



Historic England

# Streets for All Yorkshire



# Summary

In 2017 Historic England published an updated national edition of *Streets for All*, a practical guide for anyone involved in planning and implementing highways and other public realm works in sensitive historic locations. It shows how improvements can be made to public spaces without harming their valued character, including specific recommendations for works to surfaces, street furniture, new equipment, traffic management infrastructure and environmental improvements.

This supplementary document summarises the key messages of *Streets for All* in the context of Yorkshire. It begins by explaining how historic character adds value to the region's contemporary public realm before summarising some of the priorities and opportunities for further improvements to Yorkshire's streetscapes.

This guidance has been prepared by Craig Broadwith, Historic Places Advisor in Yorkshire, and Rowan Whimster.

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## Front cover: Sheffield City Hall

In 2005 the square in front of Sheffield's Grade II\* City Hall was relaid in Yorkshire stone. Two glass-cased fountains are illuminated at night and several seated areas are also illuminated in colours that match the ground lighting of the nearby Millennium Square.

## The public realm

Yorkshire is one of England's most diverse regions. Three-quarters of its population now live in the major urban centres of Leeds, Bradford and Sheffield, but it is also the home to a host of smaller industrial towns and more than 150 historic market towns and villages.

But it is not only fine buildings that give these places their special character. Just as important are their public spaces – the streets and paths through which people move and the squares and precincts in which they connect.

Many have evolved over hundreds of years and are rich in inherited character, though sometimes it will have been degraded by neglect or the remorseless pressure of cars and lorries.

Today, the focus has shifted to making the public realm a better place for drivers and pedestrians alike. As well as improving traffic flows this means placing a greater emphasis on walking and cycling, on the value of public transport, on the safety of children and on accessibility for everyone.

*Streets for All* shows how practical solutions to common highway problems can be achieved without harm to the valued character of places. The underlying principles are to reduce clutter, co-ordinate design and to reinforce local character, while maintaining safety for all.

*Streets for All* also demonstrates how opportunities can be translated into action. In a world of scarce resources and competing priorities it sets a clear agenda not only for councils but also for local communities and businesses.

It begins by identifying the elements that make an area distinctive – its landscape, its building materials and its traditional detailing. It then addresses some of the common problems that can diminish the quality of public areas and explains how integrated townscape management can provide answers.



Sensitively laid paving can reflect historic patterns while also helping to calm traffic.



A well-lit shopping street using good modern light sources in traditional lanterns, with supplementary lights on the buildings.

## Identifying local distinctiveness

The character of Yorkshire's built environment has been shaped by its industrial and rural past. It is also inextricably linked to its underlying geology – the source of the natural materials from which its buildings and streets have traditionally been constructed.

From the winding lanes of medieval York to Bradford's Centenary Square or Richmond's ancient market place, the distinctive character of public spaces needs to be thoroughly understood if they are to be properly conserved

The protection and enhancement of this distinctiveness helps to foster greater local identity throughout the region. Properly coordinated, it also has the potential to make its historic centres more attractive to inward investment and cultural tourism.

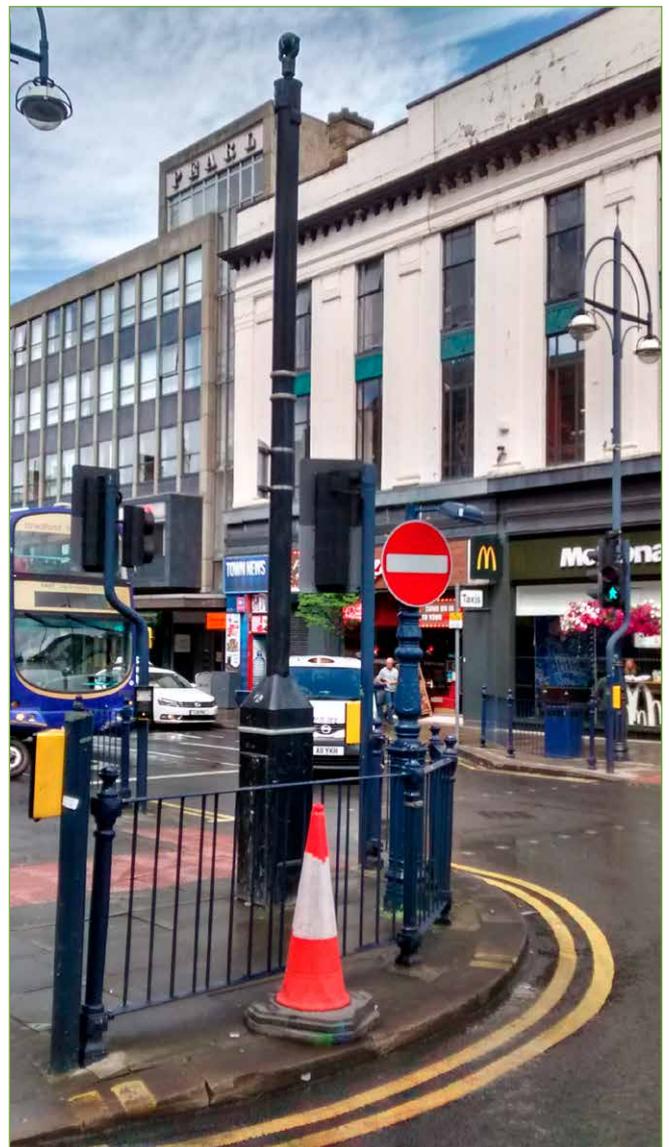
A successful public realm is one in which the differing needs of drivers and pedestrians are served without the need for excessive signs, road markings or physical barriers. Traffic calming measures should be fitted sensitively into the street scene as though they were part of the original design of the area.



Traditional details and materials can reinforce local distinctiveness.

Public spaces can also be thought of as 'outdoor rooms' enclosed by buildings. To avoid unsightly clutter, their street furniture needs to be placed with the same care as the objects in an indoor space. Traditional lamp-posts, bollards and seating are all important sources of local character, but high-quality, new design can also enrich the public realm and encourage its greater use.

Streets that are safe and attractive places for people to live and work need to be the rule, not the exception. That's why good design needs to be at the heart of Yorkshire's cities, towns and villages.

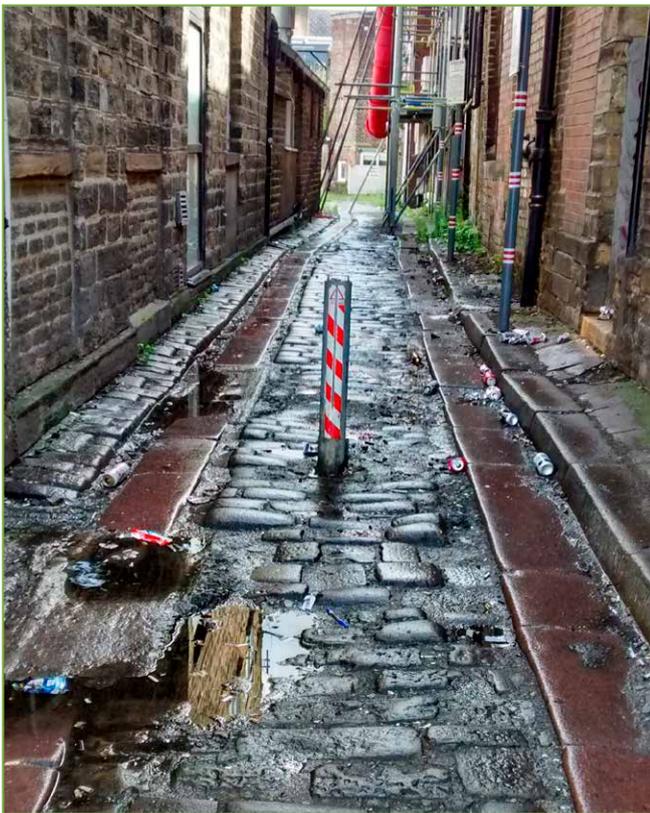


A proliferation of poorly integrated street furniture and signage detracts from the character of the public domain.

## Opportunity into action

Yorkshire has 889 Conservation Areas of which 54 were found to be 'at risk' in 2017. These include 21 in which the condition of the public realm was seen to be a noticeable or significant problem. Almost all of these were located in urban centres, local centres or inner city suburbs. Several recurrent problems were identified:

- The poor quality of roads and pavements, coupled with inappropriate or poorly executed repairs.
- Visually intrusive traffic calming measures, such as road humps, build outs and accompanying signing and street furniture, that were out of keeping with the historic character of the areas in which they have been installed.
- The inappropriate treatment of trees that had caused them to die or become diseased. Unkempt and under maintained open spaces, often with large amounts of litter, were other common problems.

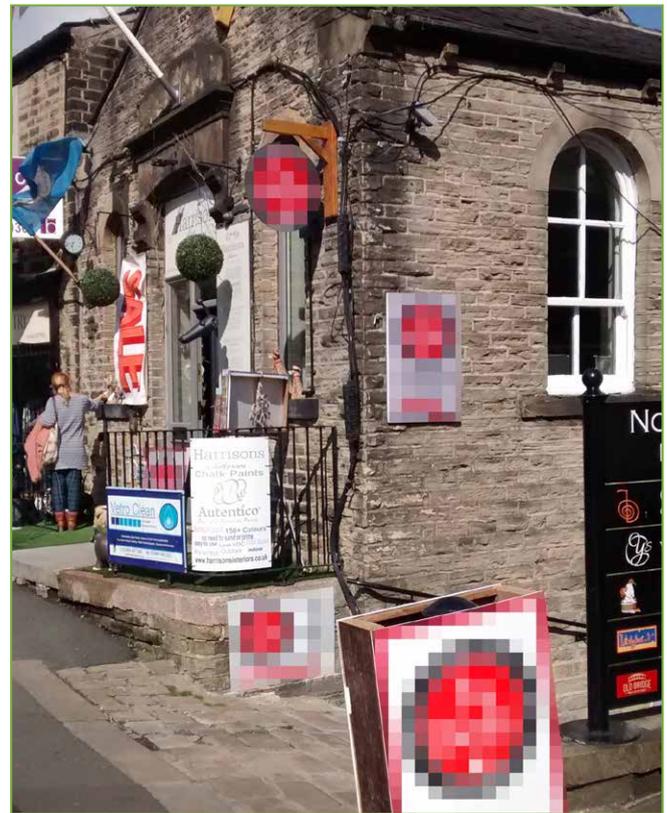


Poor maintenance can quickly blight the character of the public realm.

- Clusters of signs, signals, CCTV poles and other street furniture that create visual clutter and physical obstructions, as do randomly located balustrade banners and 'A' boards. These commonly observed problems are frequently the result of uncoordinated installations by the highway authority or local businesses.

As well as putting conservation areas at risk, poor practices of these kinds can quickly lead to wider spirals of decline that harm entire communities. Not only do businesses move out and house prices fall, but local authorities will suffer from reduced Council Tax and Business Rate revenues.

Creating environments where growth can be fostered depends on Yorkshire's communities, businesses and local authorities maintaining and enhancing the public realm in the better-coordinated ways commended by *Streets for All*.



Five signs for one café, Holmfirth Conservation Area.

## Case study: Kingston-upon-Hull

Kingston-upon-Hull's city centre has two distinct areas: its Old Town, bounded by the River Hull and the Humber Estuary and girdled by docks and former docks, and the New Town beyond it, to the north and west.

The City Council resolved to address the tired and deteriorating public realm within the city centre as part of its aspiration to 'celebrate the city's historic and contemporary culture through adopting an approach which values the city's architectural and cultural heritage and integrates the skills and imagination of contemporary artists in the development and animation of the public realm to reflect the city's culture and identity'.

The new public realm was laid in advance of Hull City of Culture 2017 to show off the city to its best advantage and to provide a lasting legacy for the event.

The project centred on a route from the city's Paragon Station via Queen Victoria Square through the Old Town along Whitefriargate to Trinity Square and the Fruit Market. The new public realm forms the setting to some of Hull's

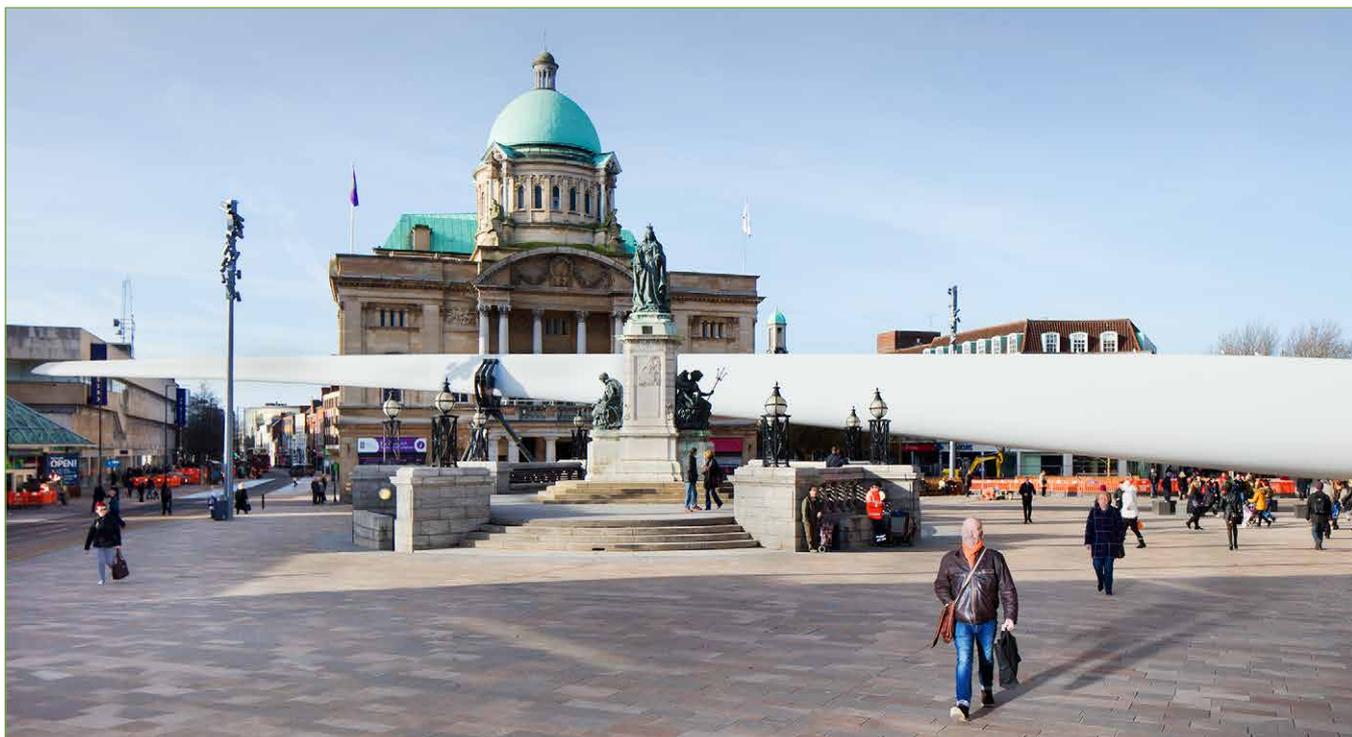
most significant designated sites, including Beverley Gate (a scheduled monument), the Maritime Museum and City Hall (both Grade II\* listed buildings), Trinity House and Hull Minster (both Grade I).

High-quality materials including granite, York stone and porphyry were used throughout to provide clutter-free, accessible, functional and legible spaces.

Historic England worked closely with the City Council to ensure that the significance of these heritage assets was enhanced by the public realm scheme, particularly in relation to Beverley Gate, which was the scene of events which initiated the English Civil War in 1642.

### Conclusion

Restoring Hull's historic public realm and unique sense of place have been vital first steps in support of the city's aspiration to become a world-class visitor destination.



The use of high-quality materials to re-pave Hull's Queen Victoria Square has breathed new life into this important public space.



# Historic England

We are the public body that looks after England's historic environment. We champion historic places, helping people understand, value and care for them.

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