

8 Reducing sign clutter

Through time many streets have become the victims of street clutter as a result of the inclusion of excessive amounts of street furniture: conventional parking and direction signs, advertising, and ad hoc signing to reduce specific inappropriate activities. Each of these combine to create a foreground that is confused and cluttered, where all emphasis has been taken away from a pleasant built environment. In particular much of the street signing has been implemented at different times, responding to the immediate needs of the street. It is important to strike a balance between essential signing and unnecessary, unsightly clutter. This has always been a dilemma for traffic engineers who are responsible for both providing information to road users and maintaining highway safety, though no signs are required by Traffic Signs Regulations & General Directions (TSRGD) 2002 per se. There is increasing realisation of the intrinsic value that a quality uncluttered street environment brings to its surroundings, and designers should start from a position of having no signs, and introduce them only where they have a clear function.

When new signing is being installed a common mistake has been to ignore the surrounding buildings,

spaces and pedestrian accesses near where it is to be placed. This has resulted in signing which may be oversized for its context, may be mounted on individual columns when signs could have been combined with others close by, and may even give confusing or contradictory messages. This may have happened through ad hoc changes to aspects of street management, or limited budgets that would preclude a regular re-signing programme.

High speed roads, as opposed to town streets, require larger signs with larger lettering to ensure their visibility is retained. Implementation of a bypass and the use of traffic calming techniques on the old road can result in the reduction in traffic volumes and speeds. This would allow for signing sizes to be reduced but can often be ignored and money spent elsewhere on projects deemed high priority. This should not be the case as it is important that a regular programme to review signage is undertaken so that the visual integrity of our streets, especially those in more sensitive historic locations can be maintained. Reducing traffic speeds in many contexts, can allow many text-based sign sizes to be reduced.

General Advice

- 1 Where possible combine signing with other elements if in close proximity to existing lighting, street furniture or signing. Consideration should be given to the sign being placed strategically so that it replaces other street elements which are seen as necessary (e.g. bollards acting as an access deterrent).
- 2 Always review the context into which signs will be placed to ensure the minimum size and number of signs are used.
- 3 Be aware of other colours and materials being used in the area. Can these be reflected in the choice of mounting for the sign?
- 4 For additional information and advice regarding the reduction of sign clutter please refer to Section 3 Street Furniture, of all English Heritage's regional *Streets for All* guidance.

Procedures

- 1 Undertake a full street audit which records all elements of street furniture, signage and road markings.
- 2 Identify those signs which are redundant, are too large for their location, give confusing/contradictory messages or could be combined with others and fixed in a simpler manner.
- 3 Develop a consistent pragmatic approach to implementing new signage so that a consistent cohesive approach is maintained.
- 4 The following list should be considered before implementing any new sign:
 - Is the sign or amount of signs necessary for the safety and use of the street?

- What is the speed limit for the road? Is the sign of an appropriate size for the type of street in which it is to be placed? Could the permitted speed of vehicles be reduced?
- Have you ensured that it is located sympathetically, but is still effective in use, especially regarding its mounting height?
- Can it be combined with other elements that are in close proximity such as lighting, street furniture or signing?
- Are you able to use sympathetic materials or colour for the posts or consider using an adjacent building or boundary wall to mount onto?
- Does the new sign give a consistent clear message when read in conjunction with the surrounding network?

Relevant Documents and Legislation

- Traffic Signs Regulations and General Directions 2002 (TSRGD) <http://www.opsi.gov.uk/SI/si2002/20023113.htm>.
- Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984
- Road Traffic Act 1991
- Traffic Signs Manual
www.dft.gov.uk/pgr/roads/tss/tsmanual
- 07/91 20mph Speed Limited Zones, *DfT Traffic Advisory Leaflet*¹
- 01/00 Traffic Calming Regulations, *DfT Traffic Advisory Leaflet*²
- Traffic Measures in Historic Town Centres, *Civic Trust/English Historic Towns Forum*, 1993
- Traffic in Historic Towns, *English Historic Towns Forum*, 1994
- All regional Streets For All guidance documents produced by English Heritage.
- LTN 1/94 The Design and use of Directional Information Signs
- TAL 06/05 Traditional Direction Signs
- Manual for Streets, Chapter 9 Traffic Signs and Markings, DfT, 2007:
- Manual for Historic Streets
English Historic Towns Forum, May 2008
- Traffic Management and Streetscape LTN 1/08
Department for Transport, March 2008

¹ Note that this guidance should be used with care as it pre-dates the current 2002 TSRGD.

² Ibid

Supporting Case Study

Erith – Town Centre Improvements

Erith is a small historic estuary town which has lost much of its distinctive character through extensive redevelopment since the 1970s. Erith provides an example where there has been a successful scheme to minimise street clutter, such as the removal of a number of large signs within a conservation area. The scheme also provided improvements to pedestrian circulation and the reduction of traffic speeds. The scheme was funded by the ODPM and all works were completed on site by July 2006.

The Erith sign reduction scheme included the following process:

Sign and post inventory gathering

An inventory of existing signs and posts within a defined area of study was taken and the data recorded on a plan to an appropriate scale. Positions for signs and posts were sited on plans, numbered and labelled to match or correspond with their pictures. Sign locations and picture records become vital when examining options for the amalgamation of some signs.

Eliminating unnecessary signs and posts

A group of engineers and highways council officers with local knowledge walked the scheme to decide which signs and posts needed to be removed. At this stage unwanted street bollards and other signs like street names were recommended for removal.

Rationalising of signage

Once unnecessary signage had been removed, there was then a rationalisation of any remaining signs, and those that could be amalgamated into one were combined. Where combined signs met the road safety standards but not the TSRGD legislation 2002, then special dispensation was requested from the Department of Transport. On many occasions, 'direction' signs were repeated too often and were combined and located strategically.

The outcome of the project has been perceived as a success by the local authority as the character of the street has been greatly enhanced by the reduction in street signage clutter without the need to reduce vehicle safety. However, suggestions for future schemes to reduce sign clutter are to include urban designers in the process, eliminating unnecessary signs and posts and exploring opportunities to mount signs on buildings and existing posts, and reduce yellow lines.



01 Before: Erith's Conservation Area was dominated by oversized and excessive amounts of traffic signage and street furniture

03 Views of the town are significantly improved by the simplification of the street environment

02 After: The reduction of clutter combined with overall public realm improvements improved the character of the area. However the use of new lines is perhaps excessive. The yellow lines may not actually be required at crossovers and could have been lemon or cream coloured to reduce its visual impact



01 Over elaborate signing implemented without any thought to its location and the impact it has on the street environment and the confusion of message it gives



02 An excess of signing – the overall design should remove the need for this through better road alignment and sign location

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