



## Streetscape Audit

An important part of developing the public realm strategy has been an audit of the existing streetscape. This has involved a general assessment of the different elements in the streetscape in order to understand:

- Understand the historic evolution and surviving historic examples
- The current role and use of the streets
- Issues arising from the function of streets
- To identify the paving and street furniture types and their general condition
- To act as a basis for identifying what paving / street furniture should be removed and retained in the future

The aim of the audit has not been to create an inventory of streetscape features but to assess the overall condition of the streetscape.

The assumption behind the audit has been that it is possible to assess the quality of the streetscape using a commonly accepted set of indicators. These tests of a successful streetscape can be listed under six headings:

- Comfortable: a street should provide a comfortable and safe environment for pedestrians and the disabled.
- Function: a street should not be dominated by any one function but rather should accommodate a range of functions.
- Visually simple, and free of clutter.
- Well cared for: a street should be well maintained, and not degraded by utilities or extraneous advertising.

- Appropriate to local character: where there is a clear local vernacular, street design should acknowledge these traditions.
- Providing for access, deliveries and storage of vehicles.

The audit covered every street in the Ashford town centre. A consistent methodology was applied to each street, recording its quality and the contribution of each streetscape element. A photographic record of each street was compiled. The results of the streetscape audit for each street are summarised in a separate document.

In undertaking the audit, an overall picture of the streetscape and wider public realm has been built up. The key findings of the audit are presented below.

### Floorscape

The term 'floorscape' is here used to describe all the paved areas of the street, including both the footway and carriageway.

The town centre lacks any coherent structure in terms of footway paving. The existing paving comprises a palette of many materials that does not relate to each other. At many locations the footway materials have worn out or weathered unevenly and are in need of replacement. Inset covers to inspection chambers are provided at only a few places and this can result in a clutter of utility covers in the footway. The replacement of materials has often been done on an ad hoc basis with areas patched with whatever material was available.

The pedestrianised High Street area is paved with



Poor quality existing floorspace

clay pavers, granite setts and York stone and, despite it being identifiable from other areas of the town, is visually incoherent and cluttered.

It is likely that the carriageways were originally made up of rammed earth and stone with a stone kerb and drainage line. The carriageways are now mostly tarmac blacktop and this is in relatively good condition in most places. Some areas suffer from poor appearance due to patch repairs and utilities reinstatement.

In the main, kerbs are of pre-cast concrete. Many kerbs have been damaged or chipped and this contributes to the poor visual appearance of the streetscape.

Litter bins have been located in most of the streets but need to be planned in accordance with other elements of streetscape. Bollards have been used in a few streets to prevent vehicles mounting the footway but the materials and design of these often conflicts with the other elements of streetscape.

Presently there are only a few places where telephone kiosks are located within the town centre.

There are very few bicycle stands within the town



Opportunities for additional cycle stands

centre with these mostly concentrated in the High Street area. The choice of materials, design and location of street furniture and their coordination with larger level strategies plays an important role in raising the quality of the streetscape. It appears that little attention has been given to these issues in the past.

## Open Spaces

Though Ashford town centre has always been relatively compact and intensively developed, open Open Spaces

Though Ashford town centre has always been relatively compact and intensively developed, open space has continually formed an important element in the town's character and townscape.

The green spaces in the town were established in the medieval period. The churchyard, which is the oldest, offers a small, sheltered space within the densely packed historic core. The Memorial Gardens, which were laid out in 1924 on undeveloped glebe land, offer a much larger green space on the eastern fringe of the historic core, with potential for relaxation, walking and leisure activities.

The other type of open space in the town is that affiliated to development. Unfortunately, the larger part of this kind of space is allocated to large, flat, hard surface car parks, constructed near the historic centre and ring road during the late twentieth century. However, open space is also provided by the streets themselves: particularly the High Street and Bank Street, which offer seating at outdoor cafes and on public benches and provide an appropriate space for socialising and relaxation.

The limited access to local countryside from the city centre is to be regretted, as it was a key characteristic of the core for many centuries. The current lack of access between the town centre and the River Stour is also notable, as this has been an important feature in the town's landscape since the earliest settlements.

(Text from draft Ashford Town Centre Character Appraisal, January



Inadequate and poorly integrated signage

## Pedestrian Signage



Visually dominant highway infrastructure

Directional signage in the form of information maps and boards are located at the station. However, they do not guide visitors along routes to key areas within the town centre as no effort has been made to integrate them with the associated signage. The signage appears to be isolated indicators and this is an issue for Ashford as it is fragmented by

infrastructure such as the railway and ring road.

In the High Street and along a few other streets, traditional Victorian style direction posts have been used and these incorporate a symbolic model of the market cross in response to the context.

### Traffic Signs

The one way ring road and increasing traffic flows



Existing blank walls and service access

have resulted in a proliferation of traffic signs on the ring road itself and on the routes to the car parks.

In general, there has been insufficient control over the number and size of traffic signs used in the town centre. Multiple signs have been clustered especially at the entrances to the ring road without consideration to how much information motorists can reasonably be expected to absorb. Standard

signage has been used without consideration for the scale and character of the local context.

The traffic signs are displayed prominently on most streets with parking restriction and one-way direction signs often being the only legible components of the streetscape due to the nature of their display.

### Private Forecourts

Many streets have buildings that have dead walls and railings which present an unfriendly streetscape. The backs of large retail outlets and car parks in the town centre have transformed some streets into service lanes only. Private forecourts are seldom seen as part of the larger public realm framework.

### Advertising

Advertising displays are concentrated in the High Street, the area that has maximum retail frontage. In other streets advertising comprises only a few boards either mounted on building walls or as 'A'



The historic lime tree lined Elwick Road

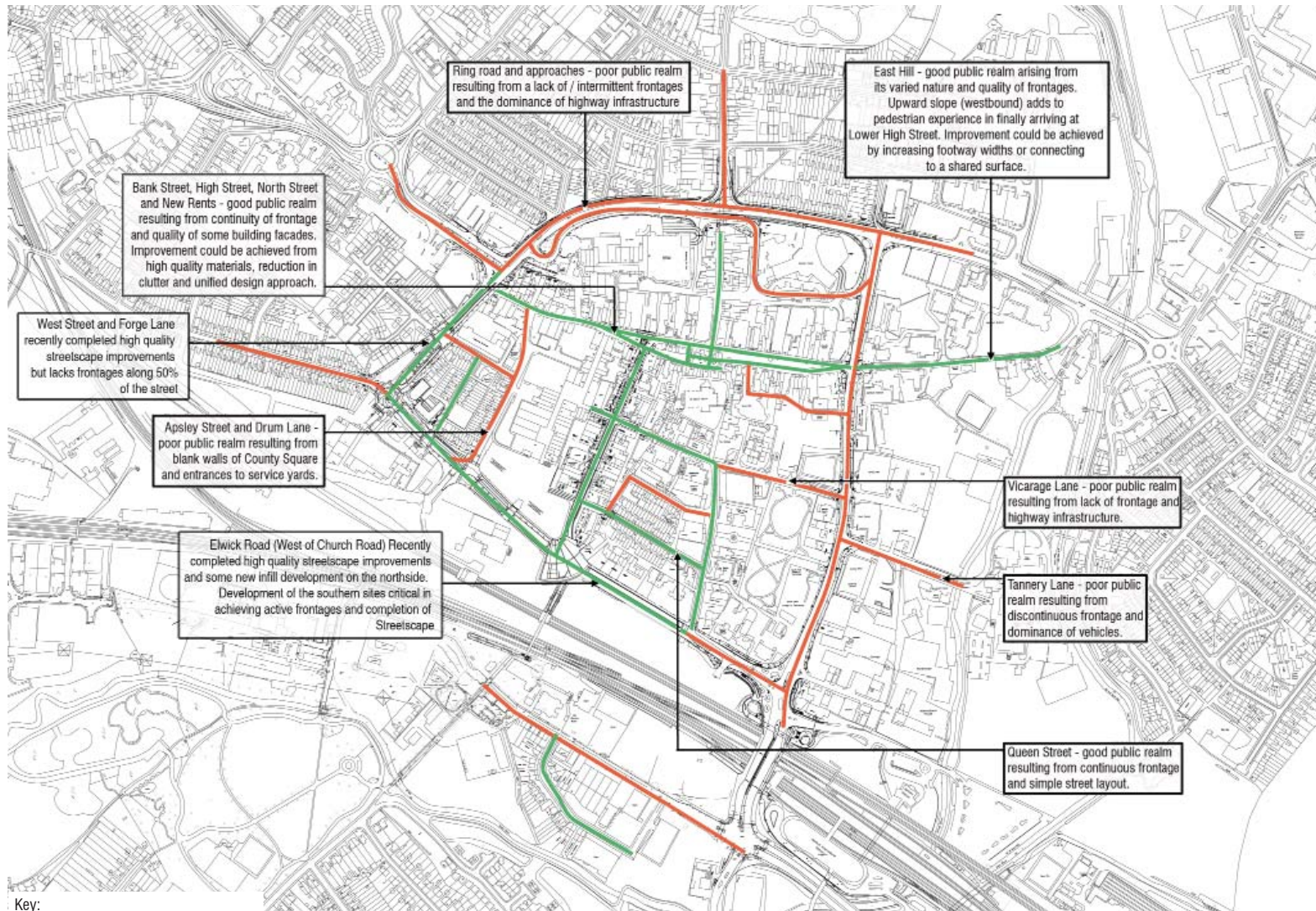
boards in the footway.

### Planting

Within the town centre there is very little planting within the footways. However, a characteristic of some streets is trees planted at the edge of property lines that form a canopy to streets (Church Road, Elwick Road, Vicarage Lane). This unique quality in these streets needs to be recognised and respected in the public realm strategy.



'Traditional' lighting columns and year-around 'festival' lights in Bank Street.



Key:  
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— POSITIVE STREETSCAPE

— NEGATIVE STREETSCAPE

Areas covered in audit

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## Pedestrian Facilities

The majority of pedestrian crossings are located on the ring road. High traffic volumes and speeds create a barrier to easy crossing for pedestrians. Guardrails are provided at many places adjacent to formal crossings and although these are for pedestrian / vehicle safety, they present an unfriendly street edge. In the absence of any public realm improvement measures, streets can be reduced to sheer traffic carriers with a minimal provision of pedestrian facilities.

Pedestrian underpasses are located on Elwick Road adjacent to Beaver Bridge and appear to be used infrequently. The pedestrian / cycle link from Elwick Road to the station though is well maintained and landscaped.



Barriers to pedestrian movement

On Elwick Road and Somerset Road there is a lack of defined street edges and uses and this has reduced these roads into high-speed vehicular routes that are unpleasant for pedestrian usage. The footways, edged at many places by high dead walls on one side and guardrails on the other, are devoid of any element of streetscape other than street lighting and traffic signs.

The footbridge across the railway south of Bank Street is an important pedestrian connection to areas to the south of the town centre. However, the connection between Bank Street and the pedestrian footbridge is very weak and does not provide a continuous link.

## Street Furniture

Street furniture comprises elements such as seating, bollards, litter bins and cycle stands.

Seating has been introduced at many places in the town centre as part of street improvement measures. The High Street improvement scheme chose a traditional seating design that responds to the historical context. The location and numbers of seats provided complements the use of the area and contributes to the atmosphere and character of the High Street.



Typical arrangement of existing town centre street furniture

In contrast seating provided near the station in conjunction with a landscaped area is hardly used at all as it is completely segregated from the surrounding context. In the remainder of the town centre, the approach has been uncoordinated resulting in seating being unused and abandoned.