

OXFORD  
CIVIC  
SOCIETY

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SIGNAGE IN CENTRAL OXFORD

*Ros Weatherall*  
&  
*Paul Cullen*

# OXFORD CIVIC SOCIETY

## Central Oxford Signage Review

### 1. BACKGROUND

The Civic Society was set up to protect Oxford's urban environment. We are currently concerned by the poor quality of the streetscape in the city. To give a few examples, there are places where traffic signs obscure views, too many posts obstruct the pavement, or street furniture is not maintained. The overall impression is untidy and not worthy of a city with a worldwide reputation for beautiful buildings and a high quality of life.

We are not alone; English Heritage has recently launched a campaign (Save Our Streets; [www.english-heritage.org.uk](http://www.english-heritage.org.uk)) to tidy up Britain's urban environment. Their launch used Oxford's streetscape to illustrate many of the problems.

Meanwhile Oxford already has a Public Realm Strategy, endorsed in September 2000 by the City Council's Planning Committee: but so far it seems to have little impression on Oxford's streets.

This report gives some examples of the problems here in Oxford, and suggests some ways forward. We have not tried to identify every problem, but have chosen a selection of issues which are wide ranging and may apply across Oxford, not just in the central (OX1) area. We have looked in detail at the central area around Bonn Square and Queen Street. The recent competition for Bonn Square, the pending opening of the Castle development, the possible redevelopment of Westgate and the West End plans all focus attention on this crowded area of the city.

## 2. WHAT IS WRONG – SOME EXAMPLES

### 2.1 General clutter

This is at the entry from New Road to Queen Street. There are too many poles here, it looks ugly and space is wasted as a result.



The entry to Bonn Square from New Inn Hall Street is through a mess of litter bins, posts, parked and vandalised bicycles and litter. This is also part of a signed national cycle route, although most pedestrians are probably unaware of this. The bollards in this picture below show some of the variety of bollards used in the area.



## 2.2 Size and number of traffic signs

The Public Realm Strategy suggests developing an integrated strategy for pedestrian and traffic signage, covering the height, size and ways of rationalising and minimising the number of signs. At present pedestrian signs are completely independent of signs for traffic, using separate poles (as can be seen in the photograph opposite). They have recently been repainted, which is to be welcomed, but integration with other signs would be better. The centre of Oxford is a 20mph zone so large traffic signs are unnecessary, as drivers will not need to read them at speed and hence will not need large lettering.



This traffic sign in Hythe Bridge Street obscures views as you walk from the station towards the city centre. Note the uncontrolled cycle parking: there is no cycle parking provided in this street.

The Public Realm Strategy points out that DETR approval can be sought:

“... for low height signs throughout the City centre to minimise the visual impact of pole mounted traffic restrictions signs”.

Cycle lane signs were installed when cycle lanes were created and their installations are often uncoordinated with other signage, and poorly maintained.







Most of central Oxford has car parking restrictions, resulting in more visual clutter of yellow lines and signs everywhere. This needs to be reviewed. For example the sign on the pole (left photograph) was moved and fixed to the wall instead, but only as a result of the householder's request.



The Public Realm Strategy suggests use of parking restriction zones instead of double yellow lines.

## 2.3 Cycle parking

Oxford is a city of bicycles, and Oxford also has a serious problem with bike theft. Cyclists need to lock their bike to something immovable, and posts



and street furniture are used in the absence of dedicated cycle racks or when racks are insufficient. Apart from the visual intrusion, this creates a hazard for pedestrians.



The county has recently started a programme of replacing and adding new bike racks of the Sheffield stand type, as recommended by the Public Realm Strategy. An alternative method, rings on the wall in New Inn Hall Street, is attractive, and not obstructive when out of use.

But bicycle parking is of no use if occupied by deserted and vandalised bikes.



## 2.4 Bus stops

Bus stop posts have been allowed to become a visual intrusion in some places as each bus company fixes its own “flag” and there appears to be no overall management.

This bus stop in Queen Street has been bent sideways and needs straightening up again.



## 2.5 Hanging basket suspension posts

In many places, the seasonal hanging baskets obscure views of historic buildings, and sometimes of other signs. Although pretty, they often add to the visual clutter in the city centre. Their locations need to be reviewed so they co-ordinate with signage and poles in the centre.



### 3. RECOMMENDATIONS

Streets are used by a variety of authorities and organisations to install traffic signs, direction signs, traffic lights, benches, kiosks, litter bins, junction boxes, phone boxes, bus shelters - and so on. With no central coordination this results in cluttered and untidy streets.

It is five years since the Public Realm Strategy was endorsed by the City Council. It recommended:

“Measures will need to be put into place to ensure that all stakeholders in the urban environment work together towards a common goal. This will require inter-disciplinary working across council departments, liaison between the County and City Councils, involvement of City Centre Management, co-operation from statutory authorities and continuing public involvement.”

We suggest that it is time to implement this.

Finally, the centre of Oxford gets more attention, as it presents the first impression of our city to visitors. The Public Realm Strategy was commissioned for the OX1 area. But most Oxford residents live outside the central area, and also deserve a tidier city. Many of the above problems are repeated in areas such as Headington, Cowley, Botley and Summertown. Wider public consultation is suggested to find out if the Public Realm Strategy can be applied to the entire city.



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