

# "STREETSCAPE : STREETS FOR ALL"

## INTRODUCTION

Members will recall the launch of the Civic Society's report "Streetscape : Streets for All". Indeed, some members attended the event in the Museum Lecture Theatre on 26 January 2006. This is part of a nationwide initiative by English Heritage and the Civic Trust.

The original report addressed 27 streetscape topics. Of these, 16 have been collected together under the title "Street Furniture Issues" and are the subject of this report to the City Area (Community) Committee. The other 11 deal with "Traffic Related Issues" and are the subject of a separate report to be discussed, of necessity, with the Joint Transport Committee, although the City Area Committee will be kept fully informed.

## STREET FURNITURE ISSUES (Page references are to the original report)

1. **COMMERCIAL SIGNS AND HOARDINGS** (pp.17,18)
  - 1.1 Obtrusive advertisements and hoardings, many in a poor state of repair, are located on land or property which appears to be in the control of Network Rail. One of many such hoardings is in the railway station car park and hides the view of the Cathedral spire from visitors as they leave the station. This is currently under investigation by Development Control. Others, on Castle Street roundabout and under railway bridges, are particularly unsightly at major entrances to the city centre.
  - 1.2 More hoardings and prominent commercial signs are to be found on Churchfields Road, in Fisherton Street and St Edmund's Church Street. One, on Churchfields Road, is understood to generate an income of over £1k p.a. for the house owner.
  - 1.3 The large sign outside SDC's Bourne Hill offices detracts from the listed facade even more than the parked cars.
  - 1.4 Garish signs advertising Bed and Breakfast attached to, but totally out of keeping with, traditional pub signs are appearing.
  - 1.5 Some feel that the public lavatory signs in the Market Place could be less obtrusive, while maintaining legibility.
  - 1.6 The Close is not immune from playing host to loud commercial signs in a particularly visually sensitive area, which were, unfortunately, granted planning permission under S/1997/2042. The information which they offer largely duplicates that on a nearby finger post. A retrospective planning application has been invited in relation to a sign advertising the refectory restaurant. We understand that the Close "streetscape" is being examined by the Cathedral authorities.
  - 1.7 Banners advertising commercial events are quite frequently draped across the front of the Guildhall, a listed building. One assumes that such banners are authorised. By whom?
  - 1.8 SDC ran a very successful programme last year to remove A-boards from the pavements, but they are creeping back. The situation needs to be monitored constantly and enforcement action taken where appropriate.
  - 1.9 An ODPM leaflet "Outdoor Advertisements and Signs : A Guide for Advertisers" is disappointing in the large variety of advertisements which it excludes from control.

## **2. PRIVATE SIGNS (P.49)**

- 2.1 Many handsome old buildings in the city centre, for example Pembroke House on Fisherton Street and some more recent ones, such as the "Mews" developments in the Eastern Chequers, are defaced by a multiplicity of "private" signs, almost invariably relating to car parking, which verge on the paranoid. The ODPM leaflet is virtually useless for controlling this practice.

## **3. COMMERCIAL WHEELED BINS (p.19)**

- 3.1 Commercial wheeled bins are extremely unsightly and it is doubly unfortunate that they occur in their greatest concentration in the Market Place where they seriously detract from the visual amenity of the area. Urban squalor reaches its peak in the corner of Ox Row and Oatmeal Row, where the bins (and their overflow) combine with no fewer than four street cabinets, a redundant bollard and a semi-submerged electricity sub-station. Two bins are in close proximity to outside cafe/pub tables and must present a public health hazard, especially when rubbish is stacked alongside.
- 3.2 Other wheeled bins are left in the street for long periods, for example outside rather than within Debenham's service area (which is used as a staff car park) in Chipper Lane, outside the Chapel Night Club on Milford Street and outside the New Inn. Those commercial enterprises which cannot store their wheeled bins within their own premises should use other means of waste disposal.
- 3.3 Commercial waste disposal in general needs a much more rigorous discipline. All too often packaging and other debris is left outside shops for long periods. Collection timetables need to be strictly adhered to by both the creators and disposers of rubbish.

## **4. LITTER BINS (p.26)**

- 4.1 Most litter bins are well placed in terms of anticipated need but there is ample evidence of their failure to be used. A sudden outbreak of social responsibility among fast food consumers could well prove the total city centre litter bin capacity to be inadequate. But that problem can be dealt with if and when it occurs.
- 4.2 The adequate maintenance of approximately 130 city centre litter bins represents a daunting task for the City Centre Ranger.
- 4.3 So, the problem is clear : little used under-maintained litter bins.
- 4.4 For less than obvious reasons, the Close has a variety of litter bin designs, not all of them pleasing to the eye. The possibility of building more litter bins into walls in this visually sensitive area should be explored. Other cities have managed to do it. The Cathedral authorities are aware of this criticism.
- 4.5 Dog litter bins are well distributed around the City and in the Close.

## **5. STREET NAMEPLATES (p.37)**

- 5.1 It is somewhat ironic that, whereas much of the Streetscape report is devoted to an over-abundance of undesirable street furniture, the concern here is the under-provision of desirable street furniture. Most of us, as "locals", know where we are in the city centre but visitors, even if they have a street map, still need street nameplates.

5.2 The results of an audit of 20 streets suggest that the provision of street nameplates at many junctions falls well short of what might be considered "appropriate". Further work is considered to be necessary, both to validate the criteria used and to expand the audit. Nevertheless, there is already evidence of inadequate provision, which should be rectified. Failure to do so suggests an introverted attitude and a lack of civic pride.

5.3 Certain omissions suggest that the authorities have motorists, rather than pedestrians and cyclists, in mind.

## **6. STREET LAMPS** (pp.38,39)

6.1 Our relatively small city centre offers a wide range of street lamp designs, ranging from the attractive, but nevertheless functional, to the downright ugly. The generally low level of street lighting is supplemented by commercial establishment sources of varying aesthetic appeal.

6.2 In one cathedral city (Lincoln), the historic core zone has been re-equipped with newly-cast replicas of the original Victorian lamp posts, but fitted with modern lamps and reflector systems. Salisbury could do the same.

6.3 Street lamps attached to buildings tend to be unobtrusive and, in the High Street and New Canal areas, not unattractive. In the case of new-build, the preferred option should be to attach street lamps to buildings, preferably without any ancillary "black boxes".

6.4 In common with benches and litter bins, many lamp posts are badly in need of a coat of paint.

## **7. TELEPHONE KIOSKS** (pp.40,41)

7.1 There are 27 public telephone boxes in the city centre, of which only 3 of the traditional design remain. Can any other historic city match this sad record?

7.2 Telephone kiosks are generally well distributed in terms of access by visitors, although the Maltings and Priory Square together are served by only one. In contrast, more than two of the four in the centre of the Cheese Market are rarely in use at any one time. The area would benefit considerably from their removal/relocation.

7.3 Few telephone kiosks, if any, impede pedestrian flow. On the contrary, some are so discretely positioned that they are difficult to find.

## **8. TELEPHONE POLES** (p.42)

8.1 Perhaps surprisingly, a number of telephone poles still remain in the city centre, mostly situated in residential streets, with a considerable number of wires radiating from each to nearby houses.

8.2 These wires seriously detract from the charm of, for example, St Ann Street, from which there is an otherwise unobstructed view of the Cathedral spire.

8.3 Whereas there are relatively few telephone poles which remain in the city centre, a disproportionately large number of them significantly restrict available pavement width.

8.4 It is understood that BT have a policy to place all city centre telephone wires underground and remove the poles. This policy must be long-term inasmuch as telephone poles in Mill Road have only recently been replaced by new ones. It is a pity that BT could not have come to an arrangement with NTL when the latter dug up the city pavements a few years ago.

**9. STREET CABINETS AND CCTV CAMERAS (pp.35,36)**

9.1 City centre pavements are littered with hundreds of metal boxes or "street cabinets". They are invariably ugly and often are rusting and /or covered with graffiti. Many could be sited more discretely or to cause less pedestrian obstruction. The owners of such boxes must be made to maintain them in a satisfactory visual condition.

9.2 Although these street cabinets are associated with a variety of functions, is there no prospect of the (usually anonymous) organisations responsible for them sharing boxes and thereby reduce their number?

9.3 In other city centres, street cabinets have been built into walls. Why not in Salisbury?

9.4 Whereas it is accepted that air quality monitoring equipment is bulky but (unfortunately) necessary, the last decade has seen dramatic advances in the miniaturisation of electronic equipment, so why do so many of the other boxes have to be so big?

9.5 The number of boxes is always increasing. Few if any are ever removed. Are they all still in use?

9.6 In spite of the catastrophically adverse effect which street cabinets can have on the streetscape, those who install them are understood to be subject to few, if any, planning regulations as to their location, size or colour, even in a conservation area. Such a situation is unacceptable.

9.7 CCTV cameras which require a wide angle of view should (and usually are) fixed to street lighting columns. Their ancillary equipment usually could be (but often isn't) contained within the column. Other CCTV cameras are attached to buildings and are often associated with particularly ugly "plumbing". On the listed Guildhall building for example.

**10. PEDESTRIAN SIGNS (pp.30,31)**

10.1 As a major tourist destination, it is absolutely vital that the city centre has a comprehensive, accurate and legible signage system. By and large these criteria are met by the present finger posts, but there is room for improvement.

10.2 The signs which guide visitors from Central, Culver Street, New Street and Brown Street car parks to the Market Square or to the Close are, at best, marginally adequate. There are none at Lush House or Salt Lane car parks.

10.3 Similarly, those visitors arriving at the railway station may find walking to the Market Square a navigational challenge. Even alighting from a P&R bus and wishing to walk to the Close can present problems to a first-time visitor.

10.4 The Civic Society would be pleased to take part in a further detailed survey of pedestrian signs along the same lines as that carried out for their report. That is, from the point of view of a visitor totally unfamiliar with the layout of the city.

10.5 Consideration should be given to attaching more pedestrian signs to existing, rather than dedicated, posts.

- 10.6 The condition of pedestrian signs and their posts, as well as whether they point in the correct direction, needs to be monitored more regularly. A post leaning at a drunken angle creates an uncaring impression.
- 10.7 Although visitors can purchase town maps from machines in the High Street and in the Maltings, why not display street plans, similar to those in the Close, at key locations? The street plan posters on the outside wall of the railway station offer a model of clarity.
- 10.8 The South Wiltshire Tourism Strategy calls for better pedestrian signage.

**11. PLAQUES (p.33)**

- 11.1 Plaques convey a sense of civic pride, enhance the streetscape and are of particular interest to visitors. Given the city centre's considerable architectural and historic interest, a total of only 33 is far too few.
- 11.2 The Civic Society's blue discs offer minimal information, which is supplemented in the leaflet "Salisbury Plaque Walks", shortly to appear in a second edition.
- 11.3 Larger plaques, usually of a slate-type finish, such as that outside the Pheasant Inn on Rolleston Street (presented by Courage), give more information. The interest of potential sponsors needs to be aroused but the design must be approved.
- 11.4 SDC might take the lead by providing a plaque supplementing the meagre information on Henry Fawcett, the subject of the only statue in the Market Square.

**12. BENCHES (pp.8,9)**

- 12.1 There are three main issues relating to benches : their distribution, their design and their maintenance.
- 12.2 The majority of benches, whether on city centre streets or in the surrounding green areas, are conveniently located and are provided in sufficient numbers. A detailed audit is not considered to be a high priority. However, more benches in the Bourne Hill area might be considered as part of the SDC office redevelopment.
- 12.3 The traditional "park bench" design seems to enjoy wide public approval, whereas the backless type is less popular. The latter offers the marginal advantage of choice of view but can be dangerous in that it is at just the height to do damage to the shins of the unwary.
- 12.4 Inadequate maintenance of benches contributes to the general "down at heel" appearance of the city centre. A major improvement is felt to be possible at relatively little cost, if volunteer labour could be used to help the City Ranger.

**13. CAFE TABLES AND CHAIRS (p.50)**

- 13.1 The increasing appearance of tables and chairs outside the pubs and cafes along Ox Row, Oatmeal Row, Butcher Row and elsewhere is most welcome and offers an insight into the streetscape improvements which are possible in areas which have been freed of the motor car.
- 13.2 This recent development should be viewed as a pilot scheme for more ambitious proposals in other parts of the city centre. Priory Square and the riverside areas of Central car park, for example.

**14. FLOWERS AND TREES** (pp.22,23)

- 14.1 The city centre is noted for its floral displays, which are enjoyed each summer by visitors and residents alike. Unfortunately, the flowers are at their best for only about three months and for the rest of the year the large empty flower boxes and multi-branch posts are most unsightly. Surely at least the latter, which are clearly designed to be removed, could be taken away (and undergo maintenance) when not in use.
- 14.2 Fewer dedicated multi-branch posts would be needed if more baskets were hung from existing lamp posts. In an example at the junction of Water Lane and Fisherton Street, one post carries a "period" street lamp, a bus stop sign and two hanging baskets.
- 14.3 There is concern that plant containers which sit astride guardrails can obstruct pedestrians' view of oncoming traffic. This problem is particularly acute in the Cheese Market area.
- 14.4 Salisbury is blessed with wonderful green areas, with Elizabeth Gardens, the Greencroft, Bourne Hill and the Close only a few minutes walk from the Market Square. All are home to magnificent trees, with Elizabeth Gardens also having a wide variety of shrubs. The trees in the Market Place markedly enhance the area, but city centre streets generally lack trees or even shrubs.
- 14.5 This is a pity because trees and shrubs soften harsh streetscapes and can hide ugly features. They also absorb carbon monoxide and sulphur dioxide and attenuate noise. Ornamental species used extensively in other cities are non-fruiting and grow to a maximum of 20-25 feet. Root barriers are used at the time of planting to minimise the risk of damage to public services or road/pavement disruption. In the case of existing trees, these problems can be minimised by the use of tree grilles or resin-bound gravel, rather than yet more tarmac. A start might be made by lining the boundaries of Salt Lane car park with trees and shrubs and continuing the work already started in Brown street car park.
- 14.6 It could be that less emphasis on flowers (and their containers) and more on trees and shrubs offers savings in both capital and maintenance costs over the longer term.

**15. PAVEMENTS** (p.49)

- 15.1 Excessively narrow uneven pavements are unfortunately a common feature of the city centre, as is a patchwork of paving slabs and black asphalt rectangles. It is our understanding of the New Roads and Streetworks Act 1981, that the streetworks contractor is responsible for reinstatement. Temporary reinstatement (e.g.tarmac) is acceptable only for up to six months, when permanent reinstatement must have been completed to a standard of workmanship acceptable to the local authority, using the same as, or the closest possible match to, the original materials. Failure to do so is an offence which carries a fine. Is this law being enforced by WCC?
- 15.2 Repairs, we understand, are the responsibility of WCC Highways and, if there is a risk of pedestrian injury, are carried out very quickly, unfortunately using black asphalt. Permanent repairs by WCC Highways appear not to be subject to the same 6-month time limit or fine as is reinstatement by street works contractors. A WCC spokesman has stated that the policy is "to replace them (paving slabs) with tarmacadam until such time as funding is available for us to carry out a revamp of the entire street, rather than replace individual slabs." Does such funding ever become available?
- 15.3 A conversation with North Wiltshire District Council has revealed that they pay £20k p.a. for a gang of WCC Highways workers to repair/replace natural stone paving in

key areas and not use tarmac to effect a "temporary" repair. SDC should do the same.

**16. OTHER UNDESIRABLE FEATURES (p.50)**

- 16.1 Undesirable features of the streetscape range from the brutal razor-wire-topped wall around the BT building in Scotts Lane, to satellite dishes on the fronts of buildings in the conservation area. The latter, at least, may be contrary to planning regulations. Clarification is needed.
- 16.2 The Society intends to continue to encourage its members, and others, constantly to be on the alert for undesirable streetscape features and to bring them to the notice of the local authorities and/or the media.

**RESPONSIBILITIES**

The task of identifying those aspects of the central Salisbury streetscape which are of concern and illustrating and discussing them in a report has been a major but relatively straightforward task. The difficult task is to identify which committees and which departments of SDC have the responsibility, powers and resources to tackle the problems. In this there are significant financial, organisational and legal problems. For example :

Environmental Services and City Centre Management have a major part to play but are under-resourced. It is important that the position of City Centre Ranger is fully recognised and a full-time post established and funded. His/her duties should be very much as laid down by the City Centre Manager in documents dated January 2006. It is noted that the Ranger has a number of different departments/agencies to which to report maintenance and other problems. What record is made of these reports and who ensures follow-up action?

That the maintenance and reinstatement of city centre pavements is a WCC Highways, rather than SDC, responsibility is far from ideal.

Development Control enforcement officers are hampered by extremely limited legal powers to control outdoor advertisements.

That BT, NTL and utilities providers generally are virtually exempt from compliance with planning regulations is the source of many streetscape problems. Nevertheless, surely SDC can insist that street cabinets are adequately maintained by their owners.

We look to SDC to address these problems internally or through the Local Government Association.

To try to end on a more positive note, the Civic Society is more than willing to help SDC in any way it can to improve the central Salisbury streetscape, whether by carrying out further surveys or by providing practical assistance to the City Centre Ranger in his daunting maintenance task.