

TETSWORTH SUSTAINABILITY OVERVIEW



Evidence Report for Tetsworth Neighbourhood Plan

January 2020

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1. Purpose.

The aim of this overview is to provide a context for the nature and extent of growth which should be included in the Tetsworth Neighbourhood Plan.

2. Content.

The sustainability of a community is a loosely defined attribute. However, it is widely considered to be a composite understanding of a settlement's organic facilities, infrastructure, services and employment opportunities. This will affect its ability to be self-supporting and its capacity for future growth.

This assessment addresses the following strands of a complex sustainability picture:

- Tetsworth's size and status
- Tetsworth's location
- In-village facilities
- Access to public and commercial services
- Infrastructure
- Transport
- Employment

The overview also takes note of the results of SODC's Settlement Assessment published in October 2017 and draws conclusions to be reflected in Tetsworth's Neighbourhood Plan.

3. Tetsworth Size and Status.

Tetsworth is a small village community of approximately 700 residents and around 300 dwellings. Within SODC's hierarchy of settlements, Tetsworth's size places it firmly in its Smaller Villages category. This classification assumes a relatively weak sustainability status and acknowledges general reliance on facilities and services in nearby Market Towns and Larger Villages within the District to satisfy most of residents' needs. It also envisages a very modest rate of growth for such settlements.

4. Tetsworth's Location.

The nucleated village settlement of Tetsworth is situated in the centre of a rural Oxfordshire parish and is surrounded by open countryside. The nearest neighbouring settlements are Milton Common to the west and Postcombe to the east. Both are approximately 3km from the village and are even smaller than Tetsworth. The nearest Larger Villages of Chinnor, Watlington and Wheatley are each approximately 10km away in different directions.

The Market Town of Thame lies almost 8 km to the north of Tetsworth. Further afield, the major centres of commerce and employment at Oxford and High Wycombe lie 25km to the west and east respectively. Aylesbury is about the same distance to the north east.

5. In-Village Facilities.

In common with many Smaller Villages, Tetsworth is not blessed with a wide range of public or commercial facilities. Tetsworth Primary School, St Giles Parish Church, Tetsworth Memorial Hall and Tetsworth Sports and Social Club's premises are the only buildings available for community activities. Additionally, the Village Green supports a range of sports teams and events and hosts the village's PATCH play area and Forest School.

Retail outlets in the village are limited to an 'essentials' store in a room in the back of Tetsworth's one remaining Public House, The Old Red Lion. There is also an estate agent's office and an Antiques Centre and restaurant operated from The Swan, an historic coaching inn.

Tetsworth does not have a post office or banking facility, lacks medical and dental cover and requires children to travel out of the village for secondary education.

6. Access to Public and Commercial Services.

Thame is generally the commercial and retail centre of choice for Tetsworth's residents to satisfy their day-to-day needs. This town of around 12,000 residents supports a comprehensive range of facilities and services. However, the rapid expansion of its housing stock is already placing its existing infrastructure under increasing pressure. The Larger Villages of Chinnor, Watlington and Wheatley are marginally further away and are far more limited in their range of services on offer. Of these, only Wheatley and Chinnor lie on an infrequent bus route from Tetsworth.

The major commercial centres of Oxford, High Wycombe and Aylesbury all offer a comprehensive range of services, retail outlets and employment opportunities. The first two of these are at the opposite ends of Tetsworth's sole bus service. Access to the Larger Villages, Thame and the major conurbations is heavily dependent on the use of private cars.

7. Infrastructure.

The principal road passing through Tetsworth is the A40 which was the major trunk route between Oxford and High Wycombe. However, since 1974, the M40 motorway has passed along the southern edge of the village. Its extension to Birmingham in 1991 has resulted in massively increased traffic volumes and associated noise intrusion. The A40 remains a designated diversion route whenever there are incidents and closures on the adjacent stretch of motorway. This results in barely manageable traffic flows through the village on such occasions.

The road layout in the historic core of the village has remained largely unaltered over the past century or more. Its narrow and winding lanes are barely wide enough to accommodate emergency vehicles and refuse collection lorries. On-street parking of residents' private cars and other business vehicles further impair access.

Outside the village, the A40 is subject to the national 60mph speed limit and classified as a Clearway. Access to the M40 is available at Lewknor (Junction 6), Milton Common (Junction 7 – southbound only) and Oxford/Wheatley Services (Junction 8A). The B4012 road to Thame has a number of sharp bends and is subject to a 50mph speed limit. The minor country road exiting Tetsworth to the south first passes Stoke Talmage on its way towards Chalgrove.

Tetsworth is connected to most of the expected utility services. The electricity supply is supported by SSE Networks. Much of its distribution within the village still relies on overhead cables which are vulnerable to disruption in severe weather.

Thames Water provides the fresh water supply and operates a sewage treatment plant on the north-west edge of the village. There is some doubt over this facility's current capacity to support significant additional housing development in Tetsworth. The village does not have a mains gas supply. As a result, householders must rely on electricity, heating oil, bottled gas or solid fuels to heat their homes. Most of these commodities rely on delivery by road thereby generating varying volumes of atmospheric pollution and generally represent poor sustainability options. A few individual householders have installed solar arrays on their roofs.

In 2015, Tetsworth received its BT Openreach superfast fibre connections to in-village cabinets under the Better Broadband for Oxfordshire programme. While this is delivering sustainability benefits for many village residents and businesses, it is no more than the roll-out of the programme provided to all comparable settlements in the county. Access to mobile phone networks in and around the village is considered adequate with few complaints.

The sole example of premises delivering a publicly funded service in the village is Tetsworth Primary School. It is housed in a Victorian listed building on a severely constrained site. It currently enjoys a good reputation and has a full roll of approximately 60 pupils. Additional accommodation for pre-school and reception classes is planned on an adjacent site under a Section 106 agreement with the developers of the new housing at Mount Hill Farm. However, further expansion of the school in its current location does not appear to be possible.

8. Transport.

The residents of Tetsworth are overwhelmingly dependent on the use of their private cars for everyday activities, whether it is for shopping in Thame or a daily commute to employment outside the village. The 2011 census recorded extraordinarily high car ownership in Tetsworth, with two thirds of households having 2 or more and 10% having 4 or more. Only 10% of pensioner households managed without a car. Until the advent of less polluting alternatives, it seems inevitable that car use in Tetsworth will continue at an unsustainable level and that additional residents will only add to this harm.

The nearby accessibility of the M40 is a further encouragement to even more car usage and greater longer distance commuting from Tetsworth on the national motorway network.

The bus service between Tetsworth and Thame was withdrawn 2 years ago. The taxi fare for this journey is currently quoted as £16-£19. The sole bus route serving the village is the 4-times-per-day, weekdays daytime only Service 275, between Oxford and High Wycombe, with some being routed via Chinnor. Journey times to each end of this route are approximately 40 minutes and the daily service schedule only has a frequency of one bus every 3 hours or so.

The nearest railway station to Tetsworth is 15km away at Haddenham and Thame Parkway beyond Thame. It offers a well-respected frequent service between London Marylebone and Birmingham on the Chiltern Line. However, access to the station depends on either a car or taxi journey from Tetsworth. The current single taxi fare is quoted as £21-£26.

Cycling outside the village is only an option for determined and dedicated adult cyclists. Although the road network through and around Tetsworth is well-patronised by leisure and sporting cyclists particularly on summer weekends, it is not a practical option for shopping trips to Thame or a daily return journey to work. In particular, the speed of traffic on the A40 and B4012 presents a real safety hazard which will deter many adults and one to which children should not be exposed.

Walking from place to place within Tetsworth is clearly a sustainable option and a healthy lifestyle choice. However, venturing outside the village settlement on foot can only be considered as a leisure activity and one enjoyed by many residents walking on the extensive network of local rural footpaths and public rights of way in the attractive countryside.

9. Employment.

Tetsworth residents of working age enjoy near full employment, whether it is in jobs based in the village or requiring commuting journeys to more major centres of employment.

Within the parish, there are just 3 businesses with a significant payroll: the Oxfordshire Golf Club and Spa, the Zioxi office and educational furniture premises and the Swan Antiques Centre. However, the village does support a far greater number of smaller businesses, often operated by self-employed individuals from their own domestic properties. Employment opportunities outside the village offer a far wider choice of work. The higher than average household income and educational attainment of Tetsworth households indicates that many residents choose to follow professional careers with larger employers in the major centres of commercial and employment activity. This trend of high income and house prices would probably be reinforced by significant numbers of new residents being attracted to come and live in Tetsworth. In turn, even higher levels of private car usage for commuting to work would be contrary to embracing sustainability principles.

10. SODC Settlement Assessment 2018.

In 2016, SODC published its first quantified assessment of the sustainability of all of the District's settlements, large and small, and their capacity to accept growth. It revisited the topic in 2017 and published the results of a modified set of criteria: the level of services and facilities on offer in each settlement; the proximity of each settlement to Market Towns and Larger Villages and to employment centres; access to public transport by bus and train. In December 2018, it made further changes to its scoring scheme. The benchmark score for Smaller Villages was in the range of 19 to 70 within an explicit weighted scoring scheme.

Tetsworth achieved an overall score of just 38, all of which were awarded for facilities. This placed Tetsworth village below the mid-point of the range for Smaller Villages.

11. Sustainability Influence on Tetsworth Neighbourhood Plan.

Both the external assessment of sustainability by SODC and the more detailed local evidence presented in this paper clearly demonstrate the weak sustainability status of Tetsworth.

Moreover, sustainability evidence presented by villagers at a major housing development appeal hearing earlier in 2018 was recognised in the appeal's dismissal.

The conclusion is that Tetsworth can only accept very modest trickle growth of housing and population over the forward planning period. Improved access to the Internet might also encourage the creation of more small businesses and working from home in the village and reduce its reliance on employment elsewhere. However, perhaps the greatest attraction of living in Tetsworth is that residents like it, despite or even because of its poor sustainability. They are willing to embrace change, but only at a gradual and measured pace.