

# TETSWORTH PARISH CHARACTER ASSESSMENT (Part 1)



Evidence Report for Tetsworth Neighbourhood Plan  
January 2025



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## Executive Summary

The purpose of this Settlement and Landscape Character Assessment of the Parish of Tetsworth is to establish a firm evidence base to support the preparation of the Tetsworth Neighbourhood Plan and underpin the policies within it.

The report traces the evolution of the Tetsworth settlement from its earliest days, documents the key features of the village as it is today and describes its surrounding countryside. It also paints a more detailed picture of the character of six distinct areas which make up the village settlement and the five surrounding countryside sectors which are largely defined by the roads passing through the Parish.

The Tetsworth settlement was established at a historically important crossroads in the centre of a rural parish and remains its sole settlement, well separated from neighbouring villages. The Parish lies outside the Oxford Green Belt but is situated in open countryside with the Chiltern Hills AONB as a nearby eastern backdrop. Today's settlement footprint still reflects a clustering of development around the road junction, and it is the historic core of the village with its network of narrow lanes and cobbled footpaths, cluster of listed buildings and eclectic mix of individual housing designs which help to define much of what is special about Tetsworth and its setting. The Village Green is also a much-appreciated green feature and amenity at the heart of the community. The sympathetic integration of the new with the old in the ribbon developments along the A40 at both ends of the built-up area make a significant contribution to the attractive approaches to the village. Tetsworth has also expanded by periodic development of major housing estates incorporating both market and affordable housing. The 45 dwellings comprising Swan Gardens and Cygnet Close was completed in the mid-1990s. It has its own characteristic of executive housing built to pattern-book designs more usually seen in suburban settings almost anywhere across the country. The most recent major housing development of 39 dwellings at Blackthorn Rise was completed in 2020 with a similar mix of size, styles and tenure

Tetsworth is a community of around 340 dwellings with a population of approximately 850 and its size dictates that it can only expect to sustain a core of village facilities and services such as its primary school, church, village hall, public house and sports facilities. Residents appear to be comfortable with this low level of sustainability as an acceptable balance for living in a small and attractive rural settlement. The unusually high car ownership across all Tetsworth households reflects the need to commute to employment locations or travel to the nearby market town of Thame or further afield for virtually all retail or commercial needs and public services. The A40 running through the village and the parallel M40 skirting its southern edge also shape the character of Tetsworth and contribute to its reliance on commuting elsewhere in private vehicles. The motorway is responsible for the adverse impact of continuous noise and pollution which affects the village, but it also provides ready access to the national trunk network and routes to employment locations.

The village is set on a small hillside and the historic features of hedgerows, rights of way, streams and roads define the separation between the settlement and the open countryside. Attractive inward views of the village from key viewpoints in the surrounding countryside highlight features such as the listed church steeple and school building, and the village green as well as capturing the compact composition of the whole village nestled in its countryside setting. Similarly, outward views from the edges of the village provide attractive vistas of undeveloped greenness. The countryside sectors surrounding the village have largely preserved the long-established pattern of smaller fields surrounded by mature hedgerows and a continuing commitment to their agricultural use. Where development has taken place outside the village, such as the Oxfordshire Golf Club and Attington equestrian centre, the sense of green openness has been maintained and land use limited to leisure activities. However, the recent implementation of the large-scale Harlesford Solar Farm to the south of the M40 has had dramatic impact on the rural landscape to the west of the Stoke Talmage road. The rich network of footpaths, byways and rights of way extending from the village into the countryside are also a much-appreciated rural amenity for villagers and visitors alike.

In summary, Tetsworth is the sole village settlement in the Parish, is well-separated from adjacent settlements beyond its surrounding countryside, but enjoys only limited local services and facilities. Nevertheless, it has a strong social identity with key facilities such as its school, church, pub, hall and sports and social amenities all knitting it together as a thriving community. The incorporation of smaller infill developments into the village has been more successful than larger estate developments in delivering an attractive mix of property types, sizes and designs which promote social integration. The continuing retention of Tetsworth's rural hinterland to agricultural or leisure uses has been crucial to its attractive and much-appreciated village setting.

## Introduction

This Assessment of the Character of Tetsworth Parish has been prepared to guide and support the policies included in the Tetsworth Neighbourhood Plan. In short, it provides the evidence of 'what makes Tetsworth special' and will be used to inform future land use and the nature, extent and location of developments in the Parish over the planning period from 2021 to 2041.

The report describes the historic development of Tetsworth, the nature of the built environment and infrastructure within defined and distinctive areas of the village settlement, the overall topography of the Parish and the character and use of sectors of the surrounding countryside.

The assessment of each settlement character area and countryside sector is concluded by the following set of value judgements and susceptibility to development harms:

**Historical Value:** the extent to which the historic buildings, settlement pattern and spaces characterise an area and give it special significance linking the past with the present.

**Aesthetic Value:** the extent to which an area and its setting have a certain atmosphere making it an attractive place to live and spend time at work and leisure.

**Architectural Interest:** the extent to which the design, materials and variety of housing in an area stimulate an attractive architectural impression.

**Community Value:** the extent to which community facilities and informal amenities in an area and its setting contribute to the well-being of residents and sense of belonging to a thriving and inclusive society.

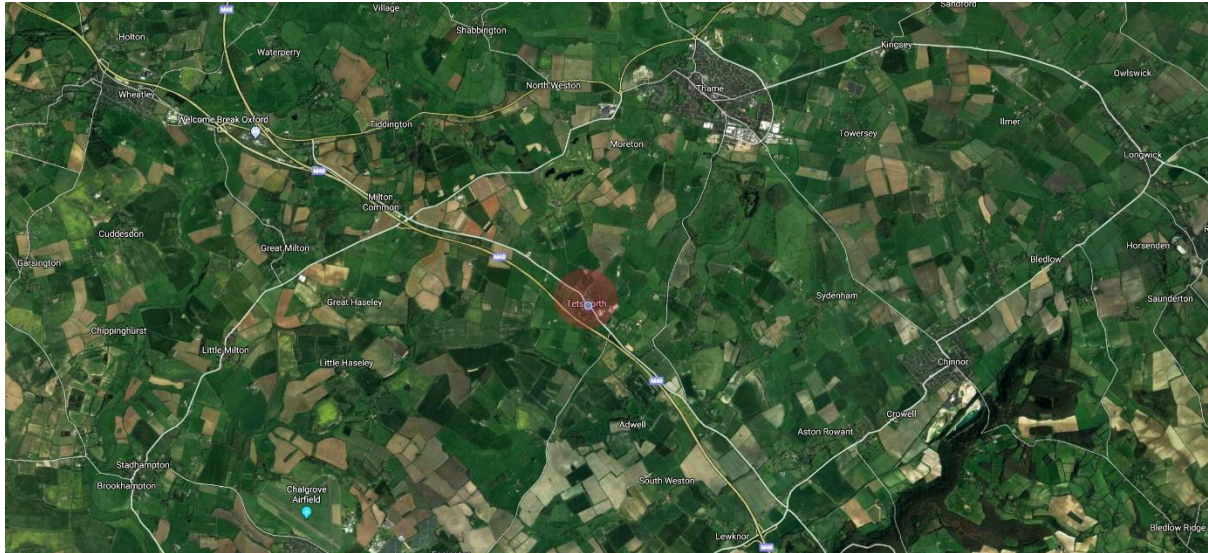
**Susceptibility to Development Harm:** the scope for future development within an area which would not result in undue negative consequences.

These judgements provide a collective summary of each area and may not highlight the value of individual streets, buildings or places within that area.



## Overview of the Tetsworth Neighbourhood Area

The Tetsworth Neighbourhood Area has been defined as all of the land which lies within the Tetsworth Parish boundary. Tetsworth is located about 5 km south of the market town of Thame and 20 km east of the centre of the city of Oxford.



*Aerial View of Tetsworth Parish Area*

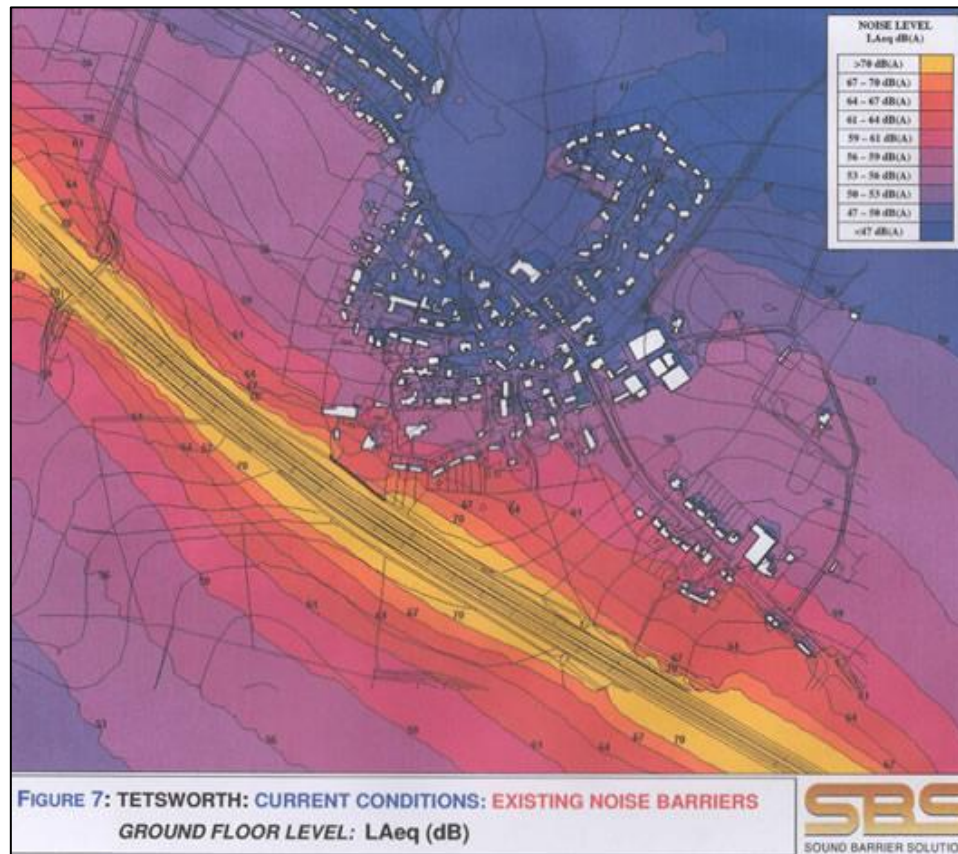
It lies about 4 km west of the scarp edge of the Chiltern Hills, a nearby AONB. It is also about 5 km east of the western boundary of the Oxford Green Belt.

The Tetsworth Parish area has a broadly circular shape of approximately 3 km diameter.



*Tetsworth Parish and Neighbourhood Area*

The village settlement lies slightly south of the centre of the Parish and, since 1974, is bordered on its south-western edge by the M40 motorway. In 1991, the motorway was extended to provide an alternative, fast route between London and Birmingham. Ever since, traffic noise from the motorway has been a constant irritant to virtually all Tetsworth residents, diminishing the overall attractiveness of living in the village. Resurfacing of the motorway with 'quiet asphalt' has done little to mitigate this problem for villagers.



*Tetsworth Noise Mapping*

The parallel A40 road continues to be the principal transport access through the village, but a well-used network of footpaths and bridleways radiating from the village is an important means of amenity access into the green space which surrounds Tetsworth and extends into adjoining parishes in every direction.





*Footpath and Bridleway Focus around Tetsworth Settlement*

Today, Tetsworth comprises approximately 350 dwellings with a population of around 850. The overwhelming majority of households are clustered in the nucleated village settlement, with just a few residents occupying outlying, isolated dwellings largely dedicated to farming activities.

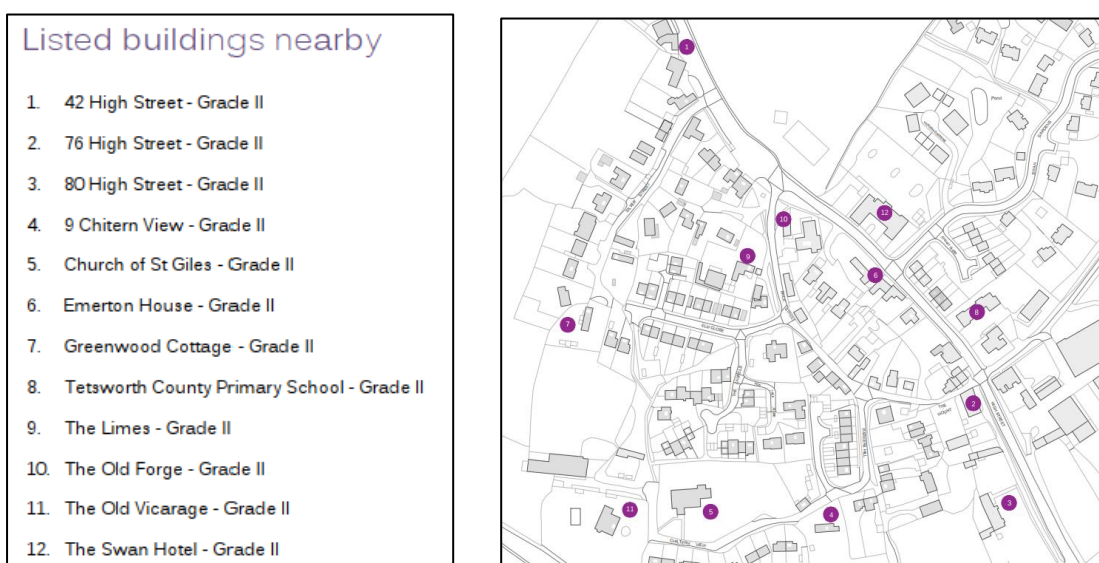


*Current Tetsworth Settlement Footprint*



*Aerial View of Tetsworth Village Settlement*

The 2021 census records that nearly half of the local housing stock is detached houses or bungalows, approximately a third is semi-detached dwellings with the remainder split between terraced homes and flats/apartments. Tetsworth's housing stock is dominated by dwellings with 3 or more bedrooms. At the time of the census, around three-quarters of households lived in privately-owned properties while the remainder relied on the social or private rental sector. Responses to the 2017 Neighbourhood Plan Questionnaire suggest that owner occupation is now approaching 85%. Once established in Tetsworth, families tend to stay here for a long time, approximately 60% having been residents for more than 10 years. Although it does not have a conservation area, Tetsworth's heritage includes 15 listed buildings, 12 of which are situated in the historic core of the village.



*Tetsworth Settlement Listed Buildings Locations*

Above average car ownership, at 2 cars per household, is a reflection of the paucity of public transport services and local employment opportunities as well as ready access to a well-developed road network connecting with more active centres of business and employment. The village is served by two infrequent bus services. Route 275 operates just 4 daytime journeys on weekdays only between Oxford and High Wycombe. Route 127 reinstated a service between Watlington and Thame operating a single return journey on Tuesdays and Thursdays only. Local unemployment is low, but the proportion of self-employed residents amongst the economically active is much higher than District and National levels. Significant local business ventures include the Oxfordshire Golf Club, Hotel & Spa, the Zioxi educational furniture plant, the Swan Antiques Centre and a number of neighbouring equestrian and agricultural enterprises. A proportion of residents also operate a range of generally home-based professional service businesses. However, most of those in employment commute out of the village to work.

Although at one time relatively self-sufficient with a butcher, a bakery, a post office, a garage and other retail outlets, Tetsworth no longer enjoys the presence of such beneficial village services. However, it does continue to support those traditional centres of a village community – its church, primary school, village hall, sports pitches on the village green, village pub and restaurant. The small number of village facilities and poor public transport provision are reflected in Tetsworth lying below the median score of the District Council's consideration of these attributes for smaller villages in its Settlement Assessment published in 2018.

The Parish lies in a distinctive and attractive rural agricultural setting which is important to the overwhelming majority of residents, based on the response in the NP questionnaire. Historically, the village is built on a hill with the church steeple at its highest point being a visible landmark from many miles away in most directions. The land also rises towards the north of the Parish with the Oxfordshire Golf Club buildings located at its highest point. Although without formal landscape protection, the countryside within the Parish has previously been described by planning inspectors as having landscape value in its own right. As northbound traffic descends through the M40 cutting through the Chilterns scarp slope, motorists enjoy the vista of the Oxford plain with the open countryside surrounding Tetsworth at the centre of this important, distant panoramic view.

Tetsworth has many public amenity spaces within the village including the Village Green, Jitty, Pound, War Memorial setting and allotments, as well as an extensive network of bridleways, rights of way and paths which radiate through the village into the surrounding open countryside. Tetsworth Common adjoins the north-west edge of the settlement and is adjacent to the Oxfordshire Way long-distance national footpath.

The village is served by most of the expected utility services but has no mains gas supply despite two buried national gas mains crossing the western area of the Parish. Mobile telephone reception is judged to be satisfactory by most residents and fibre-enabled superfast broadband reached the village in 2016. Tetsworth maintains a 'no street lighting' policy.



## Historic Development of Tetsworth

The name Tetsworth has Anglo Saxon origins. It is believed to be made up of a person's name, 'Taetel', and the common Anglo Saxon place name ending 'worth' meaning an enclosure or homestead. It certainly existed as a settled community at the time of the Domesday Book, although it was not mentioned in it. Its Saxon church was rebuilt in the 12<sup>th</sup> century and was progressively modified until it was replaced by the current St Giles church in the Victorian period. Tetsworth's position at the crossroads of the main London-Oxford route and a north-south roadway from Thame to Wallingford. This route, now known as Judd's Lane and reduced to an access bridleway, was recognised in Gough's 14<sup>th</sup> century map of England and identified the village as Worth. However, close scrutiny of the map under ultra violet light reveals the 'Tets' part of the place name.

Alongside the church, the roads were significant in Tetsworth's development from a small hamlet. Until the late 16<sup>th</sup> century, the land comprising Tetsworth was controlled by either the church or crown in turn.



*Gough's 14<sup>th</sup> Century Map Showing 'Tets' Worth*

The village's growth and prosperity has historically been heavily dependent on agricultural employment, although it achieved some prominence as an important staging post during the golden age of coach travel. Indeed, some of the market gardening then prominent in the area supported transiting travellers, and its location at the junction of important roadways gave it a natural focus for trading activities.

There was a great deal of poverty in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, but comparative wealth led to population growth to more than 500 by 1851. It was around this period that the Reverend

John Peers endowed and oversaw the rebuilding of St Giles' parish church, built an imposing vicarage, established a village school and introduced a network of cobble footpaths throughout the village. His legacy is still with us today and defines much of Tetsworth's unique character.



*The Swan Inn and High Street in 1907*

By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the street pattern of the village had been firmly established and remained unaltered until post-WWII development schemes added new estates.



*The Tetsworth Village Settlement in 1897*



In part due to the spread of railways elsewhere and fewer agricultural or other local employment opportunities, the 1931 census recorded fewer than 300 Tetsworth residents and only about 100 households. The pattern of post-WWII expansion of Tetsworth's housing stock has largely been achieved through significant growth north of the High Street, additional housing in the village core and some infilling along the High Street at both ends of the village. The most recent of the major housing developments were the 44 dwelling Swan Gardens/Cygnets Close estate completed in the mid-1990s and the 39 dwelling Blackthorn Rise estate fully occupied in 2020. Both provided a proportion of affordable homes. The latter development has contributed to the annual growth of Tetsworth being more than 2% per annum in the decade to the 2021 census.