

**Quality Of the Public Realm
Bexhill Alliance Street Audit
23 June 2016**

Introduction

The aim of the Bexhill Alliance is to improve the condition of footways and street furniture in the Town Centre by means of a Street Audit in accordance with guidelines issued by Living Streets, Guide Dogs and English Heritage "Streets for All".

The guidelines suggest that the whole community should be involved in the Street Audit including residents, officers, Councillors, businesses and other organisations with an interest in making the Town Centre Built Environment safer and more attractive for people.

The first aim is to increase the footway areas available for pedestrians by "decluttering". This can be achieved by the removal of obstructions such as dead trees, tree stumps and redundant posts etc. Seats, litter bins and cycle stands could also be relocated to better locations away from the main pedestrian through routes.

The second aim is to make the Town Centre Built Environment more attractive by implementing:

1. The policy of Rother District Council approved in 2004.
2. The Town Centre Strategy approved by the Town Centre Steering Group in June 2013
3. The RDC Core Strategy approved in September 2014.

Details of these documents are included in Appendix 1 at the end of this report.

Bexhill Town Centre Street Audit

A comprehensive survey has been undertaken by the Bexhill Alliance in conjunction with officers from ESCC and RDC and other interested parties.

This street audit has covered all aspects of the Built Environment as detailed below:

1. An inspection of all footways .
2. A condition survey of all street furniture.
3. Production of a report for each item of street furniture with recommendations as to the way forward for a coordinated "whole street" approach to improving the street scene and the pedestrian experience.
4. A condition survey of road markings in accordance with recommended guidelines.

Photos will be included in appendices for each of the 4 surveys/ inspections showing typical examples of the poor quality / condition of the footways and street furniture as a result of little or no expenditure on routine maintenance.

These photos will also include examples of damaged posts, signs, cycle stands, bollards, benches, litter bins, bus shelters and trees some of which will need to be replaced as they are now beyond repair.

Progress so far

Tree Replacement and Maintenance Substantially completed.

Bexhill Alliance members, together with James Newmarch, ESCC Tree Officer, carried out a survey of all missing trees and those in need of removal and replacement in September 2014. Following this a list of trees in need of replacement was agreed with Mr Newmarch.

Bexhill Alliance submitted this list, together with the costs of these replacements, to the Town Team. The Town Centre Steering Group approved the budget to allow the tree replacement to be carried out. This work has now been substantially completed with an immediate improvement to the street environment.

2 damaged trees are due to be replaced in Western Road and Devonshire Road.

Recommendation

Additional and replacement trees should be planted in accordance with RDC policy where possible and appropriate.

The gaps in the existing Oxford tree grids should be filled with suitable material to footway level to remove the trip hazards.

1. An inspection of all footways

An inspection of all the footways confirms the condition is poor. Little or no maintenance has been carried out and then only on the basis of repairing defects which are a trip hazard for pedestrians, identified as a result of safety inspections by the Highway Steward.

Damaged or uneven gratings are replaced or partly replaced by pipes.

Reinstatements of excavations are to a poor quality finish leaving the footway uneven and a patchwork of different colours.

Devonshire Road is the worse example of a footway which has failed. The same specification of red asphalt was used on the Marina Scheme against the advice of the Bexhill Alliance. This footway surface has failed in large areas which have been replaced.

The area of asphalt footway outside the Italian Way has holes in it which have still not been repaired after a year. These holes are a trip hazard especially for people with disabilities.

Paving should have been used to withstand the impact loading of Tables and Chairs.

Recommendation

Only quality paving be used in all future pedestrian schemes in the Town Centre in accordance with RDC policy.

2. A condition survey of all street furniture.

The condition of the street furniture is poor and in some cases corroded beyond repair.

This applies equally to street furniture which is the responsibility of ESCC and RDC.

Recently most of the existing cycle stands, benches, litter bins, flower boxes, columns and posts have been painted which improved the street scene.

Unfortunately the existing finger posts and bollards are in a poor condition and also need to be painted.

Recommendation

Introduce a system of repainting **all** street furniture on a formal regular routine basis.

3a Benches and Litter Bins

Bexhill Alliance members carried out a survey of all benches and litter bins in Devonshire Road and Western Road. The benches and litter bins which obstruct the main pedestrians routes should be relocated on to footway build outs. The Alliance's recommendations were submitted to the Town Team and Cllrs. Elford and Hughes for consideration by the Town Centre Steering Group in 2014.

The relocation of these benches and litter bins should have been coordinated with the proposed locations of new cycle stands produced by the Town Team and already approved by the Steering Group. Regrettably that did not happen.

Recommendation

Benches and litter bins which obstruct the main pedestrian route should be relocated to build outs or more appropriate locations.

Additional benches could be installed in Devonshire Square and other locations in the Town centre where none exist at present.

Note the Oasis Garden design included an additional bench which was not installed.

3b. Bus Shelters

Alliance members also noted that the existing bus shelter in Sackville Road is in a poor state and beyond repair and that the bus shelter on the West side of Devonshire Road will need replacing in the near future.

Both of these shelters obstruct most of the adopted public footway which means that pedestrians and wheelchair users have to use the private shop forecourts as the only pedestrian route along the public footways. This is an unacceptable risk to the public and the design of any new bus shelters will need to provide a minimum width of footway within the adopted highway for pedestrians and wheelchair users.

Recommendation

These 2 bus shelters should be replaced by bus shelters which leave a clear passage for pedestrians on the public footway in accordance with best practice guidelines.

3c Cycle Stands

A number of new cycle stands have been installed in the Town Centre to match the existing Edwardian cycle stands. The original aim was to try and provide cycle stands in St Leonards Road but none were provided even though the Alliance suggested suitable locations.

3 new Theta cycle stands have been installed with other street furniture such as benches and a litter bin in the Oasis Garden, the aim was to complement the Next Wave scheme.

In fact the litter bin and cycle stands are not the same as those used in the Next Wave scheme or anywhere else in the Town Centre. Only the benches are to the same design as the seafront.

Recommendation

All street furniture in the Conservation Area should be to the same specification and comply with RDC conservation policy and reflect the Edwardian Character.

3d Signage Finger Posts Maps etc.

New signage including Maps and finger posts have been installed. These have been painted in the approved "green" colour except for the Car park.

Recommendation

Paint **all** existing maps and finger posts in the approved "green" colour.

3e Flower boxes

There are 5 flower boxes in the Town Centre which have recently been painted. The flower box on the West footway of Devonshire Road and Marina was removed on the recommendation of the Stage 2 Road Safety Audit for Marina. This flower box has now been placed on the opposite side of the junction.

Similarly the flower box in Devonshire Road South of Parkhurst Road obstructs sightlines for pedestrians and drivers.

Recommendation

Review the location of all flower boxes for safety of the public.

3f Signs, posts and lamp columns

A number of signs and posts do not comply with the guidelines in the Traffic Signs Manual. Signs should have a clearance of 450 mm from the kerb but posts should not obstruct the main pedestrian route. Signs should be installed at a minimum clearance height of 2.1 metres from the footway surface.

Columns should be installed at the back of path or at the front of the footway.

A number of signs and columns do not comply with these guidelines and in particular in the Marina Scheme. The Bexhill Alliance has advised ESCC but no action has been taken to rectify these faults.

Examples of non compliance are a column in the middle of the footway in Parkhurst Road and the 20 mph terminal signs in Marina.

Recommendation

ESCC inspect all signs and columns to ensure compliance with the Traffic Signs Manual.

3g Bollards

Footway bollards are necessary to prevent the illegal parking on footways and ensure a safe pedestrian route for pedestrians especially people who are visually impaired. Guide Dogs have a campaign to raise awareness of the problem of parking on footways. Enforcement does / will not fully solve the problem. Safety must come before aesthetics.

ESCC and RDC have been advised of a number of locations where bollards should be erected. These include Marina West of Devonshire Road and St Leonards Road junction with Eversley Road.

Recommendation

ESCC and RDC urgently consider the installation of bollards to prevent parking at locations where the main pedestrian route is obstructed.

ESCC and RDC ensure that an Edwardian type of bollard is chosen as the Standard for all footway bollards for the Conservation Area.

4. Road Markings

The poor condition of road markings is evident especially at pedestrian crossings and junctions. A survey has been carried out by the Bexhill Alliance to identify those locations which are of particular concern regarding road safety.

Some of these have been reported to ESCC, for example the Give Way marking outside the Town House, Buckhurst Place.

Road Markings contribute significantly to road safety and should be renewed on a regular basis in accordance with best practice. Pedestrian crossing markings in Devonshire Road are badly worn as are Stop, Slow and Give Way markings in Bexhill.

Recommendation

A formalised Road Marking System is introduced by ESCC to ensure a proactive approach to the renewal of road markings.

5. Dropped kerbs and Tactile Paving.

Dropped kerbs and tactile paving are a vital safety aid for people with disabilities, especially partially sighted people, and should be installed correctly in accordance with National Guidelines.

Dropped kerbs should be installed flush or with a maximum kerb face of 6mm.

Unfortunately in Bexhill Town Centre generally and more recently as part of the Marina Pedestrian Improvement Scheme dropped kerbs and tactile paving have not been installed in accordance with National Guidelines.

The Bexhill Alliance have advised ESCC of this non compliance in a detailed report on the Marina scheme and individual reports for other locations in Bexhill Town Centre.

ESCC have denied any non compliance on the Marina scheme but are wrong.

Clearly ESCC have not complied with the National Guidelines which is to assist people who are visually impaired.

It is interesting and relevant that ESCC Road Safety have confirmed that tactile paving has not been installed correctly, and not at all, at some formal crossing locations in Bexhill Town Centre such as Sackville Road junction with Western Road.

As a result ESCC could face litigation in the same way that Newham Council did for failing to follow National Guidelines relating to Tactile Paving. Judgement was found against Newham Council.

The Bexhill Alliance has reported ponding at a number of dropped kerbs on Fix My Street and directly to ESCC who have stated that it is too difficult to rectify all ponding!!! at dropped kerbs even though this was a concern raised in the Marina Stage 3 Road Safety Audit.

The main aim of the Marina Scheme was to provide a direct pedestrian route between Devonshire Road and the Seafront.

This has not been achieved for people with difficulties as dropped kerbs have not been provided in Marina Court Avenue and at other locations. RDC and ESCC have been informed.

Recommendation

ESCC should survey all formal and informal crossing points in the Town Centre. Dropped kerbs and tactile paving which do not meet National Guideline should be replaced. A consistent specification standard should be adopted by ESCC for the Town Centre. At present there are at least 5 different specifications for tactile paving at formal crossing points and 3 different specification for tactile paving at informal crossing points, This can cause confusion for people who are visually impaired. There should be one specification for each type of crossing.

6. Disabled Parking De La Warr car park

As part of the RDC Oasis scheme the De La Warr car park was redesigned. The newly marked out Disabled Parking Bays do not comply with recommended best practice which is to have a 1.2 metre access width either side of the normal 2.4 metre wide parking bay. Other RDC car parks in Bexhill also do not comply with best practice. The correct layout for disabled parking bays can be seen in Sainsbury's car park. RDC have been advised.

Recommendation

The layout of all disabled parking bays in all RDC public car parks should be surveyed and disabled parking bays remarked in accordance with recommended best practice guidelines.

7. Standards and Maintenance

7.1 Standards

The materials to be used for footway surfacing and street furniture for new schemes in Bexhill Town Centre Conservation Area are defined in the policy and strategy outlined in the introduction above and Appendix 1.

The materials used in the Marina Scheme and Oasis scheme do not comply with the Conservation Policy and their installation does not meet safety requirements outlined in National Guidelines.

RDC and ESCC have been informed.

The result is another type of footway bollard, another type of litter bin, another type of cycle stand and finally another type of bench none of which comply with the Bexhill Conservation Policy.

In summary the Town Centre Conservation Area there now has:

1. 5 types of litter bins
2. 5 types of cycle stands
3. 3 types of benches
4. 3 types of footway bollards
5. 3 types of keep left bollards.

Recommendation

ESCC and RDC should introduce a Bexhill Edwardian Standard for Street Furniture in the Conservation Area in accordance with their policies and strategy documents.

Officers are instructed to comply with that standard in future. Existing non compliant street furniture should be replaced.

7.2 Maintenance

Some of the existing benches, lamp columns, litter bins, flower boxes and cycle stands have recently been repainted in the Town Centre.

The remaining street furniture is in poor condition especially the pedestrian crossing "beacon posts" in Devonshire Road.

Road markings are only renewed when the road is resurfaced.

Recommendation

ESCC and RDC review their policy and procedures for the maintenance of footways, carriageways, street furniture and road markings etc. to ensure that regular routine cost effective programmes are introduced which makes the Town Centre safer and more attractive. This will avoid the situation where street furniture corrodes so badly that it has to be replaced at much greater cost and road markings are missing..

8. Decluttering

2 years ago the Bexhill Alliance recommended that benches and litter bins be relocated to "declutter" the footways and provide a safer and easier pedestrian through route.

We have also identified a number of locations where the relocation/ removal of redundant street furniture would result in an immediate improvement in pedestrian safety and the street scene.

One example, of many, is in Marina on the South footway where a tourist sign was removed over 4 years ago but the supporting 2 posts have not been removed.

ESCC have also been advised of concerns regarding the obstruction caused by Tables and Chairs and A Boards.

Recommendation

Decluttering should be carried in accordance with the recommendations of Guide Dogs.

There would be an immediate improvement to Safety and the Street scene.

See Appendix 2 Guide Dogs "Our recommendations Advice for Businesses and Councils".

Conclusion

The Street Audit carried out by the Bexhill Alliance has shown what can be achieved, at a relatively low cost, to improve the safety and appearance of the Town Centre for pedestrians and wheelchair users.

This has been achieved in the replacement of dead or missing trees and the painting of lamp columns, sign posts, benches, litter bins, flower boxes and cycle stands in the now Standard Green colour.

Bexhill Alliance

23 June 2016

Appendix 1

1. Rother District Council Policy and Conservation Area Appraisal February 2004.

This appraisal acknowledged that the Built Environment has not been maintained to the Standard expected in Bexhill Town Centre and a Conservation Area.

The relevant paragraphs from the Conservation Appraisal document are:

Paragraph 6

6. Detrimental features

6.1 A number of detrimental features are evident in the conservation area because of a lack of investment, which can be seen in:

- Badly maintained, varied concrete paving.
- Poor quality or damaged street furniture (seats, litter bins, bollards).

Paragraph 7

7. The Public Realm

7.9 There has been a gradual and remorseless erosion of character in the streets and public spaces in the town centre coupled with a corresponding lack of maintenance which has resulted in its present poor appearance. Highways are primarily the responsibility of the County Council who, with this Council, published in 1995 proposals and guidelines for improvements in the appearance of the Town Centre's streets. The proposals set out ideas for recapturing the charm which the town centre's streets formerly possessed and have been used to guide improvements in the public realm such as the recently completed works in Western Road.

7.10 Where opportunities arise, the Council will encourage the restoration of original character by reinstating appropriate cast iron lamp columns, street trees and footway paving slabs.

2. The Town Centre Strategy document approved in June 2013 relating to the Built Environment states :

2.0 OUR OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this Strategy are:

To maintain and enhance the quality of the built environment in the town centre, including the public realm.

7.3 The Built Environment

The town centre provides a fine example of an unusually complete Edwardian townscape built principally between 1880 and 1905. The architecture here is particularly consistent, with a variety of examples of competent Edwardian detailing.

The quality of the built environment plays a key part in defining the character of the town centre, and well-planned maintenance, management and improvement are key for the town's future aspirations.

Public Realm

17.34 It is important to recognise that the character of the built environment is informed by both the architectural qualities of individual buildings and the design and management of the spaces in between. The public realm can be considered to encompass open spaces, streets, pavements, and other routes, street furniture and equipment, signage, lighting, railings, and such other features. The quality of the public realm, in terms of circulation, connectivity, activity and visual appearance, is a key component of successful places, and is highlighted in the document 'Streets for All: South East'60, which promotes a coordinated approach to public realm management, the design of street furniture, and the reduction of street 'clutter', in particular road signage, within legislative requirements.

Policy EN4: Management of the Public Realm

Priority will be given to working with the relevant agencies to:

- (i) Apply the principles of 'Streets for All: South East', to ensure high quality management and maintenance of the district's public realm, with appropriate materials and strategic design vision, to ensure local distinctiveness in both urban and rural areas is respected, and historic features are retained;
- (ii) Develop investment programmes in public realm improvements and enhancements, including reduction of street clutter and road signage;
- (iii) Continue to bring forward programmes to enhance activity and the use of public space.

Appendix 2

GUIDE DOGS

Street Clutter Survey 2012

Thank you to all the volunteers who completed a Street Clutter survey for us earlier this year. We can now reveal how big a problem poorly positioned A Boards, rubbish bins and other obstructions are on High Streets across the UK.

A-Boards were the most frequently encountered obstacle (38% of all obstacles identified)

Nearly 40% of high streets had A-Boards placed in no particular order

Cafés were the type of business most frequently using A-Boards and over a quarter of the A-Boards listed were used by cafes, restaurants, pubs or bars.

Colchester High Street had the most A-boards, with 65 listed.

Camden was the most cluttered of all the 65 towns surveyed, with 109 separate obstacles identified along the High Street.

Only 19% of Café's surveyed were using A-Boards effectively

To improve the situation we have made [six key recommendations for businesses and councils](#).

The [Executive Summary \(PDF 63kb\)](#) has lots more information, and the [full set of Results \(PDF 313kb\)](#) are also available.

If you have any questions, or would like the Executive Summary or the full Results in an alternative format, please [email us](#).

Our recommendations

Advice for businesses and councils

Having a clear pathway is crucial for many blind and partially sighted pedestrians who wish to navigate along their high street independently. Street clutter such as A-Boards, bicycle racks and static council bins can cause obstructions which can hamper a person's progress along a high street.

The Guide Dogs Street Clutter Survey 2012 sought to better understand the problems caused by everyday obstructions and to identify which high streets need to most urgently address the problems of street clutter.

Following publication of the results, Guide Dogs made six key recommendations for businesses and councils.

Ideally Guide Dogs would like High Streets to be clutter free as regardless of their placement items such as A-Boards will always potentially cause an obstruction. However; Guide Dogs understands that A-Boards and other items of street clutter may be unavoidable. In such circumstances we have the following guidelines to help councils and businesses limit the disruption caused by street clutter and maximise the use of exterior advertising tools:

Street Clutter should be positioned consistently along a pavement, leaving an unobstructed pathway for pedestrians.

Guide Dogs do not recommend whether this should be along the walls of the building or the kerb; however, whichever placement is preferred by the council or businesses should be applied consistently along the street. Once a position has been agreed upon this should remain consistent everyday to help blind and partially sighted pedestrians learn to avoid these obstacles along the route.

Where possible a gap of 1.5 metres should be left on the pavement for pedestrians to pass unobstructed.

Walking with a guide dog can mean a person needs more room to walk along a street than if they were unaided. Therefore a space of 1.5 metres on the pavement should be large enough for a guide dog and owner to fit comfortably through and should be left whenever possible. A space should also be left between items to ensure pedestrians can enter and leave businesses without unnecessary obstruction. This could also help Wheelchair users to move freely along the pavement.

Businesses should only use A-Boards where necessary.

If an A-Board simply repeats information from the shop front then a business should question whether the stand really required.

Items of street clutter should always be painted in a strong colour contrast or marked with colour contrasting hazard tape.

A strong colour contrast which stands out against the item's surroundings and in different weather conditions will help partially sighted pedestrians identify and manoeuvre around an obstacle more easily. This should also be considered for temporary items of street clutter such as ladders.

Councils should consider introducing licensing for A-Boards to ensure appropriate use along the high street.

The Highways Act 1980 places a duty on Highway Authorities to maintain roads and footpaths for the safety of users. In particular Section 148 highlights that if, without lawful authority or excuse, a person deposits any thing whatsoever on a highway to the interruption of any user of the highway it is an offence which is liable to a fine. In Scotland similar guidelines are expressed in Transport Scotland's Good Practice Guide for Roads 2009. Guide Dogs believe a licensing system would be a clear way for council's to enact this duty.

Councils should consider the enforcement of sectioned off areas of Café street furniture.

There are multiple benefits to sectioning off outside areas of café tables, chairs and other furniture. Using structures with both top and bottom tapping rail will aid blind and partially sighted pedestrians who use a long cane from walking into table and chairs and disturbing customers enjoying their social activity. In turn it will prevent such customers from having someone walk into them with a stick or long cane. A further benefit is security as customers may feel more relaxed having their bags and shopping protected behind the covering. Such structures could also be used for advertising, reducing the need to have A-Boards and other advertisements cluttering the environment. These structures could also restrict businesses and customers from encroaching beyond their allocated space and thereby preventing them from obstructing the footway for passing pedestrians.