served by up to date communications infrastructure. At the time of Plan preparation (2017) this would mean the availability of superfast broadband.**

**8.5.6.2 MOBILE PHONE SIGNAL**

8.5.6.2.1 Mobile phone reception in Thaxted is very poor. In many parts of the village there is no signal available at all on a number of the networks. This is a major hindrance to any form of commercial activity and it is essential that improvements are made.

**The Parish Council and other public authorities must lobby the network providers for an improvement in signal quality.**

# APPENDIX I

LIZ LAKE PROFORMA NO. 3 IN RESPECT OF EACH LPLCA

LPLCA No 1

Opportunities for mitigation (e.g. retention and enhancement/reinforcement of existing hedgerows & trees; retention of key views/sight lines)

Suggested landscape planning guidelines (including, if appropriate, where and at what scale could development be appropriately absorbed?):

Refer to section 10.3 of written report: General landscape planning guidelines – applicable to all areas.

Protect pastoral river valley landscape from further fragmentation by resisting inappropriate use and development.

Protect traditional dispersed rural settlement pattern.

Conserve and enhance green rural landscape character of the river valley.

Protect historic field patterns.

Protect pastoral fields, areas of rough and wet meadow pasture and wet deciduous woodlands which occupy the River Chelmer floodplain.

Protect Traditional Orchard area.

Protect historic Watling Lane.

Protect key views and attractive views along the valley.

Suggested land management guidelines (recommendations for enhancement of LPLCA):

Refer to section 10.4 of written report: General land management guidelines – applicable to all areas.

Conserve and enhance the green character of the river valley through appropriate management of wildlife habitats.

Conserve and manage the ecological structure of woodland, orchard, pasture and meadows.

Suggested land management guidelines (recommendations for enhancement of LPLCA):

Refer to section 10.4 of written report: General land management guidelines – applicable to all areas. Conserve and enhance the green character of the river valley through appropriate management of wildlife habitats.

Conserve and manage the ecological structure of woodland, orchard, pasture and meadows.

Conserve Watling Lane.

LPLCA No 2

Opportunities for mitigation (e.g. retention and enhancement/reinforcement of existing hedgerows & trees; retention of key views/sight lines):

Suggested landscape planning guidelines (including, if appropriate, where and at what scale could development be appropriately absorbed?):

Refer to section 10.3 of written report: General landscape planning guidelines – applicable to all areas.

Protect traditional dispersed rural settlement pattern.

Protect undeveloped open rural landscape character.

Protect historic field patterns and remaining hedgerows.

Protect blocks of deciduous woodland.

Protect key iconic far reaching radial/panoramic views of the nucleated settlement of Thaxted, incorporating the Church and windmill.

Suggested land management guidelines (recommendations for enhancement of LPLCA): ☐  
 Refer to section 10.4 of written report: General land management guidelines – applicable to all areas. ☐  
 Conserve and manage the ecological structure of woodland. ☐  
 Conserve and enhance the existing hedgerow pattern, and strengthen through planting with hawthorn where gappy and depleted.

LPLCA No 3

Opportunities for mitigation (e.g. retention and enhancement/reinforcement of existing hedgerows & trees; retention of key views/sight lines):

Suggested landscape planning guidelines (including, if appropriate, where and at what scale could development be appropriately absorbed?): ☐  
 Refer to section 10.3 of written report: General landscape planning guidelines – applicable to all areas. ☐  
 Protect peri-urban settlement pattern and landscape character. ☐  
 Protect historic field patterns. ☐  
 Protect small pastoral fields, paddocks and meadows associated with peripheral farmsteads.

Suggested land management guidelines (recommendations for enhancement of LPLCA): ☐  
 Refer to section 10.4 of written report: General land management guidelines – applicable to all areas. ☐  
 Conserve and enhance the existing hedgerow pattern, and strengthen through planting with hawthorn where gappy and depleted. ☐  
 Conserve and manage the ecological structure of pasture and meadows.

LPLCA No 4

Opportunities for mitigation (e.g. retention and enhancement/reinforcement of existing hedgerows & trees; retention of key views/sight lines):

Suggested landscape planning guidelines (including, if appropriate, where and at what scale could development be appropriately absorbed?): ☐  
 Refer to section 10.3 of written report: General landscape planning guidelines – applicable to all areas. ☐  
 Protect traditional dispersed rural settlement pattern. ☐  
 Protect undeveloped rural landscape character. ☐  
 Protect historic field patterns and existing hedgerows. ☐  
 Protect key iconic views of Thaxted/Church/windmill/United Reformed Church.

Suggested land management guidelines (recommendations for enhancement of LPLCA): ☐  
 Refer to section 10.4 of written report: General land management guidelines – applicable to all

areas. ☒

Conserve and enhance the existing hedgerow pattern, and strengthen through planting with hawthorn where gappy and depleted.

#### LPLCA No 5

Opportunities for mitigation (e.g. retention and enhancement/reinforcement of existing hedgerows & trees; retention of key views/sight lines): ☒

Explore opportunity to develop and improve area around Claypitts Farm.

Suggested landscape planning guidelines (including, if appropriate, where and at what scale could development be appropriately absorbed?): ☒

Refer to section 10.3 of written report: General landscape planning guidelines – applicable to all areas. ☒

Protect peri-urban settlement pattern and landscape character. ☒

Protect historic field patterns. ☒

Protect small pastoral fields associated with peripheral farmsteads. ☒

Enhance landscape condition where poor, e.g. explore opportunity to improve area around Claypitts Farm. ☒

Protect key view to Church.

Suggested land management guidelines (recommendations for enhancement of LPLCA): ☒

Refer to section 10.4 of written report: General land management guidelines – applicable to all areas. ☒

Conserve and enhance the existing hedgerow pattern, and strengthen through planting with hawthorn where gappy and depleted. ☒

Conserve and manage the ecological structure of pasture, grassland and parkland.

#### LPLCA No 6

Opportunities for mitigation (e.g. retention and enhancement/reinforcement of existing hedgerows & trees; retention of key views/sight lines):

Suggested landscape planning guidelines (including, if appropriate, where and at what scale could development be appropriately absorbed?): ☒

Refer to section 10.3 of written report: General landscape planning guidelines – applicable to all areas. ☒

Protect undeveloped open rural landscape character. ☒

Protect key iconic farreaching panoramic views of the nucleated settlement of Thaxted, incorporating the Church and windmill.

Suggested land management guidelines (recommendations for enhancement of LPLCA): ☒

Refer to section 10.4 of written report: General land management guidelines – applicable to all areas. ☒

Conserve and enhance the existing hedgerow pattern, and strengthen through planting with hawthorn where gappy and depleted.

LPLCA No 7
Opportunities for mitigation (e.g. retention and enhancement/reinforcement of existing hedgerows & trees; retention of key views/sight lines):
<p>Suggested landscape planning guidelines (including, if appropriate, where and at what scale could development be appropriately absorbed?):</p> <p>Refer to section 10.3 of written report: General landscape planning guidelines – applicable to all areas.</p> <p>Protect undeveloped open rural landscape character.</p> <p>Protect historic field patterns and remaining hedgerows.</p> <p>Protect key iconic farreaching panoramic views of the nucleated settlement of Thaxted, incorporating the Church and windmill.</p>
<p>Suggested land management guidelines (recommendations for enhancement of LPLCA):</p> <p>Refer to section 10.4 of written report: General land management guidelines – applicable to all areas.</p> <p>Conserve and enhance the existing hedgerow pattern, and strengthen through planting with hawthorn where gappy and depleted.</p>

LPLCA No 8
Opportunities for mitigation (e.g. retention and enhancement/reinforcement of existing hedgerows & trees; retention of key views/sight lines):
<p>Suggested landscape planning guidelines (including, if appropriate, where and at what scale could development be appropriately absorbed?):</p> <p>Refer to section 10.3 of written report: General landscape planning guidelines – applicable to all areas.</p> <p>Protect remaining rural landscape character.</p> <p>Protect historic field patterns and remaining hedgerows.</p> <p>Reinforce boundary planting alongside Copthall Lane to screen views from Copthall Lane to recent residential development.</p>
<p>Suggested land management guidelines (recommendations for enhancement of LPLCA):</p> <p>Refer to section 10.4 of written report: General land management guidelines – applicable to all areas.</p> <p>Conserve and enhance the existing hedgerow pattern, and strengthen through planting with hawthorn where gappy and depleted.</p> <p>Manage reinforced boundary planting alongside Copthall Lane to effectively screen views from Copthall Lane to recent residential development.</p>

LPLCA No 9
Opportunities for mitigation (e.g. retention and enhancement/reinforcement of existing hedgerows & trees; retention of key views/sight lines):
<p>Suggested landscape planning guidelines (including, if appropriate, where and at what scale could development be appropriately absorbed?):</p> <p>Refer to section 10.3 of written report: General landscape planning guidelines – applicable to all areas.</p> <p>Protect undeveloped enclosed rural landscape character.</p> <p>Protect historic field patterns and remaining hedgerows.</p> <p>Protect wet meadow pasture (“Walnut Tree Meadow”).</p> <p>Protect small block of woodland.</p> <p>Protect historic Copthall Lane.</p> <p>Protect key views.</p>
<p>Suggested land management guidelines (recommendations for enhancement of LPLCA):</p> <p>Refer to section 10.4 of written report: General land management guidelines – applicable to all areas.</p> <p>Conserve and enhance the existing hedgerow pattern, and strengthen through planting with hawthorn where gappy and depleted.</p> <p>Conserve and manage the ecological structure of woodland and wet meadow pasture.</p> <p>Conserve and manage the ecological structure of woodland</p> <p>Conserve Copthall Lane.</p>

LPLCA No 10
Opportunities for mitigation (e.g. retention and enhancement/reinforcement of existing hedgerows & trees; retention of key views/sight lines):
<p>Suggested landscape planning guidelines (including, if appropriate, where and at what scale could development be appropriately absorbed?):</p> <p>Refer to section 10.3 of written report: General landscape planning guidelines – applicable to all areas.</p> <p>Protect undeveloped enclosed rural landscape character.</p> <p>Protect historic field patterns and remaining hedgerows.</p>
<p>Suggested land management guidelines (recommendations for enhancement of LPLCA):</p> <p>Refer to section 10.4 of written report: General land management guidelines – applicable to all areas.</p> <p>Conserve and enhance the existing hedgerow pattern, and strengthen through planting with hawthorn where gappy and depleted.</p>

LPLCA No 11

Opportunities for mitigation (e.g. retention and enhancement/reinforcement of existing hedgerows & trees; retention of key views/sight lines):

Suggested landscape planning guidelines (including, if appropriate, where and at what scale could development be appropriately absorbed?):

Refer to section 10.3 of written report: General landscape planning guidelines – applicable to all areas.

Protect remaining undeveloped rural landscape character.

Explore opportunities to soften harsh urban interface, including screening recent developments projecting above the horizon with new native planting.

Protect historic field patterns and existing hedgerows.

Protect remaining key views to Church.

Suggested land management guidelines (recommendations for enhancement of LPLCA):

Refer to section 10.4 of written report: General land management guidelines – applicable to all areas.

Conserve and enhance the existing hedgerow pattern, and strengthen through planting with hawthorn where gappy and depleted.

Known presence of allocated land/approved planning applications: Approved planning application adjacent – refer to Figure 1 Study area.

LPLCA No 12

Opportunities for mitigation (e.g. retention and enhancement/reinforcement of existing hedgerows & trees; retention of key views/sight lines):

Suggested landscape planning guidelines (including, if appropriate, where and at what scale could development be appropriately absorbed?):

Refer to section 10.3 of written report: General landscape planning guidelines – applicable to all areas.

Protect regenerating scrub/woodland character.

Suggested land management guidelines (recommendations for enhancement of LPLCA):

Refer to section 10.4 of written report: General land management guidelines – applicable to all areas.

Conserve and manage the ecological structure of regenerating scrub/woodland. Known presence of allocated land/approved planning applications: Whole LPLCA allocated for education uses or other community uses (taken from emerging Uttlesford Local Plan)– refer to Figure 1 Study area.



LPLCA No 13

Opportunities for mitigation (e.g. retention and enhancement/reinforcement of existing hedgerows & trees; retention of key views/sight lines):

Suggested landscape planning guidelines (including, if appropriate, where and at what scale could development be appropriately absorbed?):

Refer to section 10.3 of written report: General landscape planning guidelines – applicable to all areas.

Protect recreational/community character.

Protect views to Church.

Suggested land management guidelines (recommendations for enhancement of LPLCA):

Refer to section 10.4 of written report: General land management guidelines – applicable to all areas.

Maintain recreational areas to a suitable standard.

LPLCA No 14

Opportunities for mitigation (e.g. retention and enhancement/reinforcement of existing hedgerows & trees; retention of key views/sight lines):

Suggested landscape planning guidelines (including, if appropriate, where and at what scale could development be appropriately absorbed?):

Refer to section 10.3 of written report: General landscape planning guidelines – applicable to all areas.

Protect peri-urban settlement pattern and landscape character.

Protect historic field patterns and remaining hedgerows.

Protect small fields/paddocks associated with peripheral farmstead.

Retain B1051 as northern settlement limit.

Suggested land management guidelines (recommendations for enhancement of LPLCA):

Refer to section 10.4 of written report: General land management guidelines – applicable to all areas.

Conserve and enhance the existing hedgerow pattern, and strengthen through planting with hawthorn where gappy and depleted.

LPLCA No 15

Opportunities for mitigation (e.g. retention and enhancement/reinforcement of existing hedgerows & trees; retention of key views/sight lines):

Suggested landscape planning guidelines (including, if appropriate, where and at what scale could development be appropriately absorbed?): ☐

Refer to section 10.3 of written report: General landscape planning guidelines – applicable to all areas. ☐

Protect undeveloped rural landscape character. ☐

Protect historic field patterns and remaining hedgerows.

Suggested land management guidelines (recommendations for enhancement of LPLCA): ☐

Refer to section 10.4 of written report: General land management guidelines – applicable to all areas. ☐

Conserve and enhance the existing hedgerow pattern, and strengthen through planting with hawthorn where gappy and depleted.

LPLCA No 16

Opportunities for mitigation (e.g. retention and enhancement/reinforcement of existing hedgerows & trees; retention of key views/sight lines):

Suggested landscape planning guidelines (including, if appropriate, where and at what scale could development be appropriately absorbed?): ☐ Refer to section 10.3 of written report:

General landscape planning guidelines – applicable to all areas. ☐

Protect remaining undeveloped rural landscape character. ☐

Protect historic field patterns and remaining hedgerows. ☐

Protect remaining key panoramic views to Church and wider valley landscape.

Suggested land management guidelines (recommendations for enhancement of LPLCA): ☐

Refer to section 10.4 of written report:

General land management guidelines – applicable to all areas. ☐

Conserve and enhance the existing hedgerow pattern, and strengthen through planting with hawthorn where gappy and depleted. Known presence of allocated land/approved planning applications: Approved planning application adjacent – refer to Figure 1 Study area.