



# Streets for All



ENGLISH HERITAGE

Streets are the foreground of our buildings and the backdrop to everyday lives. Yet England's streets are increasingly cluttered with a proliferation of traffic signs, bins, bollards, guard rails and street furniture. This results in streetscapes that are both unsightly and lack character. Co-ordinated action is needed to reverse this decline.

Retaining historic features keeps the streets individuality and helps create a sense of place. It can contribute to regeneration: well designed, well ordered and well maintained streets are an expression of a confident and caring community. Chaotic and cluttered streets can be a symptom of a community in decline with low self-esteem. Investing in quality solutions reduces maintenance costs and makes cleaning easier.

English Heritage's streetscape manuals, *Streets for All*, set out principles of good practice for street management – such as reducing clutter, co-ordinating design and reinforcing local character. The nine manuals, covering each of the English regions, provide inspiration and advice on street design which reflects the region's historic character.

## PRINCIPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE

### GROUND SURFACES

Paving forms the foreground of almost every streetscene. Quality in the design and construction of footways and streets surfaces is vital to the character of an area. It provides the context within which the buildings are seen.

- Relate ground surfaces to the local context
- Keep paving simple and avoid discordant colours
- Maintain and restore historic paving and detail such as kerbs

### STREET FURNITURE

The finest townscapes often have the minimum amount of street furniture. That which is essential is sited carefully to reinforce an underlying sense of visual order.

- Retain historic street furniture which reinforces local character, but identify and remove superfluous or redundant items

- Minimise signage, and locate signs on existing lamp post or buildings, or at the back edge of the pavement
- Use a single dark colour for all items
- Reduce guard rails to a minimum and use designs that relate to the townscape, such as traditional post and rail solutions
- Avoid standardised lighting and choose the design and light source most appropriate for the area
- Wherever possible, eliminate the need for bollards through good design; where unavoidable use designs and materials appropriate to function and context

## TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT

Traffic calming measures should be fitted sensitively into the street-scene as though they were part of the original design of the area.

- Adopt a minimalist approach. Physical measure should involve minimal visual interference with the established streetscene
- Use traditional material such as asphalt and granite setts. Coloured surfaces are usually unnecessary and undesirable and should be avoided
- Confine road markings to those essential for highway safety

## ENVIRONMENTAL IMPROVEMENTS

Environmental improvements should enhance local distinctiveness and reinforce those qualities which make an area special. The most modest schemes are usually the most successful in reinforcing a sense of place and making streets for people. To achieve quality:

A Examples of local paving slabs, setts, bricks and cobbles often survive and they can be the key to regaining a sense of place. Left: Macclesfield, Cheshire.

B Traffic speeds can be reduced without the need for intrusive signs and yellow backing boards.

C Surfaces are traditionally laid in a functional manner. Surviving details, such as radial corners, inset coalholes and setting crossovers, should be noted.

D Widened pavements with courtesy crossings reduce the dominance of traffic. High Street, Shrewsbury.

E In historic areas, traffic management is most effective where it appears to be part of the original design. Crossley Street, Halifax.



- Use a townscape analysis to identify the visual, spatial and historical qualities that make the area special
- Observe local detail in surfaces and street furniture
- Limit formal design to formal spaces; informal or vernacular spaces should follow their functional tradition
- Provide for regular management and maintenance

## STREET MANAGEMENT

No single authority or agency has control over or responsibility for the presentation and management of the street. The impact of roads and traffic on the historic environment can only be minimised if highways and planning authorities are co-ordinated. A managerial approach involving engineers and urban designers is necessary.

- Include clear policies for paving, street furniture and the public realm in development plans and conservation area statements. Local policy and guidance should be based on a detailed understanding of how streets have developed in the past.
- Street audits, carried out jointly by highways and urban design/conservation staff, will identify surviving historical materials and details.
- Investing in quality will provide enduring value for money. If resources are limited, doing less to a high standard is better than compromising. However, all investment must be protected with adequate provision for maintenance.
- Improve levels of urban design awareness amongst highways staff to ensure routine practice decisions are well informed by principles of best practice.

## HIGH STREET, SHREWSBURY

The aims were to reduce the dominance of traffic, to improve pedestrian accessibility and to minimise the amount of signs and road-marking required.

The single-direction carriageway was narrowed to a minimum of 3.5 metres by widening the pavements. It was surfaced with black basalt setts to act as a continuous 'rumble strip'. The footways were surfaced with Yorkstone flags. These materials echoed those traditionally used in the historic town.

The most innovative feature was the provision of pedestrian 'courtesy' crossings at frequent intervals indicated by bands of smooth Yorkstone setts across the street. They were also marked by stout oak posts at the kerb edge. Their informality meant that no white lines or zig-zags were necessary and their frequency is a strong deterrent to traffic speed.

The whole street was made a Restricted Zone so that yellow lines were not needed either. However, it was then necessary to give positive indication of parking places. Small-scale signs attached to the oak bollards were specially authorised. These allocate the use of parking bays for buses, deliveries and blue badge holders.

The scheme has proved popular, with 57% of those surveyed were keen to see further restraint. It has also led to a 34% reduction in traffic volume and a 22% reduction in speed. It shows that it is possible to improve safety through physical enhancement rather than Traffic Regulation Orders.

## CROSSLEY STREET, HALIFAX

A range of traffic management techniques was used to reduce the conflict of traffic speed and volume with pedestrian flows across the street.

The town centre was divided into five zones with no access between them except for buses, taxis, delivery vehicles and cycles. This 'zone and loop' system has reduced traffic volume by 28%. The central Market Quarter is protected as a Pedestrian Zone during the day by rising bollards controlled through the town centre CCTV network. These have successfully prevented the abuse of the restricted entry signs that was previously common.

Local Yorkstone paving was used to widen footways, and sandstone setts provide level crossing 'tables'. The resulting reduction in traffic speed has allowed the use of less obtrusive traffic signs mounted on tubular hoops just 1.1 metres high. By a special dispensation, these have been treated with a high reflectivity finish so that they do not have to carry their own illumination.

Tactile paving at crossing points has been achieved using brass studs. They are fixed in holes drilled on site into the finished stone paving and, while they are expensive, they avoid the need for special cutting and wastage associated with moulded slabs.

This case has succeeded, through multi-disciplinary co-operation, to apply a concerted approach to traffic management. It shows how a town can be enriched by minimising signage and taking advantage of quality materials. In a survey, 82% felt that the appearance of the street had been improved.

