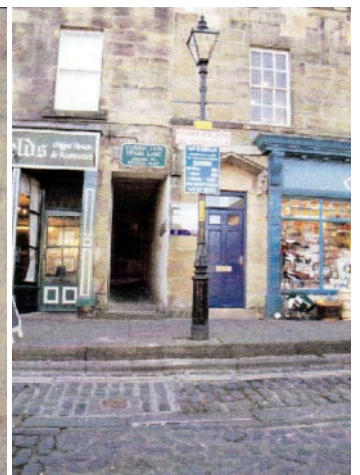




# Alnwick Civic Society Study of the Streetscape in Central Alnwick 2007 REPORT



# Contents

Introduction.....	
Purpose of Study.....	1
Involvement of Town, District and County Councils.....	1
Involvement of Members of the Civic Society.....	2
Geographical Scope of the Study.....	2
Features Considered in the Study.....	2
Principles of Good Practice.....	3
Ground Surfaces.....	3
Road Markings and Signs.....	3
Street Lighting and Overhead or Exposed Wiring.....	3
Street Furniture.....	3
Shop-fronts and Advertisements.....	3
Significant Building Frontages.....	3
Survey of Existing Streetscape.....	4
Methodology of Survey.....	4
Comments on Survey Observations.....	4-7
Administrative Factors Affecting Recommendations.....	8
Legal Requirements.....	8-10
Civic Society Recommendations.....	11-17
Acknowledgements.....	17
Appendix 1 Experience of Bury St Edmunds.....	18-22
Note: Appendix 2 Survey Sheets and Photographs is published separately	

This study of the Alwick Streetscape was first published in 2007. Since then much has changed, but the issues behind the original study are still hotly debated. The original report is re-created here, as a contribution to the continuing debate.

Members of Alwick Civic Society remain optimistic that a better balance can be achieved between the needs of drivers and pedestrians, and confident that implementing more of the recommendations in this report will improve the quality of the townscape, and benefit those who visit live and work in Alwick.

# INTRODUCTION

## Purpose of the Study

The core of this market town combines a vigorous commercial centre for a large rural population with a rare and precious heritage of buildings set on a medieval street pattern. For centuries, it has been subject to a never-ending series of modifications and repairs to keep pace with the developing demands of day-to-day living, but has managed to preserve much of its inherent attractiveness. A significant contributor to the present-day environmental problems of the town centre is the uneasy balance between, on the one hand, the needs of vehicle drivers for clearly-defined road space and



parking places, and, on the other hand, the safety and convenience of pedestrians, whose numbers include the very drivers of the vehicles once they have disembarked. To help both sets of people, a multitude of signs and paint markings have sprung up, to the detriment of the visual quality of the town.

The need to take action to prevent the permanent erosion of this quality is recognised by most residents, business people and visitors, not least by the Civic Society. The District Council is committed to preserving and enhancing the high visual quality of the Town's Conservation Area, but lacks the resources to carry out the detailed studies necessary to prepare an action plan.

The Civic Society has, in the past, produced reports on traffic, on The Lanes, on shop-fronts and on stonework repairs, all of which have helped the District Council informing and implementing its Conservation Area Policies. Among its members today, the Society has several with the energy, interest and professional expertise to offer to fill the gap in the Council's resources. The Society has therefore conducted a survey and has produced this illustrated Report and recommendations.

## Involvement of Town, District and County Councils

Responsibility for features in the streetscape is currently divided between the three local authorities, with no one authority having overall control. In addition, Statutory Undertakers, building owners and Businesses all contribute to the street scene. Before conducting the survey, the Society consulted officers in each of the three Councils, to explain its purpose and to seek co-operation.

The Town Council endorsed the Society's initial proposal to conduct the Study, and offered practical and financial help within its limited resources.

The District Council's officers also endorsed the Study in principle, and offered help in clarifying responsibilities and a contribution towards the cost of printing the Report.

The County Council's officers expressed interest, helped to clarify responsibilities and offered continued consultation.

## **Involvement of Members of the Civic Society**

The Society's Executive Committee took the decision to propose the Study. Its Planning Committee undertook to do the necessary field-work. A small team proposed the scope and design of the study and produced the report.

The society's members were kept in touch by means of the regular Newsletter, and by presentations at critical stages, and all members were encouraged to contribute comments and suggestions to the study team.

## **Geographical Scope of the Study**

The initial phase of the study concentrated on the historic core of the town and its immediate approaches, covering:

- Hotspur Tower
- Bondgate Within and Narrowgate
- Market Street and Fenkle Street
- The Market Place and Paikes Street
- The Lanes and Roxburgh Place
- Pottergate
- Greenwell Road and Bow Alley
- Bailiffgate

The survey work was then extended to cover other parts in the Conservation Area including:

- Bondgate Without
- Hotspur Street
- Green Batt

## **Features Considered in the Study**

Guided by publications by English Heritage, the team observed and commented upon:

- Road and footway surfaces
- Road markings and signage
- Street lighting and overhead wiring
- Shop-fronts and advertisements
- Significant building frontages



# PRINCIPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE

The following notes are derived in part from English Heritage's "Streets for All", adapted to suit the objectives of the Study in Alnwick

## Ground Surfaces

- Keep paving simple and avoid discordant colours
- Use traditional local materials - asphalt, stone setts and pavements, cobbles
- Look for, and preserve when possible, historic paving and detail such as kerbing
- Ensure that all surfaces are in good repair and safe
- Respect the need for ramps for wheelchairs and tactile surfaces for the visually impaired at road crossings, but ensure that their design is in keeping with the general principles of good quality paving applied elsewhere

## Road Markings and Signs

- Confine road markings to those essential for highway safety
- Minimise traffic and parking signage, and locate signs on existing lamp-posts or buildings, or to the rear edge of the footway

## Street Lighting and Overhead Wiring

- Avoid standard street and highway lighting equipment, and choose the designs, light sources and light locations most appropriate for the area
- Minimise overhead cables

## Street Furniture

- Retain historic street furniture that reinforces local character, but identify and remove superfluous or redundant items
- Use a uniform, dark colour for all items of street furniture
- Reduce guard-rails and bollards to a minimum and use traditional designs that relate to the townscape
- Ensure that trees are well protected and maintained and that flowerbeds and planters are appropriately designed and placed

## Shop Fronts and Advertisements

- Relate present-day shop fronts to the standards in the District Council's Design Guide for Shop Fronts, produced by the Civic Society in 1995
- Use restrained and co-ordinated colour schemes
- Minimise obtrusive exterior advertisements

## Significant Building Frontages

- Use traditional materials in Alnwick's vernacular style
- Ensure that exterior signs and decorations, including hanging flower baskets and displays, enhance rather than detract from the scene
- Ensure that floodlighting is of good quality and enhances the night-time scene

# SURVEY OF EXISTING STREETScape

## Methodology of Survey

The town centre was dealt with in relatively short sections of street. Where possible, each section was photographed from first or second floor windows to give a view of the floorscape and the adjoining building frontages, and to locate items of street furniture etc.

Each section was then surveyed at ground level, observing the various items for consideration and noting any that required comment. Additional photographs were then taken of many of these items. Subsequently certain key items were located by GPS equipment for inclusion in the Councils' electronic mapping system.

The survey sheets and photographs are included in Appendix 2, a separate document intended to be used by those responsible for the implementation of any of the Society's recommendations.



## Comments on Survey Observations

As may be seen from the survey sheets, the comments of the surveyors were many, various and detailed. Some of them may be illustrated in summary by viewing six specimen photographs, selected from the many taken at the time of the survey.

1. The photograph taken from an upper floor in The White Swan Hotel, looking towards the Northumberland Hall, shows:

- The effect of poor reinstatement of the quite recent red tarmac road surface after extensive water company works, with the consequent patchwork of black tarmac repairs. This illustrates failure to control the contractor's specification for road surfacing repairs.
- The harsh visual effect of strong white lining on the sides and centre of the road, and of the zig-zag lines at the approach to the Pelican crossing.
- The somewhat crudely-designed stone-built planters on The Cobbles acting as barriers to prevent cars accessing the car park area except at the official entrances.
- The patchwork of ineffectual repairs to the deteriorating surface of The Cobbles, where a consistent specification for the bedding of the stones is required.
- The visually-intrusive double yellow lines and white lines defining the narrow strip of ancient roadway along the top of The Cobbles.
- A park-and-display ticket machine partly obstructing the footway.
- A wheel-chair ramp occupying half the width of the footway.

2. The close-up photograph of the entrance to Correction House Lane illustrates a number of streetscape problems:

- Badly-set beach stones in various bedding Materials in The Cobbles.
- Stone setts in the ancient roadway repaired badly at a water supply stop valve.
- Strident, largely ignored, double yellow parking prohibition lines.
- Broken white line denoting the edge of the ancient roadway.
- Un-coordinated parking control signs and serial number on a good lamp standard.
- Goods on display on the footway - in this case causing no significant obstruction.
- Clashing colour schemes on adjacent buildings.
- Graffiti-disfigured wall in the entrance to the Lane.



3. The photograph of Thresher's shop front shows:

- Double yellow lines on the ancient roadway.
- Badly-repaired steps and footway after water supply works.
- Parking control sign on its own galvanised pole in the footway.
- A non-conforming shop front (currently subject to a planning application for improvement)





4. The photograph of street furniture on the footway of Woolworth's demonstrates:

- Well-sited seats and litter-bins of a suitable colour scheme.
- A good example of a large, single lamp street light pole, painted grey.
- A standard, bright red Post Box.
- A modern, metal and glass BT telephone box.
- A modern, metal and glass BT Internet kiosk of different design, size and colour.
- A small parking control sign on its own galvanised pole.
- A tourist direction sign in the black and gold livery of the seats and bins.



While these are all (except the parking sign) useful to people, and are set in a widened section of footway, they are completely un-coordinated in colour and style and look (correctly) as though they have been placed there by different authorities, willy-nilly on the footway.

4. The photograph of the sidewalk near, and outside the Hotspur tower shows an unseemly clutter of items:

- A green BT control box.
- A stone-built planter on the corner.
- A grey metal telephone kiosk.
- A bright red Post Box.
- A yellow fire hydrant sign on its own pole (which also carries a no-parking notice).
- The stone replica of Jimmy Riddle's Pant.
- A set of black-painted bollards.
- A standard galvanised metal highway lighting pole and lantern.
- Four separate direction signs attached to the lighting pole.
- Direction priority and headroom signs attached to the Hotspur Tower.
- A mixture of different forms of concrete paving slabs and blocks.
- Strident double yellow no-parking lines on the road surface.



This collection of items is not worthy of the main entrance into the historic town centre through the archway of the Hotspur Tower.



5. The view of the entrance to St Michael's Church in Bailiffgate shows the disfigurement of this ancient and elegant gateway by an un-coordinated and badly located set of traffic signs attached to a galvanised pole. The litter-bin, while of acceptable design, stands drunkenly askew.



## **Pedestrian/ Vehicle Conflicts**

Although the Study did not extend to a traffic survey, it was realised that many of the problems illustrated above derived from the need to control the flow of traffic and to provide places for cars and service vehicles to park, while maintaining safe passage for pedestrians.

The viability of the town centre depends upon

- good access for customers by car, in the absence of any large-scale public transport provision, and
- safe and convenient footways and road crossings for pedestrians.

With only one Pelican crossing in the town centre, on Market Street near its junction with Bondgate Within, most pedestrians cross the two-way roads at random and, in some cases, with difficulty.

The provision of car parking spaces for shoppers in the centre is limited, and any further erosion of the number of spaces would be detrimental to its commercial viability.

Servicing of businesses in the town centre by van or lorry is an occasional problem for other road users, but is usually tolerated with mutual understanding. However, some very large vehicles attempting to deliver loads to small businesses require room to back out and turn in the main road, and can cause significant disruption.

## **ADMINISTRATIVE FACTORS AFFECTING RECOMMENDATIONS**

The following notes and quotations are based upon sections of the 1987 publication by the institution of Highways and Transportation for the Department of Transport entitled "Roads in Urban Areas", updated by reference on the Internet to the current version of the Department's new "Manual for Streets" and following conversations with officers of Alnwick District Council and Northumberland County Council.

### **Legal Requirements and Government Advice**

An Urban Area is defined as one that is irreversibly urban in character and has a population of at least 1,000 people. Thus, central Alnwick is, for traffic-related purposes, an Urban Area, even though it is the centre of a large rural area.

Control of most aspects of traffic-related matters lies with the County Council as Highway Authority, with separate sections in different offices at County Hall dealing with Local Transport Plans, traffic

signage, street lighting and the coordination of Statutory Undertakers. Many local highway matters are dealt with through the Area Office in Alnwick.

The annual rolling Local Transport Plans give an opportunity to the District and Town Councils to inject local ideas and special requirements into consideration by the County Council.

### **The Highway**

- The "highway" is, to all intents and purposes, all the land between the frontages of the buildings, with the exception, in Alnwick, of one or two relatively minor areas with historic ownerships or rights.
- Under the Highways Act 1980, and the Transport Act 2000, the Highway Authority is responsible for "the construction, maintenance and improvement of highways and for stopping up or interfering with them".
- The Highway Authority for Alnwick is Northumberland County Council, which is responsible for strategic control of traffic-related matters.
- However, the District Council may, under the law, act as agent for the County Council for some highway functions, and can, as of right, carry out the maintenance of unclassified roads. In fact, no such Agency arrangements exist at present in Alnwick.
- Responsibility for the footways in Alnwick lies with the Highway Authority, with two exceptions that are the responsibility of the District Council, including:

The Cobbles in Bondgate Within / Market Street (other than the ancient roadway along the top of the slope, which is regarded as a working highway giving access to emergency vehicles).

The cobbled parking area in Fenkle Street.

## **Parking Control**

- The Road Traffic Regulation Act, 1984, provides for the regulation and control of the speed, movement and parking of vehicles on the highway. It is administered in Alnwick by the County Council as Highway Authority.
- However, the District Council may (and does) provide off-street car parking in partnership with the Highway Authority. Parking control signs and equipment are provided by both authorities in consultation with one another. The revenue from parking meters is shared between the two authorities. Wardens are employed by the District Council.
- In environmentally sensitive areas such as central Alnwick, yellow lines designating parking controls may (but are currently not) be narrower (at 50mm or 2 inches) than standard width (90-100mm) lines and a paler yellow paint may be used. Such lines have recently been applied by the County Council in parts of the protected coastline at the insistence of English Heritage.
- Furthermore, it is understood that the Department for Transport is willing to consider dispensing with yellow lines "on an experimental basis" under certain conditions, including the designation of an environmentally sensitive historic town centre as a special zone with uniform loading and parking controls (refer to Appendix 1 for a relevant example).

## **Traffic Signs**

- Traffic Signs Regulations and General Directions, 2002, prescribe the traffic signs in urban areas and the circumstances that apply to their use on the public highway. These are administered in Alnwick by the Highway Authority, as are "Brown Signs", provided on a commercial basis to give directions to certain tourist attractions.
- The District Council controls the provision of all other direction signs and Town Maps related to tourism. Many of these have recently been funded by the Market Towns Initiative.
- Among measures suggested in Government Advice to minimise environmental impact is "the careful siting of traffic control equipment and signs using the smallest possible size of sign while maintaining legal and safety requirements (eg fixing signs to walls and street lighting columns where appropriate)".

## **Footways and Pedestrian Crossings**

- "Poorly sited street furniture can prevent full use of the footway... it creates particular difficulties for physically-disabled people. It is sometimes possible to site equipment like traffic signal controllers, lighting columns and poles for signs at the back edge of the footway rather than at the kerbside".
- The provision, location and design of pedestrian crossings is determined on the basis of requests by individuals or pressure groups, or at the instigation of the Town or District Council. Requests are assessed by the County Council's Safety Engineering Team. Those considered to be the highest priority are then recommended for inclusion in the County's annual works programme. The layout of pedestrian crossings must conform to current regulations.

## **Street Lighting**

- This is provided and maintained by the County Council's Lighting Department.

## **Street Cleaning and Refuse Collection**

- This is the responsibility of the District Council. Residents are provided with wheelie-bins, while most businesses have arrangements with the Council or with a private contractor for the removal of refuse on a regular basis.

## **Statutory Undertakers**

- Such bodies, including those concerned with water supply, telephones, gas supply, electrical power and many others, have the legal power to carry out works essential to their operations, but the planning of such works, including their reinstatement, is subject to co-ordination by the County Council.

## **Decision-making**

- Central Government influences the provision and design of traffic-related measures by issuing Department for Transport(DfT) Circulars and Advice Notes, and by regulating the finance available for spending on different projects or areas.
- Every five years, the County Council prepares a Local Transport Plan(LTP) that is submitted to DfT to outline its strategy for highways and transport in Northumberland. Based on this application, DfT then determine how much grant and capital borrowing the Government will support.
- Every year, the County Council consults the Alnwick District and Town Councils to re-assess priorities. As a result, a recommended programme is prepared for discussion with the County's Area Committee and then approved by the Cabinet Member for Transport and the County's Executive Director for Community and Environmental Services.
- A decision to depart from standards in the interest of avoidance of damage to the environment in, for instance, an historically-sensitive area like central Alnwick, will "depend upon a local authority's policies towards improving the environment and upon the competing demands for funding other projects". Such a decision "will ultimately be made at the political level".



# CIVIC SOCIETY RECOMMENDATIONS

## General Introduction to Recommendations

Central Alnwick has evolved over the centuries as a town built outwards from the triangle of streets around its market and - for most of its existence - under the firm control of its Castle. Its inherent charm is based on the subtle geometry of its street pattern, with few straight lines but with land ownerships and buildings confined in size to the regular burgage strips laid down in Medieval times. These underlying qualities are permanent, but their visual effect is being eroded by the imposition of a multitude of stresses caused by the demands of modern living.

The Survey demonstrates that there are too many examples of poor streetscape management in central Alnwick. The Civic Society recognises that this is due, in large measure, to the division of responsibility for the various elements - traffic and parking control, surfacing, general maintenance and statutory undertakings. No one Authority has the power to set the standards and to co-ordinate the well-intentioned and usually necessary work of the other bodies. The result, there for all to see, is a steadily-worsening mess.

## Administration

Drawing on the experience of Bury St Edmunds (see Appendix 1), it is clear that, if anything is to be done to clear up the cluttered state of central Alnwick and to improve its environment, a drastic change is required in the way the streetscape is managed by the local Authorities.

It is recommended that, within a plainly-defined boundary around the central core of Alnwick, a Project be initiated to transform the town. All aspects of streetscape should become the responsibility of a single Local Authority, with an Alnwick-based team reporting directly to a professional Project Manager. The team should be tasked with coordinating the specification and implementation of all relevant matters, including the activities of Statutory Undertakers.

The Project Manager would use this report and its separate Appendix 2 as the basis of the team's Terms of Reference, and should have the authority to exercise the Council's power to enforce the agreed standards. The team would have the responsibility of planning and programming the works in detail, consulting all relevant bodies to ensure - as far as possible - local consensus, and seeking the necessary finance to implement the plan.

For the far-ranging recommendations to be achievable, the support of local politicians and organisations will be necessary, and the team will have to gain this support by demonstrating its collective enthusiasm for the task and by ensuring at all stages the practicality of its proposals.

## The Historic Core Zone

The Town Central Area and its immediate approaches should be declared - with the sanction of the Department for Transport - an Historic Core Zone in which street furniture, traffic and parking control arrangements, equipment and signs are made subservient to the quality of the street scene, changing the present balance as between the convenience of pedestrians and that of vehicle drivers. Its proposed entry points are: in Bondgate Without at The Playhouse; the bottom of Hotspur Street; Clayport Street, east of Bus Station; Pottergate Tower; the top of The Peth and in Bailiffgate east of the junction with Northumberland Street.

At each point of entry - the threshold of the Zone - simple signs should indicate a 20mph speed limit and a complete ban on parking except where this is positively allowed. Within the Zone the layout of carriageways and footways should be adjusted to ensure compliance with the reduced speed limit.

## **Statutory Undertakers**

The survey shows in particular that, in too many cases, remedial work in both roads and footways after digging trenches for service pipes has been slap-dash and quite unsatisfactory.

All Statutory Undertakers should be obliged to work under the control of the Town Manager, in particular ensuring that repairs necessary after completion of any underground works will be specified and implemented to the required high standard.

## **Road and Footway Widths**

### **Generally**

The width of carriageways within the Zone should be reduced, as in Bury St Edmunds, to 3m in each direction, with a corresponding increase, where possible, in the width of footways. The additional footway structures should allow for occasional loads from wide vehicles. The alignment of carriageways should be varied to avoid long straight sections by providing parking and loading bays in lengths on alternate sides of the road where there is room to do so.

These measures will have a marked effect on driver perception, making the 20mph speed limit virtually self-enforcing. They will also make walking on the footways and crossing the roads on foot easier, safer and more pleasant for all pedestrians including those with infirmities and disabilities.

### **In Bondgate Within**

Between the Tower to beyond the V-junction (originally part of the A1 Great North Road that ran through the town) two one-way 3m wide carriageways should be formed, separated by an intermittent 2m wide pedestrian refuge. The carriageways would merge at the approach to the narrow arch of the Tower, where the existing driver courtesy system (giving priority to vehicles leaving the town centre) would be maintained.

Provision would have to be made in the design of the carriageway layout for the turning of occasional large vehicles trapped in Bondgate Within by the size of the arch. Parking bays on both sides of Bondgate Within would continue as at present, although the method of marking the bays would be altered.

This arrangement will give the opportunity to pedestrians to cross Bondgate, the commercial heart of the town, at will, safely, without causing any undue traffic delay.

## **Road Surfaces**

The survey shows that, while most of the roads in the centre of Alnwick have been surfaced acceptably and quite recently in tarmac using red stone, the effect has been spoiled by the use of black tarmac patches in their reinstatement works by Fastflow (the water company that has since then replaced many of the underground water pipes) and other Statutory Undertakers. Also, the surfaces of the carriageway lanes approaching the Clayport Pelican Crossing have been overlaid with a grey-yellow slip resistant surface.

Tarmac with a red stone has, for decades, been used in Alnwick and throughout the length of the A1 in Northumberland, and, if the damaged road surface is to be repaired in tarmac, then the same colour should be used. However, it is recommended that irregular, textured, concrete blocks, as seen in Bury St Edmunds, should be used instead, to give a clear physical and visual sensation to drivers that they are entering and driving in a "special" area.

Where vehicular traffic is possible in The Lanes, the existing patchwork of roadway surfaces is unsatisfactory and (other than in Dodds Lane and Three Tuns Lane) should be replaced with irregular block paving.

### **Traffic Control and Car Parking Within the Zone**

It is recommended that the speed limit within the Zone be reduced to 20mph, as indicated earlier. With narrower carriageway widths, central refuges and wider footways, the present high-visibility Pelican crossings and their accompanying zig-zag white lines and control equipment would be redundant, and should be removed.

White lines defining the edges of roads and limits of parking bays should be replaced with setts, their colour contrasting with that of the road surface.

Car parking within the Zone should be permitted as at present, but with obtrusive pay machines being moved to the rear of the footway. Signs should be fixed to the walls of buildings where possible, or on poles at the rear of the footway; their designs should be co-ordinated in size, form and colour. Many of the existing signs and their poles should be removed altogether.

Parking within the Zone would be permitted only where positively indicated. Existing double and single yellow parking control lines showing parking prohibitions should be removed - or replaced, where absolutely necessary in narrow streets to maintain the flow of traffic, with narrower, paler yellow lines.

A small number of parking bays should be provided, as at present, specifically for disabled driver badge-holders, and provision would have to be made, also as of present, for a limited number of spaces for residents of properties within the Zone, and for taxis.

Loading and delivery controls on service vehicles, where these cannot function without entering the Zone, should be made uniform throughout the Zone for instance by specifying times when access is available. This is a sensitive matter affecting commercial viability, and will need to be discussed and agreed in detail with retailers.

### **The Cobbles**

The three main areas of off-road surfaces paved with beach cobbles or setts and used for car parking (Bondgate Within, Fenkle Street and Bailiffgate) should be retained in view of their traditional appearance in Alnwick. However, in many locations the stones are poorly bedded or loose, and offer quite unsuitable and sometimes dangerous surfaces for pedestrians and car drivers alike, especially in wet or icy conditions.

A clear engineering specification should be established for the laying and bedding of cobbles and setts, and all existing surfaces should be re-laid, in sections, to the new specification.

Parking bays in all three areas of cobbled surface, and the guidance lines at the entrance and exit from the main area of The Cobbles in Bondgate Within should be indicated by flush stone markers. The double yellow and white lines along the ancient roadway on The Cobbles should be removed; parking (including especially spaces for disabled drivers) should be permitted along the top of The Cobbles, with emergency vehicles using, when necessary, the clear circulation space between the top and bottom rows of parking spaces.

## Footways

While there are a few examples of much older stone paving slabs and kerbstones still in existence, notably at the Castle entrance and in Bailiffgate at the gateway leading into St Michael's Church, there is no general case for re-introducing stone, given the successful use in modern times of small, regular and irregular concrete slabs and blocks. An exception to this, however, is in the vicinity of the main entrance to the Grade I Listed Alnwick Castle. At the junction between Bailiffgate and Narrowgate, the beneficial effect of a recent re-alignment of the road has been spoiled by the crude use of concrete paving slabs and lengths of straight concrete kerbs. In such an environmentally sensitive location, this should be rectified with the substitution of stone slabs and kerbs.

Many stretches of heavily-used footway in central Alnwick have been re-paved quite recently, using square concrete slabs, some as small as 140mm x 140mm, with others up to 600mm square. These have replaced previous larger, standard paving slabs that were in poor condition. In general, the new, smaller slabs have been laid on a sand base. They give a satisfactory visual impression, and seem to keep their integrity and their profile better than their predecessors, although in some cases on sloping footways the sand base is in danger of being washed out. The policy of replacing older, large concrete slabs with smaller ones should continue.

In general, the widened footways and the introduced pedestrian refuges, complementing the narrowing of the road carriageways as recommended above should be done using blocks of a suitable colour and texture, with a specification designed to withstand heavy wheel-loads.

The footway on the east side of Narrowgate, from Bow Alley to Bailiffgate, was surfaced some years ago in roughly-screeded concrete. This is an important pedestrian route in a sensitive area between the town and the Castle, and the footway should be re-paved in blockwork.

The footways in Pickwick, Corn Exchange and Correction House Lanes are all poor patchworks of concrete, tarmac and stone, and all require treatment. Well-laid blocks, cobbles or stone setts should be used to enhance the historic nature of these narrow passages throughout their lengths. Modern, brick-shaped pavements have been used in the re-furbishment of large areas in Dodds Lane and Three Tuns Lane, with the vehicle carriageway distinguished by different coloured concrete "bricks" edged with darker, bevelled ones. This treatment is appropriate in such a modern re-development, but does not blend well when introduced into crossings of more traditional paving, as has been done at the entrance from The Cobbles into Corn Exchange Lane. At those locations, "bricks" should be replaced with concrete slab pavements or stone setts.

The Market Place and Paikes Street were resurfaced recently, using concrete blocks in patterned squares in the main open area, and York stone slabs for the surrounding footways. The general effect is satisfactory, despite the presence of some pronounced slopes in the footway that can be dangerous in icy weather. Care must be taken with any remedial work that may become necessary in the Market Place, to ensure that the surfaces maintain their integrity in the future.

The recent imposition of legislation demanding special footway treatment for wheel-chair users and visually-impaired people has resulted in the construction of numerous dropped kerbs at junctions and elsewhere, and the introduction of "tactile" flooring slabs. Some of the dropped kerbs have been placed inappropriately on the corners of junctions (for example at Fenkle Street / Market Street), where they are so severe that they constitute a hazard for all pedestrians. Dropped kerbs should be placed at least a few metres away from the corner, and given shape with cut slabs and sloped kerbstones rather than with moulded concrete. An example of good practice from Bury St Edmunds is shown in Appendix 1.



Tactile paving, where required, should be blended in with the pattern of footway slabs, and a strongly contrasting colour should be avoided. Alternatively small, round-headed brass studs set in the footway may be used effectively.

## **Street Lighting**

The general effect at night of the different forms and colours of street lighting, combined with the wide variety of shop lighting, is patchy. Some areas, notably in The Lanes and on part of the north side footway at the Banks in Bondgate Within, are poorly lit. If Alnwick is to be inviting at night, to residents and tourists alike, the level of lighting at street level needs to be improved and unified, and significant frontages such as the Hotspur Tower and Lloyds Bank could be discreetly floodlit.

The main roadside lighting columns along Bondgate Within are relatively new and of suitable design, with well-designed lanterns. Likewise, the smaller street light columns and lanterns illuminating the Market Place and the footways in the central area measure up well to the required standard of quality. Also, in several key locations of junctions and in narrow streets, wall-mounted lanterns have been erected. However, the survey showed that the serial numbers for the poles had been painted on in unnecessarily large bright yellow patches, which should be removed and replaced with discreetly numbered labels.

Away from the roads passing through the town centre, but in the immediate approaches and in other streets, car parks and lanes within the central core, the use at present of standard highway lights on galvanised poles is, visually, less satisfactory. These should be replaced with lighting of the style and quality of that adopted in the centre.

## **Overhead Wiring and Equipment**

There are several examples of phone-line distribution poles in sensitive locations (Bow Alley, Chapel Lane), and a few cases of groups of wires crossing the roadways. With developing technologies, these should all be removed, although provision should be left in place for the supports for the traditional Christmas Lights.

The frontages of many of the older buildings in the town centre carry redundant equipment such as disused burglar alarm casings and trailing wires. Building owners should be encouraged to remove these extraneous items.

## **Street Furniture**

The survey revealed a plethora of seats, litter-bins, planters, Town Maps, map dispensers, direction signs, parking control signs and equipment, phone boxes and the like. The present scattering of items of street furniture should be reviewed in detail as to their intended functions, locations, designs and colours, and action taken to co-ordinate their provision.

In the Market Place, the time-worn Market Cross survived the refurbishment of the square, and the steps of its plinth are used, as ever, for informal gatherings. Its historic importance should be recognised in any proposals for the use of the Market Place, with consideration being given to some form of floodlighting at night.

Several unusual seats have been designed and placed in the Market Place for a combination of functions as seats and as "public art". They excite a mixture of strong comments from residents and visitors. The members of the Civic Society are also mixed in their views on the merits of the seats, but it is now generally recognised that they have become a well-known feature of the large open space in the centre of the town. No recommendation is made for change.

Many of the seats, litter-bins, Town Maps, map dispensers and tourist direction signs have been provided by the Market Towns Initiative through the Community Development Trust, and are welcome additions to the town. However, some of the locations chosen are questionable, and some items have not been levelled up in their installation, giving an unfortunate, haphazard impression. The new items of street furniture - Town Maps, seats and litter-bins - have a common feature in their colour scheme, which is black with gold-painted trimmings. The Alnwick crest appears on most items. This provides an acceptable colour standard for all other street furniture, including street lights, bollards, poles for signs, parking pay stations, phone kiosks, BT boxes and even post Boxes. It is important to use either self-coloured materials or very good quality paint specifications for all items, in view of the likelihood of surface damage in use.

## **Shop Fronts**

The District Council has a well-accepted Design Guide for Shop Fronts, and it is Council policy to use this as a major reference document in deciding on Planning Applications for new or refurbished shops in the conservation Area. The Guide should be applied rigorously in the zone.

## **Outside the core Zone, within the Conservation Area**

Many of the recommendations for improvements within the Zone may, with advantage, be applied also in the remainder of the Conservation Area, but without the imposition of the 20mph speed limit. It is, however, suggested that effort be concentrated on the area within the Zone first, to demonstrate the advantages of the proposed measures, before embarking on too wide a scheme.

## **Phasing of Implementation**

The Civic Society recognises that the recommendations represent a substantial and radical change in conditions for movement in the centre of the town. Also, that the cost will be considerable. Clearly, a phased project will be necessary, with a programme of works that could extend over a period of between five and ten years. The following is suggested:

### **Phase1: Year 1**

- Establish the Project Team and its Manager, with an office in Alnwick.
- Plan the works in detail.
- Declare the Historic Core Zone, with the sanction of DfT, and seek the necessary Traffic Orders.
- Co-ordinate street furniture in terms of function, location, colour scheme and installation.

### **Phase2: Years 2 - 3**

- Create permanent entry points to Zone, using block paving for, say, the first 50m of each access.
- Create new, narrower carriageways and pedestrian refuges within the Zone, using temporary road edging.
- Apply 20mph speed limit and new parking / servicing regime.
- Review all traffic and parking signs, coordinating designs and modifying locations.
- Relay The Cobbles.

### **Phase 3: Year 4 onwards**

- Gradually, replace tarmac carriageways with block paving, in stages to minimise disruption.
- Complete the remaining items.

## **The Society's Aspiration**

Based on its observations of the success of such radical measures elsewhere - notably Bury St Edmunds - the Society suggests that their introduction in Alnwick would restore to the historic core of the town its traditional atmosphere of a busy commercial centre with a pleasant, well-ordered appearance.

It is recognised that the implementation of the recommendations will require a significant political resolve to create and empower a dedicated Project team to design the scheme in detail and to marshal the necessary financial and administrative resources to carry it out.

The Society hopes that such resolve will be forthcoming, and offers its own resources to back up the work of the Project team as required.

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- Northumberland County Council, whose officers advised on current regulations and their administration and took part in consultations.
- Mr Ian Poole, Planning Policy and Special Services Manager at St Edmundsbury Borough Council, and Vice-Chairman, English Historic Towns Forum, for advice on his experience of similar environmental improvements at Bury St Edmunds.
- Mr Richard Smith of "Living Streets", for his illustrated address on the topic at the Society's Annual General meeting on 13 March 2007.
- Members of Alnwick Civic Society and its Committees, for contributing comments and ideas during the conduct of the Study.
- The members of the Study Team who carried out the survey and produced the Report: Messrs R Connell, P Deakin, P Ennor, W Robinson and the Study Manager P McIlroy.

# APPENDIX 1

## Experience of Bury St Edmunds



### General Background

Bury St Edmunds is a market town with some 35,000 inhabitants and serves a rural hinterland with more than 100,000 people.

It is thus about four times the size of Alnwick town and the District respectively, but the two towns have much in common.

Both have developed over many centuries and each contains a core with a medieval street pattern. Each remains an important focal point for shopping and business.

Bury has a street market every Wednesday and Saturday; Alnwick's refurbished Market Place holds a market every Saturday and

other public events from time to time.

Each town has to cope with significant local traffic, while each is bypassed by a Trunk Road (A14 at Bury, A1 at Alnwick). Bury has a major tourist attraction in its Cathedral, its ruined Abbey and its gardens, while Alnwick has the Castle and the Garden. Bury has over 3,000 off-street official car parking spaces close to the centre, and allows some on-street parking. Alnwick is less well-provided with off-street parking spaces.

Since the early 1990s, the local authority, St Edmundsbury Borough Council, has gradually managed to:

- Create a clearly-defined Zone with obvious special traffic controls
- Design measures that are largely self-enforcing
- Enhance the Conservation Area, including removing unnecessary signs and road markings
- Reduce the dominance and speed of traffic without actually preventing access by cars and service vehicles: the whole of the Zone is now a 20mph area
- Create better access to the historic core for public transport, pedestrians, cyclists and the mobility-impaired
- Manage the demand for car parking, while enhancing and expanding residents' parking priority schemes

In the mid-1990s the town was selected by English Historic Towns Forum as one of four towns for special schemes to take the measures further, with the cooperation of DfT, English Heritage, the Local Authority Associations and the Civic Trust, with the Road Research Laboratory acting as monitors.

The overall effect of the measures appears to have pleased and satisfied local residents and businesses, and is much appreciated by visitors. The main impression on the visitor is of a vibrant town that has achieved a good, practical balance between the convenience of vehicle drivers and pedestrians.



## Administration

While Suffolk County Council is the Highway Authority for the whole County, it has given over the agency for highway matters in Bury St Edmunds to the Borough Council. This includes enforcement of the traffic and parking controls. The County retains control of the annual maintenance budget, and allocates capital funds via the Local Transport Plan. The Borough Council also has a record of significant capital investment in environmental enhancement schemes in the town.

The Historic Zone scheme was treated as a comprehensive Project, led by Mr Ian Poole as Project Manager / Planner. His team included the Borough Conservation Officer, an Urban Designer, a Highways Engineer, a Traffic Management Engineer and a Landscape Architect, all working together in one office. Specialists were employed for art-work and sign design. Construction contracts were managed by the Borough Council. A vital, ongoing aspect of the project was extensive consultation at all stages between the team, local people and Statutory Undertakers.

## The Historic Core Zone

The Zone is bounded by a rectangle of streets close to the core, feeding into a grid of central area streets, mostly fairly narrow, and mostly designated for one-way traffic. There is a 20mph speed limit throughout the Zone, indicated at each entry point by two simple signs. One entry point (Crown Street) a "gateway" has been created with signs set in panels on 10-foot high art work towers.



The principal public off-street car parks are just outside the Zone within 10 minutes on foot to all parts of the centre. Parking within the Zone is allowed on-street and off-street, but only where indicated positively by signs, allowing double yellow lines and prohibition signs to be removed entirely in most cases.

Provision is made for buses, coaches and service vehicles at the edge of the Zone and at specified times within its boundaries. Certain streets are wholly or partially "pedestrianised", while allowing for essential servicing of business premises.

## Treatment of Roads and Footways within the Zone

Carriageway widths in both one-way and two-way streets have been reduced generally from the usual 7.3m to 3m, with parking bays of 2m width. This has allowed footways to be widened from the previous minimum of 0.9m to between 1.2m and 3m. By providing parking in short sections, alternating between left and right hand sides, the previous straightness of the carriageway has been eliminated. Drivers negotiating such streets are thereby encouraged to keep well below the 20mph speed limit, allowing pedestrians to cross the narrow carriageway safely at will.

Surfaces vary. In some cases, particularly in streets used for traffic travelling through the Zone, the earlier tarmac and concrete surfaces remain. But typically in those that have been treated as part of the Project - the bulk of the streets today - footways are paved in York Stone or high quality artificial slabs, kerb stones (where used) and channels are in granite setts.



Carriageways are in concrete blocks in random width courses. Tegar blocks are much in evidence, giving a pleasingly natural impression. Varied colours have been used to define parking / loading bays.

There is little evidence of damage, or of inadequate repair of road and footway surfaces. The universal problem of chewing gum is tackled by contractors using high-pressure, high-temperature steam hoses with grit-blast machinery.



## Parking Controls

Where positively-defined parking areas have not been introduced, narrow, pale yellow double lines are used. These are about half the width of the standard lines, and, while clearly present, are much less intrusive visually.

Instead of being standard sized signs on individual poles, most parking control signs have been reduced in size and placed on (or against) the walls of buildings - with the consent of the owners.





Pay and display machines, while functional, are sited against walls and do not obstruct the footway.



Off-street surface parking is in bays marked either in white lines or by blocks set in the surface. Provision is made by permit, where necessary, specifically for residents' parking.

## **Servicing**

Attempts made to control the access of large delivery vans by getting them to off-load to smaller conveyances outside the Zone did not prove to be acceptable, and servicing to premises within the Zone without suitable back access is allowed, as needed, even from pedestrian-only streets.

## **Buses and Coaches**

The main bus station is situated on the edge of the Zone, and both bus and coach services use this in the main. However, buses use the road bordering the west side of the Zone and are provided with dedicated lanes and stopping areas convenient to the main shopping area of Cornhill and Butter Market.

Many day coach trips are aimed at the Abbey Gardens to the east of the Zone, and the coaches are allowed to set down and pick up in Angel Hill, where there is a public toilet. However, coaches and vans are not permitted to enter or stay overnight here, being monitored by CCTV.

### **Street Lighting and Overhead Cables**

Some of the varied forms of lighting poles and lanterns inside and at the edge of the Zone are evident from photographs. In narrower streets, poles have been placed close to the walls, where necessary having the lanterns on brackets to give better vertical lighting effects. Observation at night showed that the lighting throughout the Zone was, in general, effective.

BT telephone cable distribution poles are not much in evidence, although one was noticed remaining in place despite having all the cables severed.



### **Pedestrian Crossings**

The reduction in the speed of traffic throughout the Zone, combined with the narrowing of carriageways, has allowed for the complete removal of formal pedestrian crossings (Zebras and Pelicans). Also, with the reduction in kerb heights (sometimes to zero), in many cases dropped kerbs have been unnecessary. However, where they have been provided, at places of observed pedestrian demand, they have been constructed with the same stone or block materials as are used in the footway, and tactile effect is produced with brass studs drilled into stone slabs.

In the busy, two-way Angel Hill / Crown Street road adjacent to the imposing entrance to the Abbey Gardens, the carriageway has been divided into two separate, one-way, 3m roads, allowing space for a 2m wide pedestrian refuge.

This gives pedestrians a safe, two-stage crossing without the need for formal traffic controls. Observation confirmed the claim that, despite the volume of vehicle traffic, drivers respected the rights of pedestrians to cross the road.

