

7. Thaxted Area Strategy



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Introduction

- 7.1 Thaxted is situated within the eastern extent of the district and is unique in that, unlike all other Key Settlements and Local Rural Centres, it does not lie along either the M11 or A120 corridors. Instead, Thaxted's location, scale, and extent of facilities serves to support the comparatively rural surrounding settlements. It is proposed that a modest amount of growth is delivered within Thaxted across the Local Plan period, to ensure that the vitality of the settlement and local community it supports is maintained, whilst also contributing to some infrastructure improvements.
- 7.2 Thaxted has an historic core with a high concentration of listed buildings, owing to its medieval origins. Located on rising ground in the east of the district, the settlement is centred around the Grade I listed Church of St John the Baptist, the Guildhall and Clarence House. The Grade II* listed Thaxted Windmill is also an important landmark. More recently, 20th and 21st century developments have increased the size of Thaxted to the north and east.
- 7.3 The heritage value and design quality of Thaxted's built environment is well established, with a Conservation Area covering much of the western side of the settlement, where there is the highest concentration of listed buildings. It is therefore essential that the Council protects and, where possible, enhances these qualities when planning any development at Thaxted. The settlement edge of Thaxted is broadly divided into two parcels; gently undulating arable fields to the east of Thaxted, and steeper valley sides of the River Chelmer to the north and west of Thaxted.
- 7.4 Within the settlement itself, the B184 acts as the main linear through route, as well as the high street which hosts several retail stores, food and drink outlets, a pharmacy, library, and accommodates a weekly market. Along this key movement corridor, residences are situated at an increased density resulting from the prevalence of terraced housing.
- 7.5 Moreover, along the B184 and situated at the top of a hill, the church acts as a backdrop to what is a distinctive street scene. Varied rooflines and local vernacular give the centre of Thaxted an historic and attractive character. As the road continues up the hill to the church, the built form follows the curve which creates a sense of arrival to the church and the surrounding space.
- 7.6 Beyond the centre, the B184 connects Thaxted with Saffron Walden approximately 8km to the north-west and with Great Dunmow approximately 9km to the south. An hourly bus service links these three settlements between Mon-Sat, with a further hourly bus service running through Thaxted via Debden between Saffron Walden and Stansted Airport on Mon-Sat.
- 7.7 It is important that future development within Thaxted is brought forward in a sustainable, attractive manner, and in accordance with other relevant policies held within the Local Plan. Modest development over the plan period can help to maintain the viability of the local bus services, provide a boost to local business, retailers and employers, provide some affordable housing within the settlement and make a contribution to improving services and facilities available. More specifically, development within Thaxted must respond to the existing high-quality architecture within the historic core of the village, so as to preserve the exemplary nature of

Thaxted's built environment. Where development would relate to or impact the setting or views of any designated heritage assets, it will need to be demonstrated that the conservation setting of these assets was integral to the formulation of any proposal, so that the social, cultural, economic and environmental benefits of these assets can continue to be enjoyed by existing and future residents. For these reasons, no development is proposed to the south, west or north of the settlement, with high-quality and sensitive development proposed only to the east.

- 7.8 Beyond the management of local constraints, development should seek to maximise opportunities to provide enhancements to existing infrastructure, whilst ensuring new residences are properly integrated with the existing active travel and green infrastructure networks.
- 7.9 Following the delivery of the proposed allocations, Thaxted will continue to be a thriving Rural Centre providing an important service centre role for the surrounding rural catchment. Its historic character and attractive landscape setting will have been maintained. New development will have been successfully integrated with the settlement and will have been provided alongside additional education provision, improving the self-sufficiency of Thaxted. Meanwhile, new residents will help to sustain the services and social life of the existing community.

How the Thaxted Area Will Change by 2041:

- 7.10 By 2041, the following deliverables are sought for within Thaxted:
- the provision of a new 1 F/E primary school on a site sufficient to allow for the expansion to a 2 F/E school subject to future demand
 - the provision of around 489 new dwellings on two proposed strategic development sites in the east of the settlement, including around 171 affordable dwellings
 - to provide active travel linkages between the proposed development sites and the existing settlement facilities
 - new convenient pedestrian connections between the existing settlement and the Public Rights of Way network to the east of the village
 - new green infrastructure to support attractive urban environments, public amenity space, and enhancements to biodiversity
 - transport improvements including the increased frequency and quality of bus services
 - development which achieves high quality urban design and protects the historic nature of the settlement, and
 - greater footfall within Thaxted's high street, resulting in a more attractive and viable retail environment.
- 7.11 Given the importance of the historic environment in Thaxted and topographical challenges which would constrain development to the south, west and north of the settlement, the proposed strategy is to only support modest development at Thaxted to the east of the settlement. In doing so the proposed strategy minimises the potential for harm to the valued historic and landscape setting of the town, as development adjoins the more contemporary settlement edge. Moreover, by allocating land to the east of the settlement, the proposed primary school which would benefit not only new residents, but also the existing communities.

Housing

- 7.12 To deliver the homes and supporting infrastructure outlined above, the Local Plan identifies two proposed allocations to the east of Thaxted. The location and extent of these allocations can be viewed within Figures 7.1 and 7.2 with further details set out in Core Policy 16: Thaxted Area Strategy. Development proposals in these locations that accord with the Core Policies set out in this plan, including the site-specific requirements in Appendix 4, will be supported in principle.
- 7.13 Both allocations within Thaxted are located towards the less constrained eastern extent of the Rural Centre. The more contemporary nature of development along this eastern edge ensures that new residential development will minimise its impact upon the sensitive historic designations within the settlement. Moreover, whilst the topography rises to the east of the village, the change in levels is more limited than that to the west of the village towards the River Chelmer. This change in topography within and surrounding the allocations ensures that key views towards the village centre and the Grade I listed church spire form an integral part of future development proposal, and this is reflected within the policy requirements for any future planning application (these are set out in Appendix 4).
- 7.14 With regards to opportunities, the selected sites allow for the delivery a new primary school within the northern half of the settlement, ensuring both new and existing residents across the village are situated within walking distance to education facilities. Furthermore, these sites provide opportunities to link new homes in with the existing transport network, with an emphasis on prioritising high quality and convenient routes towards the centre of Thaxted, such as along Copthall Lane and The Mead.
- 7.15 The policy requirements (Appendix 4) ensure that a comprehensive masterplanning approach is taken, whereby new development is not delivered piecemeal but as part of cohesive approach. Planning applications will be required to ensure that new development delivers appropriate linkages between the allocations and the existing settlement, well-connected green infrastructure, and high quality public open spaces that benefit all Thaxted residents.
- 7.16 The Site Selection Methodology Topic Paper provides a detailed explanation for how the proposed allocations have been selected⁴⁴.

Economy

- 7.17 Thaxted functions as an important Local Rural Centre for the surrounding rural catchment and provides a range of local convenience retailers, places to eat and drink and community facilities, along with a range of small businesses and employers.
- 7.18 Whilst, there are no proposals for expanding any designated employment sites in Thaxted, it is important the existing local businesses, retailers and employers are supported to ensure the community remains viable for the long-term and to reduce the risk of the vitality of the centre gradually reducing with the resulting increased for reliance on other settlements such as Saffron Walden and Great Dunmow.

44 UDC, Site Selection Topic Paper, 2023. Available at: <https://www.utlesford.gov.uk/article/4924/Local-Plan-evidence-and-background-studies>

Thaxted Area Strategy

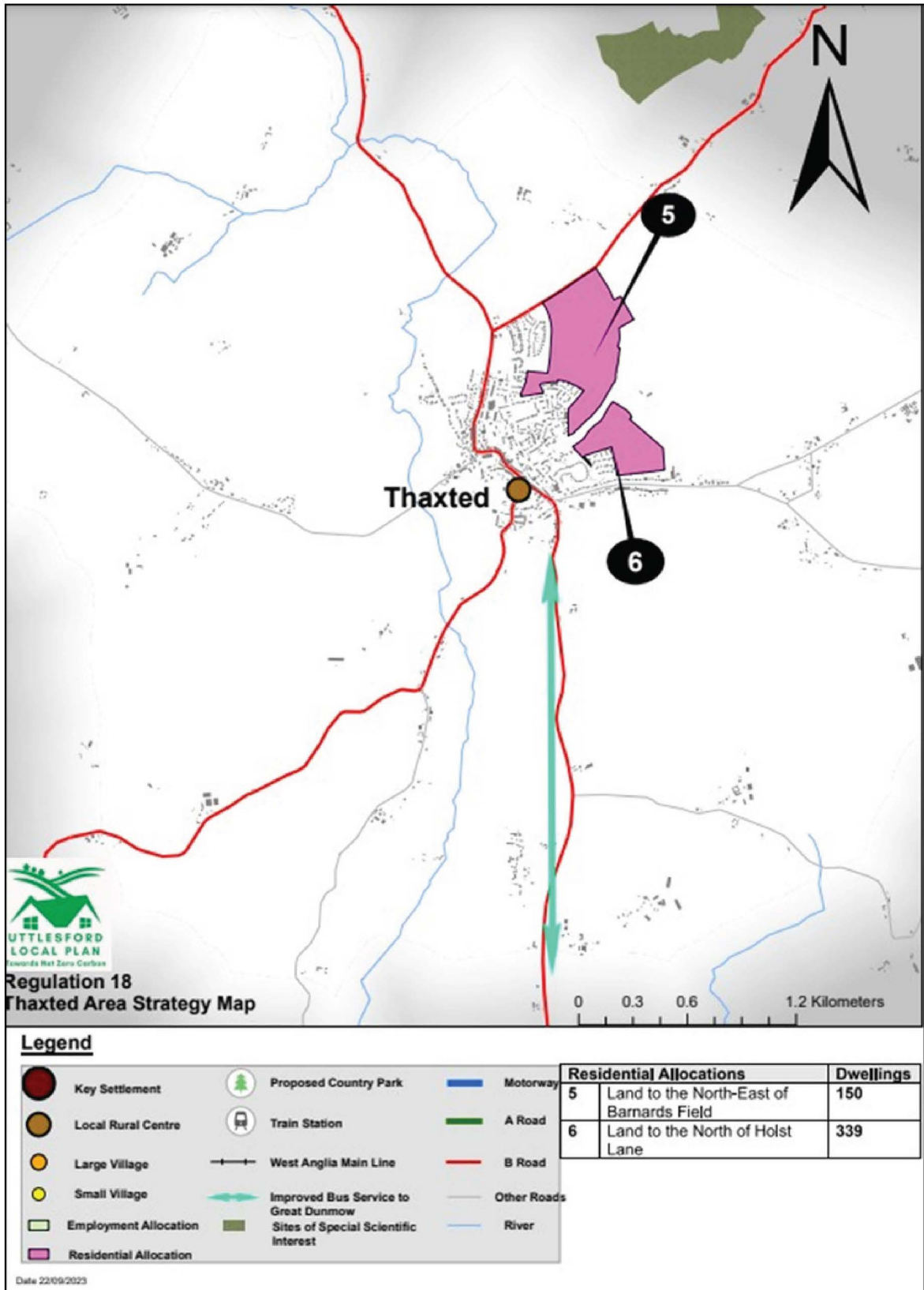


Figure 7.1: Thaxted Area Strategy Map

Core Policy 16: Thaxted Area Strategy

Our overarching priority for Thaxted is to protect its service centre role and deliver a balance of housing and education facilities, improving the self-sufficiency of the area, protecting the vitality and viability of the settlement and its surrounding rural communities, and maximising opportunities for sustainable travel choices.

Development in the Thaxted Area should be in accordance with the Settlement Hierarchy set out in **Core Policy 3**.

Housing Delivery

Around 489 dwellings will be delivered through strategic allocations. Non-strategic allocations may also be delivered through this Plan or through Neighbourhood Development Plans.

Development will be supported at the strategic site allocations where development meets the requirements set out within the Site Development Templates (Appendix 4) and are in accordance with the Development Plan taken as a whole. The following table shows how the level of planned housing within the Thaxted Area through strategic development sites will be distributed:

Table 7.1. Thaxted Area Strategy Allocations

| Settlement/ Parish | Site Name | Number of Dwellings |
|--------------------|--|---------------------|
| Thaxted | Land to the North-East of Barnards Field | 150 |
| Thaxted | Land to the North of Holst Lane | 339 |
| Total | | 489 |

Employment

Existing employment will be protected in accordance with **Core Policy 45: Protection of Existing Employment Space**. The additional housing development will help to improve the vitality and viability of local businesses and employers.

Proposed Strategic Allocations at Thaxted

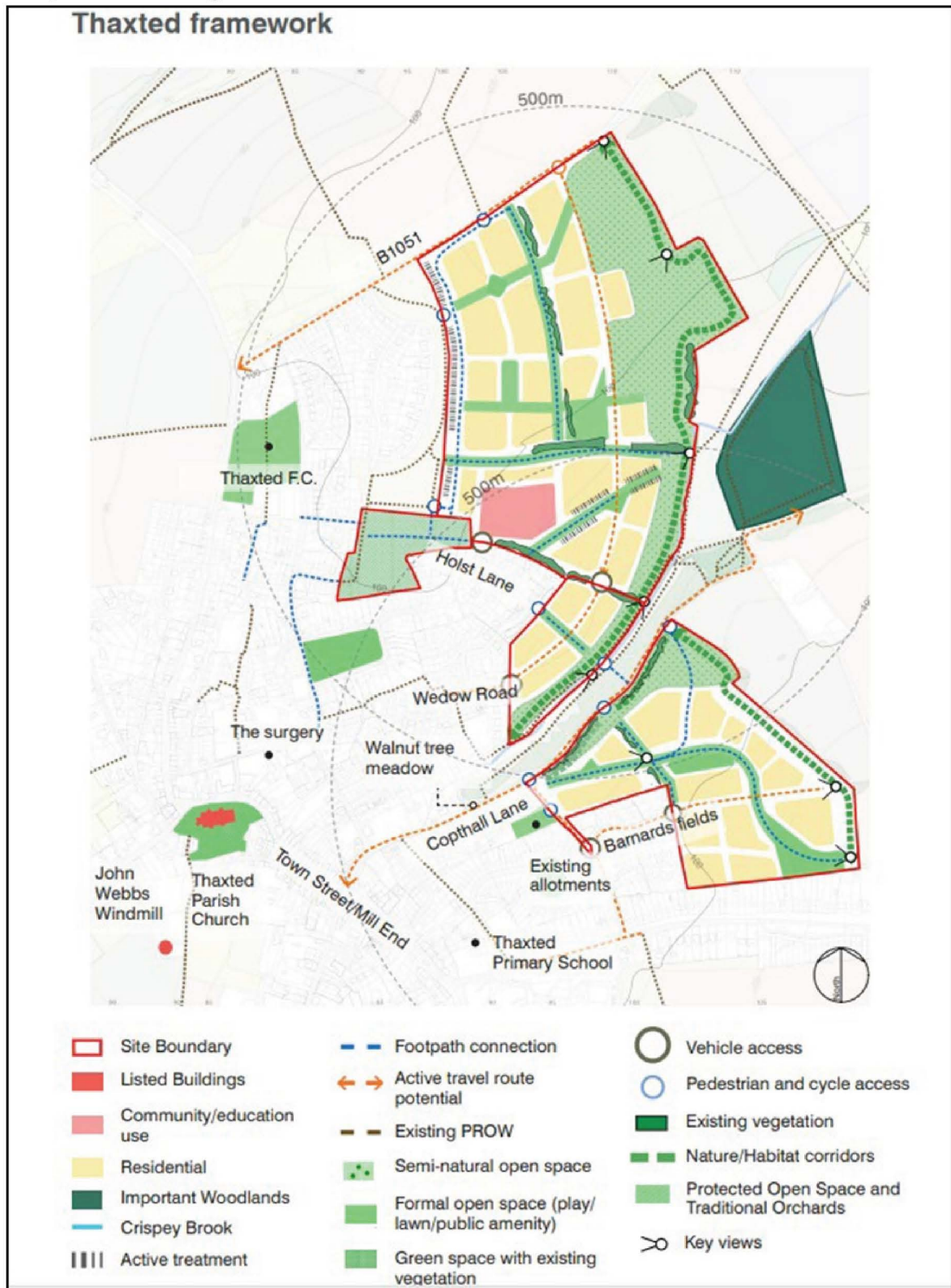


Figure 7.2: Proposed Strategic Allocations in Thaxted

- 7.19 The proposed allocations within Figure 7.2 seek to cumulatively deliver around 489 dwellings, a new 1 Form Entry primary school (on a site sufficient to deliver a 2 form entry school subject to future need), green infrastructure, open spaces, and new transport infrastructure. These allocations deliver a level of growth which can support the vitality of Thaxted and provide new essential facilities such as a new school, whilst also being well integrated into the town and protecting its important historic character. Key considerations for planning for these sites will include:

Land to the North-East of Barnards Field:

- maximise key views of the Grade I Listed Church and John Webbs Windmill from higher ground along the southern edges of the site
- create a strong interface with Copthall Lane and develop a pedestrian and cycle access strategy which demonstrates how pedestrians and cyclists can be connected between Copthall Lane and at the north-western corner of the site
- create a pedestrian point of access in the north-east corner of the site that connects into the existing PRoW network that extends beyond Copthall Lane and the woodland nearby
- propose a range of central green areas that combine existing ecological assets and include measures to enhance biodiversity and encourage play and recreation. These areas should be centrally located and accessible by a range of safe and legible routes that are appealing to pedestrians
- retain existing hedgerows and vegetation that run north to south in the site and border the edges of the site boundary, and
- develop a green infrastructure strategy that seeks to compliment important woodland and landscape towards the north-east of the site.

Land to the North of Holst Lane:

- demonstrate suitable vehicular access onto the B1051, exploring the possibility of two access points. Where a single access is proposed, the internal road alignment should be such that a cul-de-sac layout isn't formed
- pedestrian and cycle connectivity should emphasise connecting with the existing public footpath that extends between Burns Way and The Mead. Additionally, pedestrian and cycle connectivity should link this public footpath to the PRoW network situated to the south and east of the site
- provide additional services and facilities within a new minor centre. This must include a 1Form Entry primary school (on a 2 Form Entry size Site) and should consider another use such as a local convenience retail, leisure, or community building
- acknowledge and respond to the presence of Crispy Brook, the woodland belt and the open space to the south of the site through layout, design, orientation and connectivity
- provide a network of green spaces that are interconnected through clear and legible pedestrian links. These spaces should be overlooked by homes and/or community facilities and any play space should be situated within the heart of the development.
- utilise open space in the eastern part of the site to form a natural connection with the existing woodland located off Copthall Lane, and
- maximise key views of the Grade I Listed Church and John Webbs Windmill from within the site. The site should also focus on retaining long distance views with regard to the historic core of Thaxted and its wider landscape.

Delivery of Transport Infrastructure within the Thaxted Area.

- 7.20 At present, Thaxted functions as a Local Rural Centre to the surrounding rural hinterland of eastern Uttlesford. The settlement provides a number of services and facilities within walking distance for the majority of Thaxted residents. Whilst Thaxted does not lie along either of the key movement corridors within Uttlesford (the M11 and A120), it is served by hourly bus services to Saffron Walden, Great Dunmow and Stansted Airport.
- 7.21 To ensure the sustainability credentials of Thaxted are maximised it is important that some transport improvements are made within the Thaxted Area, as set out within Core Policy 17: Delivery of Transport Schemes within the Thaxted Area.

Core Policy 17: Delivery of Transport Schemes within the Thaxted Area

In order to deliver the growth in the Thaxted Area, highway infrastructure has been identified to mitigate the impact of planned growth that is important to help secure a viable and sustainable future for the Thaxted Area. The package may be further refined through development of the Local Transport and Connectivity Plan being developed by Essex County Council.

Transport infrastructure at Thaxted will be required as follows:

- i. delivery of attractive, convenient and all-weather active travel routes within allocated development sites, including linkages to the existing network
- ii. ensure dropped kerbs, tactile paving and other features are provided to make walking within the village as accessible as possible
- iii. electric cycle parking to be provided as standard for every new household
- iv. financial contributions towards the improvement bus services between Thaxted and Great Dunmow, allowing for an increased frequency of services to twice an hour
- v. enhance existing bus stops and shelters to provide real-time information on services, and
- vi. provision of discounted bus services for new residents to ensure sustainable transport habits are developed at the beginning of a development's occupation.

Delivery of Green and Blue Infrastructure in the Thaxted Area

- 7.22 There are several challenges regarding green and blue infrastructure in and around Thaxted, which comprise areas of flood risk along watercourses, fragmented woodland network and overall habitat connectivity, and a lack of active travel access. Thaxted, given its historic and compact nature, does not benefit from substantial or connected green infrastructure within the settlement public realm. Outside of Thaxted, habitats such as woodland and hedgerow are often broken or gapped due to agricultural intensification.
- 7.23 Opportunities therefore exist for the proposed allocations to deliver or contribute towards improvements to the green and blue infrastructure network within the Thaxted Area. The improvements sought will enhance the aesthetic, ecological and functional qualities of Thaxted's riparian, woodland and urban environment. In doing so, the Council will seek to address the challenges highlighted above and within the Uttlesford Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy.

- 7.24 New development within the settlement will be expected to contribute towards the strategic opportunities as set out in **Core Policy 18: Delivery of Green and Blue Infrastructure in the Thaxted Area**.

Core Policy 18: Delivery of Green and Blue Infrastructure in the Thaxted Area

The Council will require all development proposals to protect and enhance green and blue infrastructure and assets in the Thaxted area as shown by maps in Appendix 9-11 and the Adopted Policies Map.

The Council will seek contributions towards the strategic projects identified below and in more detail within the Uttlesford Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy for the Thaxted area including their enhancement and on-going management costs:

- i. improved water retention, slowed water flow and erosion
- ii. greening Thaxted and enhancing local experience
- iii. creating a connected north-south green spine along the River Chelmer
- iv. enhanced habitat networks within the arable landscape
- v. enhancing the Harcamlow Way, and
- vi. create a nature network and woodland corridor from Hatfield Forest to Thaxted.

Planning permission will not be granted for development that would prejudice the construction or effective operation of the schemes listed.

Thaxted Area Heritage

- 7.25 Thaxted's origins as a prosperous medieval town can be seen in the high quantity of listed buildings which are largely consolidated along Newbiggen Street, Watling Street and Town Street. These Listed Buildings, often constructed in contiguous terrace formation frequently have sensitively colour washed facades. Within the Conservation Area, on rising ground, lies the Grade I Listed St John's Church, which, together with the Windmill to its south are located in strategically elevated positions, both of which dominate the town when seen from viewpoints within the historic core and beyond.
- 7.26 The design and heritage value of this built environment led to the designation of the Thaxted Conservation Area, which spans the majority of the western half of Thaxted. Thaxted contains many high-quality buildings representative of many periods, however, some of the more contemporary additions to the eastern edge of the village haven't always been as successful as may be liked and it's essential that any new development achieves a high-quality standard
- 7.27 To prevent new development from being detrimental to the historic character of the existing settlement, it is important that new development is context-led. Opportunities should be taken to establish key views of the church from within the development sites and provide active and attractive frontages along these views. Such frontages should look to utilise terraced housing typologies and varied roof forms to recreate the architectural features that contribute to Thaxted's design quality. Planning applications should demonstrate that all reasonable design options have been considered to conserve and enhance the heritage value of Thaxted.