Abstract

This paper outlines the findings from the preparation of a new Streetscape Design Handbook for the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. It draws on best practice streetscape design practice across Europe and applies this to the particularities of the Kent Downs. The central argument is that “shared space” and “contextual design” approaches offer more than simple aesthetic rewards and can lead to improved safety, quality of life and civility.

A brief review of the problem of traffic growth and poor streetscape design is followed by the development of good streetscape design principles for the Kent Downs. These include coverage of:

- Planning for pedestrians and cyclists
- Managing traffic
- Road surfaces, paving and edge treatments
- Street furniture
- Signing
- Landscape and ecological features

The paper uses a number of case studies to illustrate what the design principles might mean in practice in the Kent Downs and concludes with a synthesis of key issues. The special quality of the landscape in the Kent Downs demands a special approach to the design of the street and landscape; one that reinforces and enhances landscape quality.
1. INTRODUCTION

The magnificent character of the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) - with its protected landscapes, dramatic views, rich habitats, ancient woodlands and beautiful lanes and villages - is worthy of special conservation and enhancement.

This paper reports on the preparation of a new Streetscape Design Handbook which aims to provide a new approach to the design of existing and new streets and lanes in the Kent Downs. Drawing on best practice across Europe, including so-called “shared space” and “contextual design” approaches, the Handbook aims to develop an enhanced streetscape in the Downs - one that contributes to and enhances the special character of the landscape and built environment.

Much of our thinking in the Handbook draws on the interesting and often counter-intuitive work being developed in places such as Freisland in the Netherlands. Here much of the clutter in highway design is removed, with vehicles, pedestrians and cyclists using the resulting shared space together. Surprising road safety statistics result – the removal of extraneous traffic engineering “paraphernalia” appears to result in reduced accidents and casualties. Instead, a reduction in segregation and increase in social interaction improves safety. Pedestrians and cyclists no longer “withdraw” from using previously traffic-dominated streets.

The shared space and contextual design approach is slowly evolving in the UK. There are some well-known experiences in London, especially...
along streetscapes with special character, in places such as High Street Kensington (aligned with high street retailing). Plans are being developed for Exhibition Road in Kensington (home to the Science, Natural History and Victoria & Albert Museums and Imperial College), and Euston Road (the British Library, Regents Park and many historic buildings). The World Squares Initiative in London follows similar design principles. Experience in rural areas is less frequent - but there are examples around - for example, new streetscape designs in Shrewsbury and Fakenham town centres, Stiffkey and Starston (both Norfolk) and Wellow (Somerset). All are premised on “winning back” public space from traffic and reallocating it to pedestrians, cyclists and social activities.

The paper is structured as follows: a brief review of the problem, a consideration of good streetscape design principles, together with a number of case studies illustrating what this might mean in practice in the Kent Downs, and concludes with a synthesis of key issues arising.

2. THE PROBLEM: TOO MUCH PRIORITY FOR THE MOTORIST

Too often our impressions as we journey through the Kent Downs are of clutter, street signs, garish yellow and white lining, uncoordinated street furniture and unsympathetic traffic management schemes. All this takes away from the unique character of the Downs.

A lack of sense of place and distinctiveness and increased traffic levels pervade. The resulting visual confusion diminishes the quality of life in the AONB – for both residents and visitors. Much of the clutter is driven by perceived safety concerns - however although we might know where and how we should drive, cross the road, walk and cycle - the rules are however all too often too apparent. There is little concern for quality in streetscape design - yet this is an important part of the essence of the Kent Downs; one of the reasons people like to live there and to visit.

New development pressures, poor design of new development within sensitive landscapes, illegal access and increasing recreational use of the countryside all add to these difficulties.
Common problems: This type of highway treatment is not appropriate in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
Concerns over the quality and use of the streetscape are, of course, symptoms of a wider problem. Increases in traffic volumes run counter to broad sustainability objectives, and are linked to the debate concerning transport and its contribution to global warming. There are additional concerns here in terms of transport and social inclusion, the promotion of accessibility and access for all.

Traffic growth and the pervasive use of motor cars have had a huge adverse impact on street life in the UK. Transport planners and engineers have accorded the motorist priority over other street users, and as result pedestrians and cyclists have retreated as the threat from traffic increases. A number of common myths are evident concerning streetscape design (see Box 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Box 1: The Common Myths</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. The only way to tackle speeding traffic is to have more signs, tighter rules and more enforcement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Response:</strong> Research and practice, both in the UK and abroad, suggests that fewer signs and clutter allow social and cultural constraints to come to the forefront and can be very effective in reducing speeds. Drivers become more socially interactive and rely more on eye contact to avoid collisions with other vehicles, cyclists and pedestrians.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Guardrails are essential to improve pedestrian safety</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Response:</strong> Barriers between pedestrians and traffic can encourage higher speeds and generate a false sense of security. They reduce visibility for children and people in wheelchairs and inconvenience pedestrians. There is little evidence to suggest they improve safety in the long-term.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. We have the safest streets in Europe.</td>
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<td><strong>Response:</strong> Kent has been relatively successful in reducing casualties for drivers and car passengers. But this has possibly been at a cost to other street users. Non car users, including pedestrians and cyclists, and particularly children, have withdrawn from using the streets. Well-designed streets should mean safer travel for all.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. The only way to control parking is to use yellow lines and signs.</td>
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<td><strong>Response:</strong> Some parking restriction signs are no longer legally required. And some towns in the UK have already adopted the simple principle, already widely used in mainland Europe, to identify where you can park, rather than where you cannot. Yellow lines are unnecessary where parking would clearly cause an obstruction. Where used, they need be no wider than 50 mm.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. White centre line markings are necessary on all but minor roads to help prevent collisions.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Response:</strong> Recent evidence shows that centre lines increase traffic speed. They also reduce driver awareness of the surrounding activity by drawing the eyes towards the far distance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Standardised road signs and markings are essential.</td>
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</table>
Response: Standardised signs may be appropriate on trunk roads and motorways. In built up areas, in villages or towns, they often have little effect on driver behaviour. Legible streets with their own distinctive identity and sense of place achieve safety through enhancing driver concentration.

7. Traffic lights are essential for road safety and reducing congestion at busy junctions.

Response: Traffic lights are only necessary where streets are designed for vehicle speeds above 30 mph. They do not necessarily reduce accidents. Uncontrolled junctions can encourage lower speeds and greater caution, and can reduce delays to vehicles and pedestrians. Across Europe, many traffic lights are being removed at busy intersections with positive results.

(Based on English Heritage, Save Our Streets, 2004)


The forthcoming Manual for Streets (Department for Transport) frustratingly only has a brief to cover the design of streets in areas of new development. The vast majority of streets in the Kent Downs are thus not covered by existing guidance documents or planned new ones - there is therefore currently a policy vacuum in terms of providing a consistent way forward for streetscape design – and this is particularly important in areas of landscape quality. The result is that inappropriate guidance templates are used in the Downs.

3. BUT WHAT DO WE MEAN BY CHARACTER?

Much of the shared space and contextual design approach is premised on conserving and enhancing existing local character. In a place such as the Kent Downs there is much to work with. A landscape character assessment for the Kent Downs AONB was published in 1995. It identifies, describes and classifies the characteristics of the AONB – 13 character areas are developed (see Box 2 and Figure 1 below).

Box 2: Kent Downs AONB: Landscape Character Areas

1. Darent Valley - Brasted to Farningham: the River Darent runs between the Greensand Ridge and the chalk downs in a wide valley enclosed by deciduous scarp-top woodlands above cultivated lower slopes;

2. Sevenoaks Ridge - Westerham to Ightham: extensive coniferous and deciduous woodlands, concealing a network of narrow lanes, with heathy commons along the top of the southern scarp;
3. Low Weald - Crockham Hill to Shipbourne: a landscape of gentle, underlating farmland, stretching south from the wooded scarp of the Greensand Ridge;

4. West Kent Downs - West Kingsdown to Shorne: an area of ridges and valleys, where extensive deciduous woodlands surround large arable fields on the plateaux, often separated by thick shaws;

5. Kemsing Vale: the Vale runs along the foot of the Downs; whilst the steep scarp rising to the north is a patchwork of woodland and chalk grassland. Thick hedges along the Pilgrim’s Way separate the scarp from the large scarp-foot arable fields;

6. Medway – Birling to Cuxton and Wouldham to Aylesford: wooded upper scarps with large arable fields on the scarp foot;

7. Hollingbourne Vale – Boxley to Westwell: a narrow strip along the scarp and scarp foot, includes yew-dominated woodlands in the west to open, cultivated fields, extending up the scarp to the east;

8. Mid-Kent Downs – Boxley to Selling: a series of wide ridges and dry valleys; tiny scattered villages are linked by a network of single track lanes. There are many extensive coppice woodlands and conifer woodlands;

9. Stour – Brook to Chartham: deciduous scarp-top woodlands occur on both sides of the valley, with mixed farmland below;

10. East Kent Downs – Crundale, Bridge, Capel-le-Ferne to Lyminge: includes a wide expanse of downland, with long ridges and narrow, dry valleys, emphasised by wooded upper slopes;

11. Postling Vale – Brabourne to Newington: covers the undulating countryside between the chalk scarp above Folkestone and the Hythe escarpment above Romney Marsh;

12. Lympne – Bonnington to Hythe: scrub and species-rich, rough grassland on the scarp, giving these slopes a ‘wild’, undisturbed character;

13. South Foreland – Dover to Kingsdown: includes the white cliffs of the Dover to Kingsdown heritage coast and the downland behind. An open, exposed landscape with farms and small settlements, fringed by trees.

A landscape of this quality demands special streetscape improvements - they must be sensitive to and enhance the landscape.

In terms of historic streetscape character, the Downs includes many historic lanes, providing a rich history of the routes of movement used by people to communicate and trade in earlier times. There are a variety of different types of routes, as outlined below:

- Prehistoric tracks/routeways: discounting small field lanes, these are best regarded as routes of movement, often as braided trackways.
where crossing steep slopes. It seems likely that Watling Street and the Ridgeway/Greenway have prehistoric origins providing a choice of routes along the scarp foot or along the ridge of the North Downs.

- **Roman roads:** the major Roman road in Kent – Watling Street - lies outside the Kent Downs AONB. However, Stone Street on the present day B2068 between Canterbury and Lympne passes through the East Kent Downs, and includes a single ten-mile straight alignment, descending the scarp to the south of Stowting in what appears to be a broad curve reducing the effect of the steep slope.

- **Medieval roads:** many of the narrow twisting lanes of the Kent Downs have their origin in piecemeal clearance of heavily wooded countryside in the medieval period. Some also developed as long distance driveways for swine and sheep, running across the grain of the landscape from north to south.

- **Turnpike roads:** some current A and B roads through the Kent Downs were 18th century Turnpike roads, often bypassing the villages. Some characteristic features are still visible such as broad road verges, occasional milestones and distinctively shaped toll cottages.

- **Historic streetscape of villages and towns:** a few, small historic market towns e.g. Wye and Chilham, are found in the Kent Downs. These have small squares and a more urban streetscape with properties at the back edge of streets and smaller alleyways. Most of the smaller villages and hamlets, e.g. Detling and Bearsted, have a very dispersed settlement pattern which grew up from loose clusters of farms and cottages, joined by a complex network of lanes, back lanes and paths, sometimes incorporating small greens and commons. Where the main transport routes developed, infills of houses and cottages tended to create enclosed village streets.

It is this type of character that new streetscape schemes need to take account of, respect and where possible enhance. Too many highway schemes are designed without consideration for the context. In a special area such as the Kent Downs this detracts hugely from the local landscape and built environment character. Each of the distinct disciplines of highway design, transport planning, landscape design and urban design need to work more closely together.

### 4. FIXING THE STREETSCAPE: KEY PRINCIPLES

#### 4.1 Overview

A concerted effort by all can reverse these trends, and provide streets and places that people like to stop in and enjoy, rather than simply pass
through. A number of general issues are worth considering from the start:

- Local distinctiveness should always be respected, drawn upon and enhanced wherever possible. Distinctiveness is to a large extent influenced by the underlying local geology of an area, as well as by history, socio-economic characteristics and communications;

- Many of the lanes and routes within the Kent Downs already possess physical and historic built and landscape features which limit speed and influence driver behaviour. These features should be used to help articulate the streetscape - they may not need "additional" traffic management measures, and at least can be used as a reference for traffic management schemes;

- Less is usually more. Nothing should be placed in the street unless there is a clear design benefit. Much of the existing street furniture in the Kent Downs is unnecessary; it certainly has little strategic co-ordination, and is usually a result of ad-hoc improvements over time. The existence of street furniture should be "clutter audited" and reduced to a minimum, with redundant items removed;

- Investing in quality solutions that will endure and offer best value for money is important. If resources are inadequate, it is wise to do less, to a better and higher standard. We should bear in mind that a quality, minimalist approach may not cost more, and will probably be much less, than an "over engineered" approach;

- What will be more resource intensive, however, is the process of streetscape design: We can no longer work in our single-discipline "silos". Wide ranging consultation, participation, co-operation and input from a range of stakeholders, the public, interest groups and local authority officers - facilitated by transport planners, urban and landscape designers and traffic engineers - is important to guarantee quality in design, and the acceptance and successful implementation of schemes.

This paper is therefore premised on improving streetscape design with an overall objective of enhancing the quality of life in the Kent Downs. By this we mean:

4.2 Planning for pedestrians and cyclists

Increasing the use of walking and cycling will help enhance our public spaces, increase social interactions, improve the health of residents and visitors, and generally enhance the civility of life in the Downs.
- Market squares and main streets within villages should be attractive to pedestrians and cyclists. Those that are overly dominated by traffic and parked cars should be redesigned as shared space;

- Pedestrian and cycle routes should form part of a coherent and continuous network. They should follow natural desire lines and take people where they want to go without major detours on restrictive physical barriers. Commitment and modest investment can make a huge difference in terms of pedestrian and cycling improvements. The "5Cs" of improved route quality - connected, convenient, comfortable, convivial and conspicuous - can be used in the design of new routes. All new investment should follow these principles;

- Where new rural footways and cycleways are provided, the use of locally-derived, subtle-coloured surface materials are the most appropriate solutions. Coloured surfaces should be avoided;

- Shared surfaces encourage mixed use and reduce vehicle dominance. Country lanes should allow pedestrians and cyclists, horse riders and vehicles to interact at low speeds;

- Cycle parking is a critical part of the story - improved provision should be made for cycle parking in the villages and at railway stations in and adjacent to the Downs;

- The most effective approaches for improving walking and cycling combine improvements to the environment and facilities with carefully targeted information about travel choices, health benefits and recreation opportunities. Wider cultural change initiatives are thus critical, targeted at reducing motorised travel and increased walking and cycling. Personalised travel planning in particular could help here.
4.3 Managing traffic

As noted previously, traffic growth and increased traffic volume is at the heart of the problems faced in streetscape design. Accommodating increased traffic volumes is becoming increasingly difficult. Traffic calming measures should be fitted sensitively into the street scene. There may be a difficult balance here – some traffic management designs can be difficult to integrate into an older streetscape. There are no standard solutions. Each feature or device should relate in its design and materials to the overall townscape or landscape to ensure that traffic calming measures reinforce rather than detract from local character.

Key principles:

- The best traffic management schemes are multi-functional; for example, those which solve more than one existing transport issue and which also conserve and enhance the appearance of the place which they affect;

- The characteristic physical features of rural lanes – such as trees, ditches, hedges and hedgebanks – and the typical winding, horizontal and vertical alignment of the lanes themselves naturally calm vehicle traffic speeds. Such features are elements to build upon rather than removed and replaced with standard highway “improvements”. For example, there should be a presumption to retain strong bends and curves on minor rural routes, rather than route straightening which might have traditionally been perceived as favourable to increase traffic throughput;

- Similarly, features which either border rural lanes (such as walls, post and rail fencing, metal parkland railings, timber bollards, gatehouses, tollhouses and lodges) or which vehicles travel over (including cobbles, setts and humpbacked bridges) can naturally calm traffic speeds and affect driver behaviour. How these features can be used should be considered at an early stage in any traffic management scheme. Bollards and other street furniture should only be used if they are essential. The design of new schemes should use the existing physical topography, vegetation, buildings and other structures, so that they appear as an integral part of the landscape and the historic road pattern;

- Design responses should not be overly large or garish or place undue reliance on signs, lining or lighting. White lining is generally not required in rural areas and its introduction should be resisted, particularly in village centres or along attractive rural lanes, and consideration given to gradual and selective removal. The use of red surfacing is similarly discouraged – subtle, buff colouring is usually preferable and will perform the same role in improving safety;
- Pedestrian guardrailing and fencing should be reduced to the absolute minimum and where possible removed entirely, especially where this inhibits pedestrians travelling along route desire lines. There are very few examples of rural villages where guardrails are required in design or safety terms;

- Courtesy crossings are a useful way of giving pedestrians subtle priority over vehicles at designated points within villages to ease crossing the road - despite no pedestrian priority, vehicles often give way to pedestrians. They should be promoted and considered alongside more formal crossing arrangements;

- Parked cars on the highway in villages can be a useful way of reducing traffic speeds and thought should be given to ensuring these are placed or permitted in a manner that brings the greatest benefit in terms of reduced speeds and careful driving through built-up areas. Subtle road marking or surface treatments can be used to designate the spaces for parking cars, rather than the usual approach of yellow lining where cars are not allowed to park. Differently coloured paving can de-lineate parking spaces without the need for painted markings;

- Carriageway narrowing (often to their historic widths), or natural grass strips along the centre of lanes, can slow traffic speeds and make walking and cycling more pleasant. Additional measures may include reinstating junction triangles and village greens and tightening rural junction radii.

The subtle art of traffic management: using the landscape; or a simple change in surface treatment

4.4 Road surfaces, paving and edge treatments

Paving and surface materials define the “platform” of the built environment. The choice of paving materials can make the difference between an interesting and distinctive place or standardisation and anonymity. Paving can, amongst other things, influence how and where
people drive, and influence the routes that pedestrians take across spaces.

Key principles:

- Ground surfaces should be related to their surrounding streetscape context. Historic paving and kerbs, coalholes and Victorian manhole covers should be retained in the villages and urban areas;

- New highway works, including new footways, can draw upon a wide palette of non-standard paving materials, including hoggin, ragstone, cobbles, paving stones, bricks, sets of granite or sandstone, gravel or limestone chippings or bound gravel. Local materials and colours similar to the local geology should be used;

- Ground surfacing should be simple. It should not become a focal point in trying to enhance poor quality environments. Paving should create a neutral setting and a “plinth” for the surrounding buildings;

- Arbitrary pavement extensions which break the kerbline should be resisted, since kerbing helps define the linear geometry of the street. A kerbline should be maintained even in pedestrianisation schemes;

- Tactile crossings can be provided in a non-standard way in villages, for example with brass studs attached to existing stone paving.

- Wherever possible, kerbs should be avoided in rural areas, especially adjacent to commons or greens. Where over-running and erosion cause problems, and a solution is needed, then earth embankments or verge reinforcement should be considered alongside kerbs of granite, logs and timber sleepers. Low-profile, splayed kerbs or those “laid on a batter” (at an angle) are all methods used to minimise the impact of kerbs.
4.5 Street furniture

The existence and attributes of street furniture in the villages and lanes has an important influence on the quality of the streetscape. In many streets and public spaces, uncoordinated and poor quality street furniture masks local character. Better practice uses the careful siting of street furniture, managing movement, reducing the need for physical barriers and improving aesthetics. Furniture should be sited to increase visibility in the street, to improve “natural surveillance” and create a safe environment. It should not dominate the street scene. Materials, size and form should be inspired by the surrounding context. Existing buildings, pavement lines can guide siting.

Key principles:

- As a rule, the best street furniture is simple, fits the location and reflects local character. “Off-the-peg” designs may reduce the local distinctiveness of the area;

- The first stage of design is to identify and remove superfluous or redundant items. The existence of new furniture should be reduced to a minimum. Style, colour and siting of street furniture should be co-ordinated;

- Too many bollards can look cluttered in the streetscape and consideration should be given to alternative methods of preventing unauthorised vehicle use of spaces. Selective designs can be used where appropriate to function and context;

- Other historic or distinctive features - including milestones, tollhouses and tollgates, bridges, war memorials, post boxes, telephone call boxes, village signs, street nameplates and lamps, etc. should be retained in situ wherever possible and maintained. They can help reinforce the local identity of the villages and lanes in the Downs. An inventory of historic street furniture should be compiled and plans made for future maintenance;

- New or replacement boundary features or street furniture items should use materials appropriate to the local area vernacular and be authentic. Consideration should be given to recasting historic local designs;

- Lighting: is often required in rural areas on safety grounds, however its existence can be highly intrusive and environmentally damaging. Lighting in sensitive areas should be avoided. Junction designs that must be lit should be avoided, e.g. roundabouts. Selective lighting of
problem areas is often more appropriate than complete schemes. Where lighting is necessary, high pressure sodium lights with columns 5-7m in height will lessen the orange glow. Dark matt colours will reduce the intrusiveness of the columns themselves. New lighting should be simple in design. Overly decorative, pastiche heritage style lighting is rarely appropriate in places such as the Downs.

4.6 Signing

Street signs and nameplates are of fundamental importance to the understanding and legibility of a place. Local variations in design, materials and lettering add richness and variety to the street scene. Over use in recent years has however led to visual proliferation in certain locations.

The general approach in terms of policy and guidance on speed management and signing in Kent is contained in the County Council’s Speed Management Strategy (KCC, 2004).

Key principles:

- Redundant signs should be removed. Where signs are necessary they should be concise, no larger than necessary and carefully sited;

- Warning signs should only be installed where there is a need, based on site observations and/or accident records. Any new signs should be located safely where they can clearly be seen. They should however have regard to their setting - for example, they can be placed, by agreement, on existing features such as buildings, boundary walls, railings and posts;

- Signs should be as small as is practicable, legal, safe and enforceable and departures should be sought from Kent County Council standards to achieve this wherever this would be
advantageous. Consideration should be given to setting signs at lower levels to reduce visual impact, especially where this allows them to have a hedge or wall as backdrop; compiling information onto composite;

- Signs should not be placed against the skyline; carefully placing them in front of hedges or trees will reduce their impact;

- Signs themselves should be constructed of local natural materials where this reflects traditional uses and is feasible (e.g. timber, stone or cast iron). Fingerpost designs are often preferable to standard directional signs. Brightly coloured sign backing plates should be avoided, including “yellow backs”.

4.7 Landscape and ecological features

The streets and lanes in the Kent Downs at times provide some of the most enduring features in the landscape. Ideally the local character of the Downs should be enhanced with the continued use of local materials. Although there may be local supply difficulties – for example, local materials may not be available in sufficient quantities – every effort should be made to reflect the existing landscape and ecological features in new streetscape schemes.

In addition, roads offer a large “soft estate” – land within the highway boundary but not including the hard road surface – which usually comprises hedges and narrow grassland verges, and sometimes much larger areas, often within interchanges or on land acquired when new roads are constructed. They can provide a wide variety of habitats. Vegetation within the highway needs to be appropriately maintained. Although there is a cost implication here, roadside vegetation is an important asset to the Kent Downs landscape. As well as being important visually, vegetation can also reinforce the local identity of the

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highway network, provide a boundary to the highway, prevent erosion, enhance local biodiversity, provide wildlife habitats, reduce airborne pollution and reduce the impact of new development.

5. WHAT DOES THIS MEAN IN PRACTICE IN THE KENT DOWNNS?

The importance of context means that there is not a single good practice template that can be imposed in a particular area; rather the area should dictate what appropriate measures should be taken. A series of case studies are developed in the Kent Streetscape Handbook. In this paper we have time to draw on just two examples to help illustrate the streetscape design principles.

5.1 Chilham

This is a quintessential "Garden of England" village, complete with central market square. However traffic levels, parking (particularly in the market square) and signage clutter have all had a detrimental effect on the village ambience.

The proposals are for the ‘de-cluttering’ of traffic signs at the eastern gateway to the village and making more use of the local context. The entrance to Chilham is made less traffic sign dominated and intrusive white lining is removed along with signage clutter. The road junction is paved with setts, possibly edged with brick, as found outside the Woolpack Inn, to extend the visual influence of the Inn as the natural gatekeeper for the village.

The central square is returned to use for local residents and visitors, rather than acting as a car park. Only residential parking is allowed – with available spaces marked by subtle use of surface materials. At least 50% of existing parking space should be removed. Visitors to Chilham will instead use the alternative car park at the bottom of the hill.

Outdoor seating can be provided for the White Horse Public House, spilling out into the square. A water drinking fountain provides a focal point, yet is still subtle in size and impact. Space is provided for a weekly farmers market (a market dating back to 1260 was previously held by Royal Charter here). The route from the Jacobean Mansion House to St Mary’s Church is marked with brick edge detailing. Any signage clutter is removed.
5.2 Hollingbourne

Hollingbourne provides a classic case study of a gateway. The approaches to the village currently suffer from intrusive signage, red tarmac and speed limit roundels. These have been introduced in an effort to reduce speeds, however little thought has been given in terms of design or context. They are not particularly suitable for a location in the Downs AONB. It is also very doubtful whether this type of intrusive, template-based design is more successful in reducing speeds than more subtle, context-sensitive designs. Within the village itself, the narrow, winding High Street and enclosure provided by the building frontage helps to naturally slow traffic and provide an illustration of a more appropriate way of reducing speeds.
Many of the proposed design improvements are modest: the existing gateway surfacing and signage is removed and a granite sett rumble strip is provided. A new gateway feature to the right of the entrance complements the existing brick pillar opposite. Careful, context sensitive design thus slows traffic. 30 mph signs are located on the existing/new brick pillars in a more subtle manner than previous.
6. FINAL THOUGHTS

The shared space and contextual design approach offers more than simple aesthetic rewards. A more thoughtful approach can add much to the quality of life and civility in the Kent Downs. The essence of the Downs is in its special landscape and built environment quality. All investment in the Downs - including that of traffic engineering and management - should respect and enhance this quality. This means that transport planners, urban and landscape designers and highway engineers need to work much more closely together than they have in recent years. Without this the special quality of the Kent Downs will be lost. There are already disturbing signs of mediocrity and "anywhere-town" type treatments.

A number of the lessons from the Kent Downs experience can be applied elsewhere in the UK (and indeed in the rest of Europe).

- Travel behaviour on roads with a special public character should be influenced more by the expression of the environment and “contextual design” than by the usual tools of the traffic engineering professions;

- Speed of traffic is, to a great extent, determined by the degree of psychological retreat from roads and streets by residents and other participants. Reversing this retreat is critical to reconciling the multiple roles of streets and public spaces;

- Shared space allows public spaces to “tell their own story”, with road layouts that use the information given by the space. Traffic engineering tools are used reticently, with spatial elements used to achieve the required behaviour. The character of the space - the context, history, morphology and landscape - is thus critical to use.

- In terms of changes from current practice: there is a distinction made between accident reduction and increased safety; highway engineering evolves into a more holistic view of streetscape design; highway engineers responsibility becomes the wider road users responsibility; there is a move from the use of standards towards context sensitive design, from the safety audit to the wider design audit.

Shared space helps to generate public spaces where traffic, social and other spatial functions can exist in harmony – vehicles, cycles and pedestrians share space; where all can move together at slow speeds and interact. Social space is therefore designed in a manner such that we do not conceive space as traffic space, but as people space – a space where the social functions of the public space take priority. The
design of a street or lane is thus conceived as part of the area through which it travels. A person travelling along the street is aware that they are "a guest" because of the layout of the space, and in response they adjust their travel behaviour to the social requirements of the context.

The message is thus very positive: we can "win back" public space from traffic and reallocate it to more effective usage by pedestrians, cyclists and social interaction. The shared space and contextual design approach provides the way forward. Momentum is growing. Good streetscape design should not be an optional extra; it should be common working practice.

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Key References:
Hamilton-Baillie, B. and English Heritage (2004) Save our Streets. EH.