



Historic England

# Streets for All London



# 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 London. It begins by explaining how historic character adds value to the city's contemporary public realm before summarising some of the priorities and opportunities for further improvements of London's many streetscapes.

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**Front cover: Watling Street, City of London.**

Thoughtful townscape management and the use of high-quality materials are the keys to creating a clutter-free public realm that respects its historic origins.

## The public realm

London is a city of extraordinary history, vitality and diversity. But it is not only fine buildings that provide its special character. Just as important are its public spaces – the streets and paths through which people move and the squares and precincts in which they connect.

Some of this public realm has evolved over hundreds of years and other parts are the result of more recent planned development. Between them, they are rich in character, though too often it has been degraded by neglect or the remorseless pressure of traffic.

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

Historic England's *Streets for All* shows how practical solutions to common public realm

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 and distinctiveness.

*Streets for All* also demonstrates how opportunities are being translated into action. In a world of intensely competing priorities, it encourages developers, boroughs, communities and businesses to work together to forge a better public realm for everyone's benefit.

It begins by identifying the elements that make an area special – its streetscape, 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.



Exhibition Road. Replacing a proliferation of ill-assorted clutter with well-designed new street furniture has introduced a greater sense of occasion and of place to this major tourist destination.  
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## Identifying local distinctiveness

London displays a remarkably rich and varied tapestry of local character, materials and traditions. It is also a rapidly growing city in which individuality and diversity can help to provide a vital sense of identity in an increasingly homogeneous global environment.

From the narrow lanes of the City to the elegant planned squares of Belgravia and the industrial-led spaces of Kings Cross, the character of its public spaces needs to be thoroughly understood if they are to be properly conserved and appreciated by all.

The protection and enhancement of this distinctiveness helps to foster greater local identity throughout the London region. Properly coordinated, it will also ensure that it remains a place in which people want to live, visit and invest.

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 and security measures should be fitted sensitively into the street scene as though they were part of the original design of the area.



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

Public spaces can be thought of as ‘outdoor rooms’ enclosed by buildings. To avoid unsightly clutter, 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 enrich the public realm and encourage its more effective use, which benefits Londoners and visitors alike.

Streets that are safe and attractive places for people to live and work need to be the rule, not the exception. That’s why Historic England believes that a place-making approach to design needs to focus on the soul of an area and the connection with the people who live there.



Careful retention of traditional details and materials helps to reinforce local distinctiveness.

## Opportunity into action

Since *Streets for All*<sup>1</sup> was first published in 2004 many of its recommendations have been taken up across the capital, not just by borough councils but by private owners who appreciate the value of investing in an enhanced public realm.

Historic England's *Translating Good Growth for London's Historic Environment* (2016)<sup>2</sup> welcomes the opportunity to support the ambitions of the Mayor's *A City for All Londoners* (2016)<sup>3</sup> by playing an active role in encouraging good growth while celebrating London's diversity and unique character. Best-practice standards set out by some of London's local authorities, such as Westminster Way (2011) and TfL's *Streetscape Guidance* (2016)<sup>4</sup> also align closely with the aspirations of *Streets for All*.

While there has been a welcome improvement in the quality of many of London's streets and public spaces, investment has not been equally spread. Alongside world-class rehabilitations of the public realm there remain extensive areas that fall far short of the standards to which a global capital should aspire.

Whether at the centre of the city or in its outer suburbs, heritage is at the heart of London's identity, particularly in its public realm. Conserving the local character of London's different neighbourhoods and places depends on three vital ingredients: good design, quality materials and respect for the past.

Over the next decade the pressure for growth will be great across every part of London. This global metropolis will only remain an attractive place to live and visit if its shopping streets and public spaces provide the character and security that people want.

It also depends on London boroughs and neighbourhood planners being bold in what they demand. Even though their own local circumstances may differ, there is much that planners, designers and decision makers can learn from some of the outstanding schemes put in place by both public and private developers since the original launch of *Streets for All*.



Of particular concern in terms of street clutter that shouts its presence, are advertisements attached to street furniture. In London these are increasingly being located in highly trafficked and often historically sensitive areas. Historic England is worried about the degrading effect these have on the character of conservation areas and the setting of listed buildings, with damaging impacts exacerbated when digital screens and internally illuminated signs are used.

## Case study: The Ancient Market, Kingston upon Thames

The Ancient Market is at the heart of Kingston's historic town centre and was crucial to the success of the Kingston Futures initiative, a coordinated programme of regeneration and place-shaping projects with a particular focus on the town centre.

Regeneration was focused on what gives the area its feel as a historic market town. The project has played a major role in enhancing the leisure and retail experience using the extra value that the area's heritage provides.

Projects included enhancements to the Ancient Market, restoration of the Grade I listed All Saints Church and a programme of events to promote the town as a tourist attraction. Championing the area's historic and cultural heritage more strongly as a destination for tourism in this way was supported by 69% of the borough's residents.

In the Ancient Market subtly toned new granite paving, stylish but functional street furniture and a creative lighting scheme combine to create a beautiful public space with character and drama. Through careful and sensitive design they complement the Grade II\* listed Market House.

The upgrade of the Ancient Market was supported by the Mayor of London's Outer London Fund which is helping to bring vibrancy and economic growth to high street places across London.

### Conclusion

This revitalisation, along with a strong marketing campaign, has resulted in a surge in footfall to both the market and retail outlets. The projects have also created stronger connections between the market and the surrounding areas including the riverside.



As well as improving the setting of around 20 listed buildings, the scheme has enhanced trading prospects for the market, which now generates an estimated £6 million each year for the local economy.

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# 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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