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Winter 2024-25

SIGNPOSTS

News and views from Haddenham Safe Walking and Cycling group

Issue 15

HADDENHAM-THAME GREENWAY: OXFORDSHIRE LEADS THE WAY!



Our recent focus in lobbying for a Haddenham-Thame Greenway has been on Buckinghamshire Council, given that they are the lead authority for the cross-border project, but it now appears to be Oxfordshire which is taking the initiative, with realistic allocations for the project in its draft Medium Term Financial Plan (2025-28).

In its draft budget (consultation closed on 2 January), Oxfordshire County Council has included not only £200,000 for its share of the (latest) feasibility study under "High priority capital schemes to which indicative funding is proposed to be allocated", but also £5 million for "an active travel link between Thame and Haddenham Parkway" under "Proposed Additions to future Capital Pipeline (pending funding becoming available)".

This ties in with what we already know: whilst the two county councils have been collecting developer funds for the scheme, they will need to bid for outside funding (probably from the government via Active Travel England) to actually build the scheme. Also worth pointing out that this is only a proposal at the moment (Oxon councillors will vote on the budget on 11 February 2025). **So it is crucially important that all our readers living in Oxfordshire write to their councillors asking them to vote in support of progressing the Greenway in the budget.**

So the ball is now firmly in Bucks Council's court! To date, they have taken the lead on work on the Greenway, but surely they need to match Oxfordshire's move with a budget commitment of their own?

Alan Thawley, chair
Haddenham Safe Walking and Cycling group

Who to write to: your councillors in Oxfordshire



<https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/council/about-your-council/oxfordshire-councillors/your-councillor>

PRESERVING OUR PUBLIC FOOTPATHS



Footpaths, like other transport links, need to be maintained. They may need updating to modern mobility standards or they may need to be recovered after long disuse, to provide new walking opportunities for a public ever more keen for outdoor exercise and to explore their countryside.

While basic servicing of footpaths is provided by local council teams, there remains much scope for improvements, either to make paths more attractive to local walkers or to make them accessible to a wider range of users. The quality of the local network thus depends on the generosity of the community and the cooperation of farmers, but above all on the enthusiastic volunteers who take the initiative.

Among the latter, Haddenham resident Bill Piers is an outstanding example of what can be achieved by someone with the time and energy of the newly retired, the organising and diplomatic ability of the former executive, the necessary outdoor skills and devotion to the cause of countryside walking.

Starting in 2015, Bill gathered a company of 12 with like enthusiasm to improve and update the footpath walks around Haddenham, neighbouring villages and the wider county. Mostly this has involved removing stiles and replacing with gates, thus greatly improving the scope and range for walking by older people.

“ The quality of the local network thus depends on the generosity of the community and the cooperation of farmers, but above all on the enthusiastic volunteers who take the initiative.

... Time for the next generation to step forward.

Often the fieldwork can only begin after many months of lining up the ducks, which is where Bill's persistence and negotiating skill come in. Funding has to be found, from individuals and parish councils where possible, and agreement obtained from landowners and their tenant farmers to accept changes likely to bring increased numbers across their land.

Formal approval must be sought from the County Council and the work conform to British Standards. It must also meet the requirements of the Ramblers Association, which provides Bill with expenses and insurance. Bill's group is called North Bucks rRIPPLE (North Bucks Ramblers Repairing & Improving Public Paths for Leisure & Exercise) and you can see a record of their 350-plus installations on the Ramblers website at <https://tinyurl.com/yzmdpz4j> (refer to the activity reports). There is a window where you can “Donate a Gate”, if you wish, perhaps in memory of a companion or dog who enjoyed walking.

Most members of the group are now well over 70 and its output past its peak. Time for the next generation to step forward.

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SECTION 106: A FAIR DEAL?



In our [last issue](#)¹ the Chair of Haddenham Parish Council explained how the developers of new housing estates contribute to common village facilities funded out of the uplift in land value arising from planning permission: the “Section 106 agreement”.

But does the village get a fair deal?

Land with planning permission can be upwards of 100 times more valuable than farm land. Greenfield land only becomes a development prospect as a result of nearby development, including houses, roads and schools, which the local council itself will have enabled. If the council could “capture” a fair share of the uplift in value resulting from its permission, which otherwise goes to the landowner, large resources would be available for public benefit – village meeting places, medical centres, cycleways etc – and the council could insist on higher spec buildings and more affordable homes, perhaps even with ground source heat pumps.

New estates, now always resisted, could be welcomed by the village for all the improvements they bring.

Following up our Parish Council Chair’s explanation of S106 in the last issue ...

“ ... the county council ... is constrained by the limitations of Section 106 and under pressure, even compulsion, from central government to fulfil its housing quota

But, despite an enormous increase in land values in recent years, councils can do no more than negotiate for what they can extract via Section 106. In negotiation they will face a landowner who will probably not be a farmer but a professional accumulator of potential building land out to reap full value as the opportunity arises. But, while the council has the ultimate power of decision, it is constrained by the limitations of Section 106 and always under pressure, even compulsion, from central government to fulfil its allocated housing quota.

From this weak negotiating position it is difficult for a council to initiate, as it should, creative ideas which take into account the growth of the village as a whole. This was not always so. When planning control was first introduced, after the war, councils acquired land at existing use value and the entire uplift was applied for public benefit, giving rise to well-appointed new towns like Milton Keynes. This ended in 1961 with the Land Compensation Act, which gave landowners the right to full current value, which led to the era of speculation and inflated land values that we know today.

For many years governments have accepted the need for change, but tinkering with the housing system is full of political peril – for landowners, developers and banks, not to mention home owners.

AG

¹ See page 3, <https://www.villagesociety.org/lib/signpostsissue-14autumn-2024-F884522.pdf> - page=3

MARY'S MOBILITY



Image: Haddenham footway

Mary (let's call her Mary) lives in Haddenham. She drove a car for fifty years. She was a good driver – never had a single accident. Then the time came for her to stop driving. She decided to get a mobility scooter. Easy! If she could drive a big metal box around at speed, she could manage a motorised wheelchair. Surely. But as soon as she climbed aboard she realised it is a totally different experience.

Where's the sense of protection? Can there be a smooth ride with such small wheels? Roads with or without potholes are – all said and done – generally smoother than the gutter, where she now finds herself all too often, or the uneven slabs of a pavement. Then there are the slopes in pavements designed for rain run-off *or* to ease the passage of cars out of and into private driveways *or* to help pedestrians cross a road. What if you just want to go straight? You can be lurched precariously in a direction you don't want to go. What's more, you haven't got the firm pedal controls of a car where you stamp out your

“... A further thought: how about routes designed for the less mobile, with less bone-shaking surfaces? That should embolden anyone!

commands in an emergency. These scooters have less sturdy hand controls.

The overall feeling is hardly secure. But should the mobility scooter be reserved only for the bold? Besides even the bold think twice about going out when it is wet or icy. Roads may get gritted. How often do paths? Footpaths are made with walkers in mind - the clue's in the name. Often there are obstacles that make things tricky for a scootérist. A bench? Bins? A lamppost? A sharp, tight turn?

No, spare a thought for those intrepid souls trying to escape their four walls for some fresh air or to undertake vital errands on four small wheels. Put yourself in their seats...

A further thought: how about routes designed for the less mobile, with less bone-shaking surfaces? That should embolden anyone!

WARNING: Don't get Mary started on pavement parking!

BA

CONSULTING BUT NOT LISTENING



Images: The Grove,
Haddenham

Buckinghamshire Council is preparing to implement a 30mph limit on The Grove, Haddenham, pending approval from the leader of the council. If you haven't been following the saga, you might be wondering why on earth the speed limit on a residential development wasn't already 30.

Unfortunately, when the plans were approved, the layout of the street lights did not automatically restrict the roads to 30mph, so a statutory consultation had to be held over the summer to remedy this, otherwise the national speed limit would have continued to apply, despite what the signs say.

Although respondents supported the switch to 30mph, an overwhelming majority actually called for a 20mph limit. An aspiration shared by the village as a whole, as demonstrated by the response to the Parish Council's Streetscape project.

The response from Bucks has been disappointing though, stating that "there is no collision history with respect to The Grove and as such a 20mph speed limit is not considered to be necessary for safety reasons". Such a clear demonstration of local feeling surely deserves better.

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The Grove Consultation Results		
Preferred 20mph (either agreed or not with 30mph)	75.4%	
Agreed with 30mph – referred to interest in 20mph	3.6%	
Agreed with 30mph – no 20mph comment	19.8%	
Agreed with 30mph – "not less"	0.6%	
Rejected 30mph – no further comment	0.6%	



THEY HAVE A PLAN!



"Cowpat developments"?

Many believe that new housing estates are simply plonked down without much thought to their wider impact (hence the term "[cowpat developments](#)"²). But at least when it comes to how people will get around, all larger developments are required to provide a travel plan.

The objective is to encourage the use of sustainable modes of transport, with a target of reducing single-occupancy car trips by a minimum of 10% within five years. Regular surveys must be undertaken to demonstrate the reduction.

All sounds pretty good! But there are a couple of issues. First, the plans themselves often amount to little more than a leaflet distributed to new residents, telling them where the bus stops and bike shops are, listing car sharing apps, etc. Worse still, one of our correspondents reported receiving nothing at all. Behaviour change is hard and requires real effort. To give them credit Bucks Council have recently been calling for stronger measures³.

² See <https://tinyurl.com/5cm2nf6u>

³ See for example Bucks Council response to the application for "Land South of Lower Road" at <https://publicaccess.aylesburyvaledc.gov.uk/online->

“ The objective is to encourage the use of sustainable modes of transport ...

Unless these plans contain effective measures and their results are measured fairly, they will remain little more than box-ticking exercises ...

The second issue relates to how the targets are calculated. The plan for the Airfield development, for instance, took its baseline from census data for Haddenham and other villages (the Mid Super Output Area, or MSOA). But travel patterns in Haddenham are different from other villages because we have a railway station. Far more people from Haddenham will take the train, leaving the car at home, unlike people from Stone, for example. So figures for single-occupancy trips were far below the target of 67.7% in each year's travel survey. It's hard to claim much credit for hitting a target that would have been achieved automatically, especially since solo car journeys actually rose over the life of the plan!

Unless these plans contain effective measures and their results are measured fairly, they will remain little more than box-ticking exercises – one of the many, many hoops that developers have to jump through in order to gain their lucrative planning permission. A money-spinner for the consultants hired to write them, but with little benefit for residents old and new.

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<https://publicaccess.aylesburyvaledc.gov.uk/online-applications/applicationDetails.do?activeTab=documents&keyVal=S6C22ZCLLUF00> (:Highways Comments" submitted on 25 January 2024).

BUILD IT AND THEY WILL RUN! OR WALK, WHEEL, CYCLE, SWIM ...



Image: following Aspen Park, LIH "Phase 2" – photo Google Maps Imagery ©2024 TerraMetrics, Map data ©2024

Could yet another new housing development be the key to a more active Haddenham? Plenty will be cynical, but Lands Improvement Holdings (LIH) is at least making the right noises about the next phase of its plans for the old Airfield site, in pursuit of its aim to create "healthy, happy places".

HaddSWAC was present at one of the two focus group sessions held in early October and has just received their interim report on initial ideas for the "Open space active strategy". Following this early engagement, LIH believe there is an "opportunity to create a development which offers open space for both physical activity and nature, and that these could or should be defining design features", with the potential "to support the wider provision for the entire village [...] as part of a Haddenham-wide strategic approach".

Local sports clubs were well represented and a good deal of discussions covered facilities for various different sports. Ideas that emerged strongly included provision for a Park Run event and facilities for swimming, the latter accounting for around a third of

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the specific sports requests. As well as a traditional indoor pool, we also discussed the potential for open-water or wild swimming. Opportunities like these on our doorstep in Haddenham would naturally reduce the need for people to get in their cars.

And the most frequent request, mentioned in 24% of comments or suggestions was "active travel around the village", followed by "natural open spaces" on 19%. The report outlines the need to provide "safer and more accessible cycle lanes, paths and pavements around the village to enable and encourage more people to engage in active travel". This includes the need to "separate wheels from walkers" and extends to "routes between Haddenham, Thame and Aylesbury", whilst the creation of "village walks" might encourage residents to explore their neighbourhoods more and connect with other parts of the village.

We will be feeding back on these initial ideas, in particular to argue for more focus on active aging and the level ways project. They will then be finalised and presented to the wider community. On this evidence though, LIH can certainly talk the talk. Whether they will walk the walk, remains to be seen. The only thing that is certain is that we will be getting more homes on the Airfield!

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COME RAIN, COME SHINE⁴

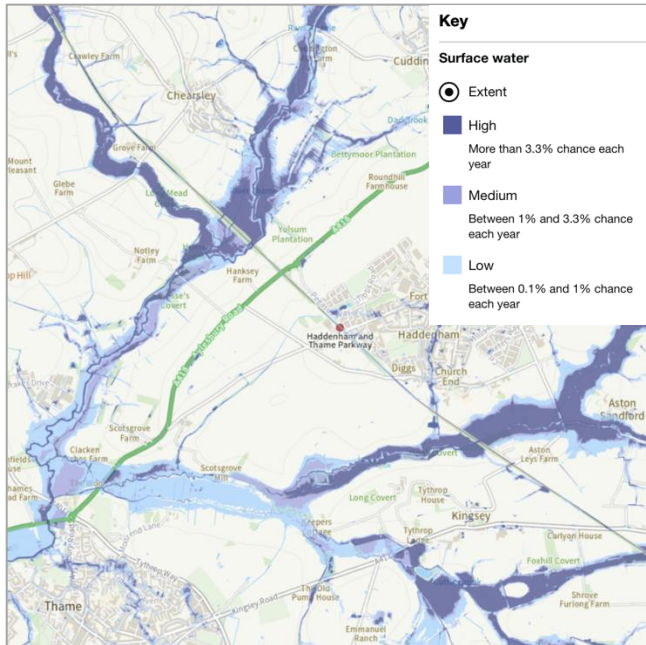


Image: Official long term flood risk

Fifteen hundred years ago the water table around Haddenham was higher than today. The earliest Saxon settlers, coming perhaps as mercenaries, settled on land they referred to as islands: Towersey and Kingsey. The -ey ending in those names means just that. Okay, not the sort of islands that are lapped by tidal seas, but the land was certainly wet and soggy enough. Witness also other local names like Ford, Marsh, Lashlake or Ilmer (“-mere” means standing water). It’s simple to recognise what’s being described. Even Haddenham’s last syllable possibly comes from the Old English – *ham*, related to being “hemmed” in – by wetness. Look at the map. There, to the west, is the meandering, spreading, inundating River Thames, giving the town its name.

That was then. But are we now in for a return of those conditions? There’s been more of the wet stuff falling out of the sky recently. A one percent increase in global temperature means a seven percent increase in water in the atmosphere. Haddenham can hopefully

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What price local walking?

withstand such changes. Well, mostly.

What price local walking? Fancy a stroll down the Thames Valley Walk? Probably best in the drier months (though winter-walking there can be spectacular if you’re suitably kitted out). Want to walk from Aston Sandford to Meadle? Get your wellies on! Indeed too many local walks – some we’ve featured in these pages – are hardly user-friendly after rain. Wouldn’t it be great to find a Greenway always usable?

If you go to the Aylesbury Vale Parkway carpark, a meagre £3 lets you leave your car for a day. However you get there – bus, train, car or bike – go under the railway, past the sign saying “Walk to Waddesdon: 50 mins” and immediately a vista of the Vale opens up before you, a panoramic reminder that our part of England is open to the skies. And this wonderful expansiveness gets better and better as you go. Daniel Defoe had good reason to say “the Vale is eminent for the richest of Land ... in England”.

It’d be great to have such a treasure on our doorstep here, would it not? Do I mean a Haddenham-Thame Greenway? I certainly do. We, at SIGNPOSTS, will keep pushing for that. Come rain, come shine.

BA

⁴ See <https://check-for-flooding.service.gov.uk>, and for map, <https://check-long-term-flood-risk.service.gov.uk/map>

A WINTER WALK IN AYLESBURY

This walk in Aylesbury is composed of three elements and you can do either all three together or select the parts that are of particular interest to you. All start from the Market Square, which is by the bus station. The walk is dry-footed throughout.

The first element is through Aylesbury's old town. Here you can leave the noise and bustle of town business and walk quiet streets with centuries old houses and imagine life in a provincial town of the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries. With average lingering time, about 40 minutes.

The next element takes you down the High Street (an abrupt switch to modern street life, but brief), under the ring road and across the park to the Aylesbury branch of the Grand Union Canal. Walk the towpath until the branch terminates at the Aylesbury basin,

where you can imagine the town's bulk supplies – coal, timber, bricks, building stone etc – being unloaded from horse-drawn barges. Cross the busy Walton Street (helpful traffic light) and walk in surprising peace through gardens and past the multi-storey parking up to the edge of the busy Friarage Road (A41). About 40 minutes.

Then you can either cross the road to the bus station or walk the third element, the Bourg Walk, which starts immediately on your left. This is quite a new footpath which takes you soaring over car parks and railways, then past playing fields and little gardens to Churchill Avenue, a short distance from your bus stop on the A418 back to Haddenham. About 1,000 metres: say 15 minutes.

Note: The Museum has a "Heritage Walk" booklet on the old town (£1) and Diane Harrison at the Town Hall next door offers occasional heritage walking tours (01296 425678).

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Market Square	Start at SE end (near bus station). County Hall (1725) on right, Corn Exchange (1864) on left with David Bowie memorial under the furthest right of the arches. Statue of Lord Chesham with imperial lions. Clock Tower (1865) in centre. In NE corner of square, statues of John Hampden and Disraeli. Leave by Kings Head passage in NW corner of square.
Kings Head	Kings Head C15, pub since mid C17, note courtyard. Turn left and right into:
Temple Street	C18 frontages, many with older interiors, leads into
Temple Square	Pleasant little square with C17-18 buildings. Ahead to:
Church Street	Mostly C18 facades with C15-16 interiors. No 7 Ceely House, with fine portico, has Museum. Opposite is No 8 Chantry. No 12 has "oversailing" upper storey, known as a jetty (C16). Before Church, turn left into:
Parsons Fee	Nos 5-8, C17 with oversailing. On right imposing entrance to Prebendal House (C18), where hill fort remains (650BCE) found. Keep to raised footway on left into:
Castle Street	Roadway has been lowered for benefit of horse-drawn traffic. Left into:
Church Street	For second time, but it is "the best street in Aylesbury" ⁵ . Enter Churchyard.
St Mary's Square	Church, C13, restored 1850, notable C12 font. Outside, walk round church clockwise along road with C17-18 houses. Note Derby Arms, with C18 frontage to much older interior. Nos 2-4 are former workhouses. Exit left into:

⁵ Famous architectural writer, Sir Nikolaus Pevsner, in his guidebooks to the architecture of England (1951-1974).

Pebble Lane	On right is back entrance to Museum (closed Mon.-Tue.) through pleasant garden, with benches, fruit trees and a Cubitt car (made in Aylesbury 1922). Also a cafeteria. Opposite is a noteworthy greengrocer. Leads into:
Kingsbury	Former parking space for carters transferring goods (and news) between market and outlying villages. Continue to Market Square.
High Street Underpass Vale Park Park Street	Turn left in front of John Hampden into High Street. Walk to main road at the bottom, take underpass decorated as part of a Youth Art project and enter Vale Park on left. Cross park diagonally to E corner and enter Park Street. Walk 50 metres to right, crossing Bear Brook (the first of several encounters), then canal bridge, and take steps down to towpath.
Grand Union Canal	Under bridge on right is Hills and Partridges Lock (1815), controls water level in Aylesbury basin. Named after long-gone flour mill, originally water-powered by parallel Bear Brook. But walk left (SW) 500 metres to Aylesbury Basin. Straight on to Walton Street, cross at traffic light.
Path to Friarage Road/Bus Station	Take path on left side of large glassy office building (the "Blue Leanie" built 1982, labelled "B2"), keeping the building on your right. Skirt left side of quiet garden at the back (benches), then follow little service road, veering right by entrance to station car park and left into Station Way East, past multi-story on right, to Station Boulevard and right to Friarage Road.
Bourg Walk	The Bourg Walk Bridge (opened 2009) is immediately on your left. Walk 800 meters to Churchill Avenue, then 200 metres right to A418 and left to bus stop (request).

BIG EVENT – BIG TEAM!



New Year resolutions or otherwise: have you thought about getting more involved locally, extending your circle of friends, helping to make things happen?

Here's an opportunity. We're looking at something BIG for June 2025, following the famous family bike ride of 30 June 2024 (above). This time more Thame-focused; again supporting the Thame-Haddenham Greenway. Of course, a big event needs a big team ...

We're desperate for people who would like to join us designing and preparing for a one-off, fun event in 2025. To remind everyone of the extent of local feeling for the greenway. This event would encourage our local politicians, and provide more evidence of demand to support applications for the national grants needed to fund implementation.

To discuss opportunities, please, do drop us a line at HaddSWAC@gmail.com. We're just getting started!

HaddSWAC is very grateful for financial support from Haddenham Village Fête, The Haddenham Beer Festivals Trust and Thame Cycles.

We welcome news and views to be published in SIGNPOSTS at the editorial committee's discretion.

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