

TETSWORTH SUSTAINABILITY OVERVIEW



Evidence Report for Tetsworth Neighbourhood Plan

April 2025

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1. Purpose.

This overview documents how well the everyday needs of people living in Tetsworth are met, and thus indicates the 'Sustainability' of the Village as a community. This provides 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 loosely defined. However, it is widely considered to be a composite understanding of a settlement's organic facilities, infrastructure, services and employment opportunities. This affects the community's ability to be self-supporting and its capacity for future growth.

SODC and VoWH have developed a unified 'Draft Settlement Assessment Methodology' including a staged approach to the assessment and description of the criteria for 'scoring' the settlement, which was published in May 2022. This Sustainability Overview is aligned to the criteria used by SODC and VoWH and, where applicable, provides an indicative score for each criterion, though it will not be possible to benchmark the scores until SODC/VoWH have completed their assessments in 2025/6.

This overview therefore addresses the following strands of a complex sustainability picture:

- Settlement Category
- Location and Infrastructure
- Services and Facilities
 - Education
 - Healthcare
 - Shops
 - Hospitality
 - Financial Services
 - Community Services
 - Outside Facilities
- Proximity to Key Employment Sites
- Public Transport
- Proximity to Tier 1 and other Major Settlements
- Broadband Coverage

3. Settlement Category.

Tetsworth is a small village community of approximately 850 residents and around 340 dwellings and is thus firmly in Category 4, previously defined as a Smaller Villages. 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. Location and Infrastructure

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.

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.

5. Services and Facilities

Education: The only school within the village is Tetsworth Primary School which is housed in a Victorian listed building on a severely constrained site. It currently enjoys a good reputation having been as 'Good' by the Ofsted inspection in 2023, but 'Required Improvement' in its 2024 report. Its Nursery and Primary sections admit pupils from the age of 3 to 11. The Primary capacity is 56 pupils and is fully subscribed. 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 estate at Blackthorn Rise which was completed in 2020. However, further expansion of the school in its current location does not appear to be possible. Children must travel out of the village for secondary education.

Score = 2

Healthcare: There are no Doctors, Dentists or other medical facilities in the Village

Score = 0

Shops: 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 the Swan Antiques Centre but these do not serve the daily needs of the Village.

Score = 1

Hospitality: Tetsworth has one Public House, The Old Red Lion'. A Bar/Restaurant in the Swan Antiques Centre has been subject to intermittent periods of opening and closure and has not had a tenant for more than a year.

Score = 4

Financial Services: Tetsworth does not have a post office, banking facility, or ATM. The threadbare service of a mobile post office operating at the Memorial Hall for one hour per week was withdrawn in August 2024.

Score = 0

Community Facilities: Tetsworth has a thriving Sports and Social Club that supports a range of sports teams and provides a bar and social events. Tetsworth Memorial Hall is available for hire and hosts a number of events. St Giles Church has a small but dedicated congregation.

Score 3

Outdoor Facilities: The Village Green supports a range of sports teams linked to the Sports and Social Club and hosts the village's PATCH play area and Forest School.

Score 2

6. Proximity to Key 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, to a lesser extent, the Swan Antiques Centre though most of the staff in these businesses live outside the village. The village does support a greater number of smaller businesses, often operated by self-employed individuals from their own domestic properties. In line with post-pandemic trends, nearly half of those in full or part-time employment were working mainly at or from home in 2021. However, full-time or hybrid commuting has subsequently returned towards previous patterns.. There are very few key employment sites that can easily be reached by walking, cycling or public transport and the overwhelming majority working outside the village commute in excess of 10km by car.

Score = 2

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.

7. Private and Public 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 2021 census recorded extraordinarily high car ownership in Tetsworth, with two thirds of households having two or more and 20% having 3 or more. Fewer than 5% of households managed without a car. Until the advent of less polluting alternatives, it seems inevitable that car ownership in Tetsworth will continue at a high level and that additional residents will only add to private car usage with the associated environmental impact.

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 main bus route serving the village is the 3-times-per-day, weekdays daytime only Service 275 between Oxford and Chinnor via Tetsworth. A single early morning weekday service runs from High Wycombe to Oxford returning to High Wycombe at the end of the working day. Journey times to Oxford or High Wycombe are approximately 40 minutes.

Introduced in 2024, Service 117 between Watlington and Thame calling at Tetsworth operates a single return journey on Tuesdays and Thursdays only allowing users a little more than 2 hours in Thame. However, its continuation is already under scrutiny. The taxi fare for this journey is currently quoted as £20-£23.

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. Parking is currently £8.50 per day and the single taxi fare is quoted as £24-£28.

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.

Score = 1

8. Proximity to Tier 1 and other Major Settlements

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 13,000 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 principal bus service. Access to the Larger Villages, Thame and the major conurbations is heavily dependent on the use of private cars.

Score = 0

9. Broadband and other Utilities

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. There is limited availability of Ultrafast Broadband to the village (25%) which seems to be restricted to the centre of the village only.

Score = 1

Access to mobile phone networks is considered adequate though tending to be poor at the edge of the village.

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. During 2024, the sewage treatment works spilled overflow into Latchford Brook on 30 occasions for a total of almost 300 hours. 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. A few individual householders have installed solar arrays on their roofs.

10. SODC Settlement Assessment 2025. 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.