

# TONBRIDGE TOWN CENTRE STREETSCENE AUDIT



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## Introduction

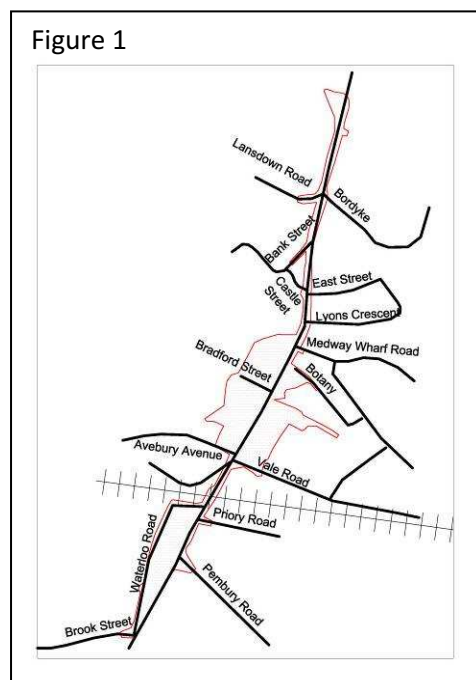
In many towns and cities in this country, street clutter created by over-provision of signs and street furniture could be greatly reduced without any noticeable impact on road safety. Instead, with moderate effort and cost, streets could be made far more attractive and maintenance costs could be significantly reduced through the removal of excessive and redundant signage.

The purpose of this street audit is to improve the appearance of the area in and around the centre of Tonbridge with a primary focus on the High Street. This will be achieved through a programme of street clutter reduction accompanied by repairs and improvements of street furniture and footway surfaces to help ensure that Tonbridge is a place that encourages residents, visitors and local businesses to enjoy the experience of living, visiting and working there.

Street furniture, such as signage, lamp standards, seats, railings and litter bins, together with street and footpath surfaces, has a major impact on the appearance of a street. Well designed and installed street furniture can enhance the experience of visiting, working or living in an area and it can assist local access. In contrast, if it is not well maintained or properly installed, it can have an adverse visual impact.

For this reason the quality and quantity of street furniture, signage and surfacing is important. The approach adopted in the schedule of work resulting from this audit is that 'less is better' while recognising that some street furniture is highly desirable and serves a critical local function, for example, providing information to assist visitors to locate car parking, retail areas, leisure facilities and tourist locations or providing seating for those who wish to rest or pause a little.

## The Scope of the Audit



**Figure 1** illustrates the scope of the project. It consists primarily of the High Street between the old Star and Garter junction to the junction of Quarry Hill Road with Brook Street and includes some limited lateral incursions along some of the side streets.

The scheme has a finite extent for practical and financial reasons. It could have extended considerably further because street clutter is not confined to the area of this audit. Therefore, this could and should be considered the first in a series of initiatives, subject to how successful this initial example is in catalysing a programme of joint action with the local highway authority, Kent County Council. It has primary responsibility for what happens within the bounds of the public highway and much of the work identified through the audit falls within its remit.

## Methodology

A recent publication, *Manual for Streets*, sets out best practice for a street audit. Using its principles for the area in Tonbridge within the scope of this initiative, an audit has been undertaken to survey what street furniture is in place at the moment and to assess what opportunities there are to relocate signage to lamp columns to reduce the number of unnecessary posts and establish what signs could be removed to reduce on street clutter.

The street audit has also collated the existing stock of street furniture, assessed which items require repair and what should be replaced or relocated. Fewer traffic signs and/or posts and items of street furniture will reduce costs in the long term by reducing the need for maintenance.

Kent County Council as the highway authority has responsibility for the roads, footpaths, street lighting, traffic signs, bollards and guard rails and has a major role to play in the appearance of the street scene.

Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council have responsibility for such elements as litter bins, tourist finger posts, bus shelters and information boards. It is therefore important that both authorities work together to achieve the improvements to the street scene and this initiative is founded on a premise of joint action by the two Councils.

Whilst carrying out the street audit all aspects of the area including footpath finishes and appearance together with visual impact have been considered to provide a work programme to enhance and improve the experience of living, working or visiting Tonbridge.

## Findings

In common with many other local authorities areas over the years, street furniture and signage has been incrementally added within the area resulting in the appearance of a cluttered street scene.



Much of the street furniture is of varying quality and the colours range from grey to black to light blue to dark blue and green. Whilst the majority of signs are necessary and only a limited number are recommended for removal, there is scope for some signs to be relocated to nearby lamp columns or adjacent buildings and for the posts to be removed. Well maintained streets add to the quality of the place and civic pride in an area.

The visual aspect when entering the town from the southern end does little to welcome visitors, the large roundabouts at Pembury Road and Vale Road junctions whilst directing and controlling traffic do not make a welcoming environment for pedestrians.



For visitors arriving by train the entry point is again unwelcoming, but without substantial investment by the rail network this is unlikely to change. It is therefore important to ensure that those areas under the remit of Kent County Council and Tonbridge & Malling Council are maintained to a high standard to improve the visual aspects of the town and to draw residents, visitors and businesses into the town centre area.



The entry points from the North of the town are more welcoming owing to a number of buildings with notable character, especially Tonbridge School. In addition there is a feeling of space and this is supported by an avenue of trees, seating areas and well maintained grass verges from Shipbourne Road to Bordyke.



The pavements throughout the main shopping area, whilst in reasonable condition in the majority of the area and appear to be kept clean and free from litter these do suffer from significant deposits of **chewing gum** which contributes to a general feeling of decay and does little to promote a feeling of a clean welcoming town.



## Pedestrian Railings

The railings throughout the Tonbridge town centre detract from the appearance of the area. They are poorly maintained, with several damaged panels, range in colour from grey to blue to black, and serve little protection (if any) to the pedestrian.

Pedestrian guard railing in Tonbridge has recently been assessed by the County Council as part of a county-wide project.

The work schedule produced by this audit reflects the adopted position of the Joint Transportation Board. In essence, some of the guard rail will be removed as part of the programme and other installations will remain in place.

Where removal takes place it will contribute to the decluttering aims of this audit and will help improve the appearance of the High Street and surrounding areas.



There may be scope to reuse some of the well designed railings scheduled for removal to replace lengths of quite ugly 'scaffold pole' type railings in locations such as Waterloo Road at the side of St. Stephens Church.

Consideration should also be given to replacing the 'scaffold pole' railings around the Job Centre in Bradford Street. In both of these locations it is essential to retain railings due to the height difference between the footpath and road.

The railings that are retained should have any damaged panels repaired or replaced and should be painted or self finished black throughout to present a linked approach from the conservation areas into and throughout the town area.

## Lighting Columns

The lighting columns through the area range in design from 'Victorian' globe columns in the upper part of the High Street, Bordyke and River Walk to modern columns in the majority of other areas.

The colours of the columns range from grey to blue to brown to black to a self finished grey. It would appear that there is no regular maintenance regime in place for the cleaning down or painting of lamp columns with reactive maintenance taking place when the lighting fails or doors fall off.



It is particularly noticeable that some lighting columns have the doors strapped on using a metal band and/or parcel tape where the hinges have failed.

All lighting columns should be subject to a regular maintenance programme to ensure that access doors are maintained and hinges repaired as necessary to any openings and a regular programme of repainting to the first two metres height should be undertaken to ensure the appearance of the area is maintained.

All to be painted or self finished black throughout to present a linked approach from the conservation areas into and throughout the town area.



Poorly maintained lamp columns detract from the overall appearance and character of an area. Where columns are self finished in locations outside of the conservation areas it may be prudent to leave unpainted to reduce ongoing maintenance costs.





## Benches

There are a number of benches of varying designs and types ranging from circular benches at the Botany and Lansdowne Road through to benches that have a seat and back and those benches that do not have any back rest. This presents problems with maintenance due to the differing sizes of replacement slat requirements when repairs are necessary.



It would appear that there is no regular maintenance regime in place with reactive maintenance taking place when the bench is longer functional and the majority of benches are covered in green algae and where benches are placed under trees within the River Walk area bird droppings present a major problem.

Consideration should be given to relocating the four benches from the River Walk at the Avebury Avenue area of River Walk where they are located under trees to the centre of the open green area abutting River Lawn away from under the trees to reduce problems from bird droppings and to create a picnic type area for residents and visitors.



All benches and seating should be subject to a regular maintenance programme to ensure that seating is clean, safe and useable. Slat require cleaning and re-varnishing as part of a regular maintenance programme. Poorly maintained items of street furniture detract from the overall appearance and character of an area.

## Bollards



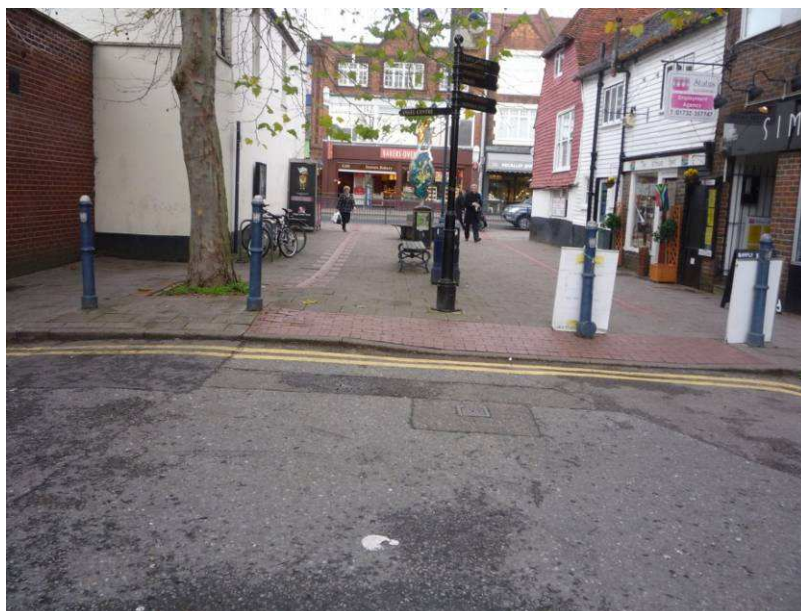
There are a number of bollards varying from wooden, concrete or cast iron. Again the finish of the cast iron bollards varies from grey to blue to black. It is not recommended that any of these bollards are removed or replaced.



Bollards tend to be located to prevent traffic accessing areas prohibited to vehicles. Cast iron bollards have been installed in conservation areas, wooden posts/bollards are located in 'green' areas, whilst concrete bollards tend to be located in less sensitive areas.

All bollards serve a purpose to prevent unlawful access and/or to prevent vehicles driving over the footway.

All cast iron bollards should be **painted or self finished black** throughout the area to present a linked approach from the conservation areas into and throughout the town area and should be part of a regular cleaning and maintenance programme to ensure their appearance does not detract from the overall appearance of the street scene.



## Litter Bins

There are a number of litter bin types throughout the area ranging from Cast Iron to polyethylene to wooden slatted bins along with a small number of combined litter/can recycling bins. The colours range from green to blue to black. Wooden slatted bins are located within the River Walk area and are suited to this park setting. All other areas are



served by polyethylene bins which vary in colour from green to blue to black. The black cast iron bins are located at the part of River Walk leading from New Wharf Road to the big bridge.



Some litter bins contain a plate for the stubbing out of cigarettes. Where no plate is present litter bins have been damaged by smokers using the top to stub out their cigarette before discarding into the bin. The colour of the polyethylene litter bins has 'greyed' over time. The use of polyethylene does not match the metal used for other items of street furniture though it does provide a less expensive option. Polyethylene bins cannot be painted to improve their appearance. The variety of colours present a problem as when a bin is damaged or requires replacing it would appear that whatever colour is available has been used thereby leading to a mixture of colours within the same area.



It is recommended that the Tonbridge Conservation Area Street Furniture and Surfaces Guide is followed and all litter bins within the highway/street area (excluding those within a park setting) are black in colour to present a linked approach from the conservation areas into and throughout the town area.



It is also recommended that consideration be given to upgrade all litter bins to traditional cast iron circular rounded top bins with gold trim to match to compliment those in the conservation area and that the location and number of litter bins be further assessed to ensure that they are positioned wherever possible with other street furniture and where their placement is of maximum effect for easy use.

Litter bins located within a park setting should continue to be the wooden slatted type. This will ensure, should a bin require replacement, replacements are readily available and it is clear which type of bins should be utilised.

Cast Iron litter bins will require a programme of repainting every two to three years dependant on location, and should otherwise only require wiping down as part of the emptying/street cleansing schedule.

## Footway Surfaces

Whilst generally these are in a reasonable or good condition for the majority of the area, there are some that require repair or resurfacing particularly at the southern end of the town. Those requiring repair or resurfacing are listed in the appendix of works. Within the list of works it is recommended that a thorough cleanse using specialist chewing gum removal techniques is instigated as this will do much to improve and enhance the visual aspect of the street scene.



## Implementation

In the current period of severe financial constraint, there is little likelihood of funding being available for schemes involving significant physical change with major civil engineering works. This makes it all the more essential to promote highly cost effective but simple interventions that produce significant and instant improvement in and around Tonbridge High Street.

The schedule accompanying this audit lists a range of such simple interventions that, taken in aggregate, can produce a significant improvement in the street and surrounding area. Funding for a substantial part of the required works could be provided by the KCC Member Highway fund among other sources, topped up with contributions from existing Borough Council streetscene related budgets.

For maximum impact, the intention would be to coordinate the County and Borough Council elements of the works programme closely.

This programme is not just about cost. Some of the proposed work has the potential to produce a reduction in ongoing maintenance costs which may lead to other improvements becoming more affordable.

An underlying aim of the implementation phase will be to bring into effect the recommendations of earlier work in the Tonbridge Conservation Area Street Furniture and Surfaces Guide. This will include using a standard colour for all street furniture throughout the area such and standardising the colour and type of litter bin.

This will assist in driving the costs down, ensuring litter bins can be quickly repaired or replaced should they be broken and will help provide a linked approach from Brook Street at the South approach into Tonbridge through to the Northern gateway from the Hildenborough and Shipbourne direction .