



Design Guide 18

Street Scene & Public Realm

18.1 STREET SCENE & PUBLIC REALM

The finest streetscapes and public realms generally have the minimum amount of street furniture and surface markings. That which is essential is sited to reinforce an underlying sense of visual order. Improvements to streetscapes and the public realm 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 attractive for people. In order to achieve high quality streetscapes and public realms:

- Use a townscape analysis to identify the visual, spatial and historical qualities that make an area special;
- Observe and respect 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.

High quality streetscapes and public realm are not reliant merely upon built elements, but require the careful use of softer or natural elements too, including trees and planting, open space, Green Infrastructure, water courses and public rights of way. The use of street trees and vegetation blocks, for example, can 'soften' and make more appealing and legible an otherwise hard urban landscape.

18.2 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 be minimised if works are coordinated.

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 but of a high standard is better than compromising by doing more of a lesser quality. However, all investment must be protected with adequate provision for ongoing maintenance.

See also: Historic England 'Streets for All' guidance.



18.3 Ground surfaces

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

York stone paving slabs and setts used as part of a streetscape enhancement in the heart of Woodstock Conservation Area.

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



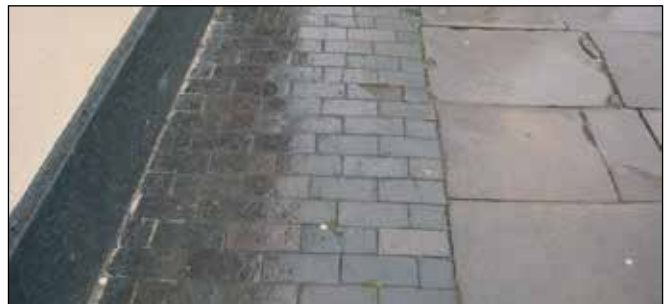
The paving slabs are laid using a traditional bonded pattern found historically throughout the District (as here in Witney).



Stone kerbs are flush with adjacent road surfaces which feature stone setts. Concrete block paviments had bonded yellow lines applied before laying.



York Stone flag footway with a flush adjoining area paved with bonded Staffordshire blue paviments.



Traditional vehicle crossover surfaced with an irregular grid of stone setts; and a modern interpretation using concrete block paviours.



Grass verge with a simple stone kerb and gutter. A traditional cast drain cover is set within the asphalt road surface.



Traditional side road with simple full width tarmac surface shared by vehicles, cyclists and pedestrians: an uncluttered streetscape with minimal road markings.



Simple pedestrian/ cycle route with informal alignment and landscaped edges: the surface is bituminous with embedded aggregate.



New paved surfaces using second-hand and new Staffordshire blue paviours.



18.4 Other traditional surfaces:

Pebbles embedded in lime mortar base; and pitched limestone paving.



New surface treatments: footway and flush road surfaces using coursed and bonded concrete paviours and aggregate embedded bituminous road; paving bordered by wood chip and planting.



18.5 Traffic management

Traffic calming measures should be fitted with sensitivity into the street-scene, as though they were part of the original design of the area. Adopt a minimalist approach. Physical measures should involve minimal visual interference with the established street-scene.



18.6 Street scene and the public realm

The streets and roads of West Oxfordshire 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. Coordinated 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.



Rural environment dominated by intrusive signage which is too high and projects over hedgeline; unnecessary multiple footway. Footway appearance dominated by rumble strips and painted surfaces.



18.7 Street furniture

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



Minimise signage, and locate signs on existing lamp posts 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 fencing.



Avoid standardised lighting and choose the design and light source most appropriate for the area. Care should be taken to ensure that well-used routes are well lit and feel safe. However, excessive, inefficient and intrusive illumination, both from street lighting and buildings, can cause undue light pollution and reduce dark skies.



Wherever possible, eliminate the need for bollards through good design; where unavoidable use designs and materials appropriate to function and context.



18.8 Boundary treatments

Boundary treatments should be carefully chosen to reinforce local character. Metal railings were a common feature during the C19 and can be appropriate to modern urban settings.



Traditional parkland fencing is well-suited to the edge of farm- or open land.



Traditional walling types can be adapted to modern urban settings. Note parkland-style tree guard.



Other types of boundary feature, including hedging, willow hurdles and slatted fencing, are particularly well suited to the rural context.

