

Community Services Committee

Report Title:	Communications and Community Engagement
Meeting Date:	4 February 2025
Contact Officer:	Cassie Pinnells, Community Services Manager

Purpose of the Report

1. To receive a report on Town Council communications and community engagement.

Compliments & Complaints

From 1 October 2024 – 27 January 2025

Thame Town Council

Verbal Compliments	No.	Verbal Complaints	No.
Written compliment clear and concise e-newsletter (St Marys Office)	1	Remembrance	2
Art Crawl	5		
Poppies	1		
Information Centre	2		
Remembrance Service	5		
Christmas Light Switch On	1		
Communications	2		
Maintenance Team	2		
Christmas Guide	1		
Trees	1		
Paper Newsletter	1		
Total	22		2

South Oxfordshire District Council

Verbal Compliments	No.	Verbal Complaints	No.
Total	0		0

Oxfordshire County Council

Verbal Compliments	No.	Verbal Complaints	No.
Total	0		0

Social Media

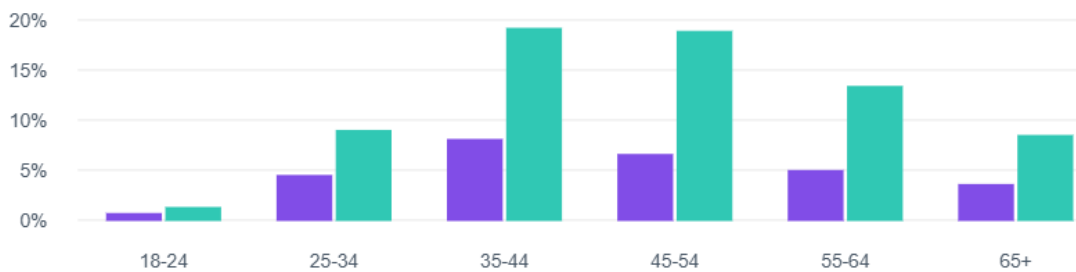
2. Current figures show Thame Town Council has:

- Facebook followers – 2,534, up from 2,345 in September 2024 (8% increase)
In January, TTC posts had 1,898 interactions (likes, saves, comments, shares).

The make-up of our Facebook page is primarily women in the 35-54 age group. Fewer than 30% of men follow TTC on Facebook. The Comms Officer (maternity cover) believes it highlights a need for the Council to find ways to communicate with men and Thame’s 55+ residents who do not receive the newsletter or use social media.

Age and gender

■ Men 29.20%
■ Women 70.80%



- Instagram followers – 600, up from 521 in September 2024 (15% increase)

3. Individual event sites have:

- Thame Town Awards – 470 followers (Facebook)
- Taste of Thame – 943 followers (Facebook), 356 followers (Instagram)
- Thame Art Crawl – 730 followers (Facebook) 1,032 followers (Instagram)
- Christmas in Thame — 2,001 followers (Facebook)
- Thame Local Produce Market – 913 followers (Facebook)

4. Since November (past 90 days), the top posts on TTC’s Facebook page have been:

- Every poppy tells a story – poppy instalments – 223 interactions
- Christmas tree teaser (coming tomorrow) – 78 interactions
- Announcement - Chris Hurdman lighting Christmas tree – 68 interactions
- Thank you volunteers for taking down poppies – 68 interactions
- Helena Fickling death notice – 63 interactions

5. Since November, some of TTC's most popular posts shared to Love Thame, a local site with over 18,600 followers, have been:
 - Thame Pride announcement (273 likes/62 comments – overwhelmingly positive)
 - Chris Hurdman revealed to be switching on Christmas lights (224 likes/42 comments)
 - Community & Youth Centre news story – 155 likes/41 comments
 - Community & Youth Centre flyer announcement – 123 likes
 - Helena Fickling death notice – 119 reactions/28 comments

Newsletter

6. Current figures show Thame Town Council currently has 1,531 weekly newsletter subscribers up from 1,475 in September 2024.
7. Since the start of 2025, we have been trialling a printed version of the newsletter to help reach those who do not use social media. The printed version, available from the Information Centre, and posted in A3 form at Montesson Square, has so far been well received. We are currently monitoring how many are collected each week and comments from the public to decide whether it is something we should continue long-term.

Website

8. Towards the end of 2024, the Comms Officer (maternity cover) working with Connect, reintroduced a Latest News slider to the front page of the website and modernised the site's buttons to help freshen the overall appearance (using allocated support time). The drop-down menus were also alphabetised for ease-of-use.

At the end of 2024, a dedicated Defibrillator web page was added to the website which shows the nearest defib locations and video guides showing how to use the equipment: <https://www.thametowncouncil.gov.uk/community/defibrillators-in-thame/>

A dedicated Warm Spaces web page is also planned to help those who are struggling to stay warm in Winter. This should be live by the first week of February 2025.

The Council's contract with the current website hosting & support provider will be reviewed in March.

Events

9. **Thame Art Crawl** – the 2024 event ran from 15-19 October. A record number of businesses and artists took part - 37 local businesses showcasing the work of 42 artists. There was a 4-week social media campaign in the lead-up to the event, along with town banners and verge signs, and an A3 (folded) colour trail leaflet. A social media driven competition to 'vote for your favourite artist', generated 223 entries.

The event was very well attended with many artists & venues expressing their desire to be part of the 2025 event – and a number of businesses that were not involved in 2024 also expressing a desire to be part of future events.

An advertisement for the 2025 event was recently placed in the Longwick Art Show's artist catalogue. The Art Crawl website has also been updated, and the online artist nomination form is now open to applicants.

10. **Remembrance** – 212 giant poppies were attached to street posts to honour those named on the war memorials in Thame and Moreton. Residents and visitors were invited to view the poppies via the e-newsletter and social media. The poppies were incredibly popular – a single photo on social media attracted around 200 reactions on the TTC website and was shared 12 times.

11. **Christmas in Thame** - Christmas Sponsorship & Advertising were easily secured in 2024 through the introduction of an online-only Sponsorship Brochure which was publicised in the weekly e-newsletter and on social media.

The 29 November event was publicised via the Christmas Guide (which was delivered to every home in Thame), TTC's social media channels and e-newsletter, the Christmas in Thame social channels, custom made banners, lamp post signs, and verge signage around town, as well as the Love Thame Facebook page, Thame Out magazine, Red Kite Radio, the Town Hall A-Board and Bucks Herald & Oxford Mail online news services.

In January 2025, Lightfoots Solicitors contacted the Comms Officer (m/c) to advise that they would like to again sponsor the event in 2025. The Oxford Bus Company have also enquired about Christmas sponsorship opportunities in 2025.

12. **Christmas Charities Fair & Santa's Grotto** – both of these events were held at the Town Hall on Saturday 30 November. Promotion for both was via the Christmas Guide, TTCs social media channels and e-newsletter and on the custom-made banners at Market Square and on the Railings, as well as the Love Thame Facebook page. Stallholders who had attended previously, commented that the Grotto had helped with visitor numbers and that numbers were up on recent years. It was suggested that the two events continue to run in tandem in future years.

Additional Engagement

13. **Mayor at the Market** – The Mayor has been regularly attending the markets on the third Tuesday of each month to meet the public and discuss Council-related issues. On Tuesday 21 January, the Mayor was accompanied by the Neighbourhood Plan Continuity Officer to answer questions about TNP2. Engagement at the markets has been well received by the public with a few people commenting on their interactions with the Mayor on social media.

14. **Flood Alert** – At the end of September, Thame received a month's worth of rain in a single day. In order to create a one-stop source of information for Thame residents, a

dedicated page was created on the TTC website with links to the latest weather and flood alert information, tips for those impacted by floodwater, and contact phone numbers. The Council's social media sites were also used to relay information as it came to hand. The response from the Council was later commended by a number of members of the public.

In response to flooding, the Committee Services & Processes Officer set-up an Information Gathering survey online. This was promoted through the e-newsletter and social media and garnered 69 responses from the public who supplied images of their flooding problems and valuable information for the Council.

15. **Budget questionnaire** – in September 2024, a basic questionnaire was created for residents to fill out online which was shared in the newsletter and on the social media platforms. At its close on 20 September, the questionnaire had garnered a total of 281 responses.
16. **Community & Youth Centre** – during the weeks commencing 2 & 9 December 2024, a tri-fold flyer was delivered to 5,400 homes in Thame. Combined with social media, e-newsletter engagement, and press coverage in the Oxford Mail, Bucks Herald and on MSN online, the campaign generated over 660 responses regarding the build of the centre and whether or not residents were prepared to accept an increase in their precept to cover the cost of a public works loan.
17. **2025 Calendar** – The Customer Services Officer organised the design and production of a 2025 Thame calendar. 150 copies were produced in the first week of October. The calendar was promoted via the weekly e-newsletter and social media and sold out before Christmas.
18. **Town Guide** – Advertising spaces in the Town Guide were promoted in the e-newsletter and on social media. As a result, £4,300 in advertising was generated for the 2025 Town Guide which covered the cost of printing 6,000 copies. It also covered the cost of distribution to 5,400 homes in Thame. The Guide is now available to view online ([view here](#)) and will be distributed to Thame homes across the first two weeks of February. 600 copies have been made available for the Town Hall and local venues for visitors to Thame.
19. **TNP2 Referendum** – On 18 December 2024, SODC announced 6 February 2025 as the date for the Neighbourhood Plan referendum. Prior to the announcement, the Comms Officer (m/c) ran information stories about the Plan in the e-newsletter and distributed via social media. The day prior to the announcement, MSN and Oxford Mail published a Council press release advising that SODC would soon announce a date for the referendum.

Since the announcement, a lot of public-generated social media activity (particularly on Love Thame) has centred around the flood plain. “Confusion” tactics have been used to cloud judgement and create fear and distrust. In an effort to stem some of the misinformation circulating, the Comms Officer and Neighbourhood Plan Continuity Officer have been responding to messages within regulation guidelines. A dedicated web page

has been created explaining the Plan and its contents, and w/c 27 January, an A5 4-page flyer will be delivered to homes and businesses throughout Thame answering some of people's main concerns and outlining the consequences of a yes and no vote.

On Tuesday 21 January, the Mayor and Neighbourhood Plan Continuity Officer attended the market to address people's questions, and on Sunday 26 January, the Mayor appeared on Red Kite Radio to also clarify some of the misinformation circulating.

A video about the Plan has been created and distributed via the e-newsletter, social media outlets, and a QR code linking to the video has been included on the flyer. In the first three days, over 60 people had viewed the video. It's hoped more will do so ahead of the referendum. The focus for Comms in the lead-up to the referendum will be to encourage people to vote and watch the video for a better understanding of how the Plan came about and its contents.

20. The **TTC Buses LinkTree** which was created at the end of June 2024 to give users instant access to every bus that services Thame, continues to be used by residents and visitors <https://linktr.ee/thamebuses> To date, the service has been accessed over 5,000 times.
21. The **TTC Public Services LinkTree** has also been well utilised by residents. <https://linktr.ee/thamepublicservices> Since its inception at the end of August 2024, it has had almost 2,600 views.
22. **Red Kite Radio** - TTC's Comms Officer (mc) continues to present a regular fortnightly segment showcasing the latest news from TTC on John Reid-Hansen's programme (Sunday mornings between 10am and 12noon).
23. **Maternity Cover:** The Communications & Events Officer maternity cover, which began mid-May 2024, will end on Friday 28 March 2025.

Legal Powers:

- Local Government Act 1972, Sections 142 and 144

Recommendation:

- i) To note the report.*