



Guildford Society Walking Audits

Guildford Society Transport Group,
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Guildford Society Walking Audits

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2004 Surrey County Council and Guildford Borough Council published a Joint Walking Strategy which aimed at identifying key routes for pedestrian movement in the Borough and to arrange to have these audited using the IHT “Guidelines for Providing for Journeys on Foot.” Little progress appears to have been made during the intervening period.

With the increasing need to encourage people to drive less and to walk more, the Society undertook to arrange for volunteers to carry out some of this work and this Report is the result of these efforts over the last two years.

A short list of 11 representative routes was selected from a longer list of possibilities (Annex 1) and guidelines drawn up to enable the volunteers to report on specific features on each route (Annex 2).

AUDIT

The audit reports (Annex 3) indicate a vast number of detailed points which need to be addressed individually. However there were also some common features which were thought to justify further study, as follows:

Direction signs

The positioning of many signs within the Town Centre left much to be desired, often pointing in the wrong direction due to having been moved or damaged since installation, or not located in the best position for them to be useful for pedestrians. Outside the Town Centre there was a lack of useful signage, even on major routes such as from Haydon Place to Guildford College and Stoke Park.

Shrubbery and street furniture

In many places there are hedges encroaching on the pavement and street furniture restricting its width.

Traffic lights

The siting and operation of many of the traffic lights affecting pedestrians around the Town Centre were inappropriate. With some the timing is faulty, and some are not positioned so as to be clearly visible to pedestrians or which result in obliging vehicles to stop on crossings. A special study is included of pedestrian behaviour at the Farnham Road lights near the railway station where the positioning of the activating button is confusing.

Acknowledgements

The Guildford Society acknowledges the good work of its members who completed these audits and of the members of the Transport Group in preparing this report.

BACKGROUND

GBC produced a Draft Walking Strategy in November 2001 and SCC and GBC issued the Guildford Joint Walking Strategy in 2004. Although these documents suggest a lot of activity, in reality it appears that little is really happening. It seemed that the Councils might have met a dead end and that the Guildford Society could usefully bring forward some new thinking.

The Strategy sets out a series of actions which the Councils say they would take. The first is to “identify key routes in the borough for pedestrian movement improvements, for routes to the main places that generate traffic, such as schools and shopping centres”. This has now been completed though the list is hardly spectacular. The 2001 Draft Strategy included 15 routes within Guildford. This has now been reduced to 5.

The document indicates that an audit will be done on one key route each year. The last item is: “Identify the key route for the 2003/2004 route audit” which was to be completed by May 2004 but apparently no route had been identified by the date we enquired in late 2006. With this in mind the Guildford Society Transport Group decided to take the initiative and complete some audits itself.

The Council audits were supposed to be based on the guidelines outlined in the Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions publication, “Encouraging Walking: Advice to Local Authorities”, and the IHT publication, “Guidelines for Providing for Journeys on Foot”. These publications contain much useful advice, but although the IHT Guidelines consider at some length how to make “before and after” assessments of “improvement” schemes, neither document offers a simple objective way to assess the quality of an existing route. Therefore the Guildford Society decided to devise its own method.

As a basis for meaningful discussion audits need to be factual and so have the advantage that they cannot be rejected as “matters of opinion”. The method proposed had 3 stages. The first stage was to prepare a “long” list of all the routes proposed for consideration. As well as “key routes” the list included some routes representative of those used for ordinary everyday activities, e.g. from home to shop. The second stage was to specify each (or most) of the routes on the “long” list in some detail including, for example, which side of the road is to be followed.

The third stage was the audit proper. The aim was that between 10 and 20 routes should be selected as representative of the whole of that part of Guildford which the Society considers to be its primary interest and that each of these routes should be walked at least once in each direction. In the event 5 volunteers walked a total of 11 routes and their reports are set out in Annex 3.

All the audit reports are given in full in Annex 3. They give a complex picture of the state of walking routes in Guildford as seen by local residents and are impossible to summarise. Indeed the audit reports describe a vast number of detailed points which need to be addressed individually.

However some common themes also appeared and were thought to justify further study.

PRINCIPAL TOPICS

Direction signs

Within the town centre there are many direction signs for pedestrians but their provision and siting seem to be largely unsystematic, and therefore unhelpful. Signs are often placed where they cannot be seen by pedestrians.

Outside the town centre signs are largely non-existent, even on major pedestrian routes such as Haydon Place to Guildford College and Stoke Park. This is of course the area where walking should be most encouraged if the Councils are to achieve their objective of modal shift from cars to feet.

The paragraphs below refer to 2 walking routes where the signing needs significant improvement, 3 routes where signing is needed but none exists yet, and a number of important general points. It is not a comprehensive list of the problems with direction signs in Guildford.

High Street to Train Station

The signs directing walkers from the High Street to the train station appear to have little logic and no consistency. It would seem to be sensible to amend individual signs as follows.

1. *High Street, outside Halifax.* This sign directs walkers along Friary Street and Bridge Street, thus adding to the congestion and consequent danger in Bridge Street. A more satisfactory route is across the Town Bridge. Therefore redirect the existing sign to point across the Town Bridge.
2. *West end of Town Bridge.* Walkers need to turn right at the end of the bridge. The present sign is high in the air outside the church on the opposite side on the road. It is unlikely to be seen and is therefore unfit for purpose. A new sign is needed at the northwest corner of the bridge at the access to the towpath, and should be no more than 7 feet from ground level. (The sign should also include Farnham Road multi-storey car park. See below.)
3. *Portsmouth Road car park.* The existing signs for this route within the car park are satisfactory.

4. *Riverside.*

The sign immediately to the north of Friary Bridge (pictured) indicates that wheelchair users should go up a flight of steps. Not only is this bizarre, it also fails to indicate the need to turn left at the top of the steps. The existing sign should be moved from the railings to the wall facing the top of the steps.



5. *Ramp to Bridge Street subway.*
Pictured.

There is a beautifully informative sign hidden on the left hand side of the wall in the centre of the picture. A “mirror image” of the sign is needed on the left hand wall.



6. *Rest of route.* The rest of the signs on the route are satisfactory in this direction.

7. *Reverse direction.*

The first sign on the route is shown in the picture, partially hidden by the Flood Information Point and the bicycle. It should be moved to the decision point where the user would expect to find it - at the start of the railings 3 bays to the left.



8. *Rest of reverse direction.* This is satisfactory.

Train station to Friary via Walnut Bridge

This is part of the route audited as WR11 and the audit report should be read. The signage on this route shows even less logic and consistency than the one above. It would be sensible to provide signs as follows.

1. *Inside station concourse, over left-hand exit.* A sign to Town Centre, etc. via Walnut Bridge.
2. *At start of path across car park.* A sign to Walnut Bridge, Cinema, Friary Centre and Town Centre.
3. *The traffic signs near the top of the ramp* are all facing in the wrong direction. They should be turned to face the correct ways. (The existing items 1, 2 and 3 are all railway property.)

4. *The “Town Centre” sign at the top of the ramp* is edge-on to approaching pedestrians and so cannot be seen by them. It should be moved to the railings just round the bend. (This sign is Council property.)
5. *Walnut Tree Close at access to Walnut Bridge.* A sign to Walnut Bridge, Cinema, Friary Centre and Town Centre.
6. *Reverse direction, at junction of Onslow Street and Bridge Street.* A sign to Cinema and Train Station via Walnut Bridge.
7. *Corner of Onslow Street and Bedford Road.* A sign to Cinema, Walnut Bridge and Train Station.
8. *Bottom of steps to Walnut Bridge.* The railings on both sides should have signs to Train Station. A similar sign should perhaps be placed at the bottom of the ramp.
9. *Rest of reverse direction* appears to be satisfactory.

High Street to Farnham Road multi-storey car park

Signposting this route might do a little to help ease the pressure on Portsmouth Road car park. It is in part coincident with the “High Street to Train Station” route described above.

1. *High Street, outside Halifax.* A sign pointing across Town Bridge.
2. *West end of Town Bridge.* Sign combined with “Train Station” sign - see above
3. *South face of Friary Bridge.* A sign pointing to Park Street subway.

4. *Park Street subway (pictured).*

Sign to “Park Street” and “Farnham Road multi-storey car park”.



5. *Halfway up subway ramp.* Sign to “Farnham Road multi-storey car park”
6. *On traffic island at Farnham Road pedestrian crossing.* Sign to “Farnham Road multi-storey car park”.

7. *Reverse direction.* At Farnham Road pedestrian crossing it might be worthwhile to remove the “Town Centre” sign on the back of the “two-way traffic” sign. This would do a little to ease congestion in Bridge Street by diverting some pedestrians via the Park Street subway.

North Street to Guildford College and Stoke Park

This is essentially the route described in WR4 and starts at the junction of North Street with Haydon Place. It is one of the most important pedestrian only routes in the town but it is devoid of direction signs. Even some of the signs in North Street have their blank sides towards Haydon place.

Direction signs are needed at all decision points along the whole of this route in both directions. This will be a significant task.

University and The Chase to Egerton Road and RSC Hospital

This route is part of WR5. From The Chase there is a short path to the main path which stretches from the University to Egerton Road near Tesco. From there on there is a pavement to the National Express coach stop and RSC Hospital.

The road between The Chase and Egerton Road has no pavements and there is no indication in The Chase how pedestrians should get to Tesco (for example). At the entrance to the University site the footpath has a batch of signs which would only be understood by members of the University. Apart from this the footpath is devoid of signs despite having several junctions and even though the parallel road is well signed.

There is a need for signs to: Town Centre, University, Cathedral, RSC Hospital, Farnham Rd. Hospital, Tesco, Onslow Village, Park Barn, Research Park, Manor Park, Bypass, coach stop, etc. These need to be placed at:

- The Chase where the path leaves the road,
- all junctions and both ends of the footpath,
- the coach stop, and
- near the hospital.

This too will be a significant task.

General points

Wrong direction. At any one time about a fifth of all the direction signs mounted on a single post point in the wrong direction. Whatever the cause, this is unacceptable. The problem never occurs with street name signs because they are always fixed to a wall or fence, or mounted on 2 posts, and it should not be allowed to occur with direction signs. One solution would be to drill a hole into the post through the strap or collar holding the sign and then inserting a self-tapping screw. This has been seen to be done elsewhere, for example in Southsea.

Wrong position. To be of value any direction sign needs to be sited at a decision point on the route to which it refers. There is little point in placing a sign where the only option is to go straight ahead. It also needs to be within the field of view of the user. On the other side of the road 10 feet up in the air is not suitable. A significant proportion of the direction signs in central Guildford fail to meet these needs.

Facing wrong way. A sign is of no value if it cannot be seen. Yet many signs in central Guildford are placed edge-on or even with their backs to the viewer. There seems to have been an apparent failure to differentiate between the needs of walkers and those of motorists.

Incomplete route. Signposting needs to be complete throughout each route - including a final indication that the destination has been reached. Sometimes the destination is obvious but that is not always the case. For example there are many signs to “Allen House Grounds” but absolutely nothing to indicate when that destination has been reached. Suitable signs should be placed on the site.

Congestion. Congestion can be as much of a problem on pavements as on roads. This is notably the case in Bridge Street but in spite of this pedestrians are still preferentially directed that way. It would be far better to direct pedestrians along alternative routes where they are equally convenient.

BT 7.8.09

Shrubbery and Street Furniture

Pavements in Guildford often seem to be obstructed by all manner of encroachments. Sometimes it appears that the needs of pedestrians are totally overlooked. Quite often it is only possible to struggle through in single file. Whilst this might meet the legal requirements it fails to meet the needs of the general public or the Councils' policy of encouraging walking. It is also a poor reflection of any efforts of the authorities to do their best for the people of Guildford.

A reasonable standard to aim for is that two couples, or two double pushchairs should be able to pass each other freely. In other words wherever possible pavements should have a clear width of 8 feet (possibly 10 feet) and rather more in shopping areas. Sometimes this will not be possible but where it is possible then efforts should be made to achieve it.

Pavement obstruction in Guildford is too widespread to expect everything to be corrected immediately so a two-pronged approach would be sensible - firstly to encourage consciousness of the problem to prevent new situations being created, and secondly action to remove the most serious obstructions.

Street furniture

Often street furniture is not sited in a position to minimise obstruction. One example is the traffic sign adjacent to the subway steps in Park Street. The main part of these steps is about 12 feet wide, which necessarily reduces to 9 feet at the top because of the kerb line. However the useful width at this point is quite unnecessarily reduced to 6 feet by the posts carrying a traffic sign even though those posts could just as easily have been sited next to the subway railings where they would have offered no impediment. There are also cases where street furniture has been added piecemeal, creating obstructive and unsightly groupings.

It is probably not realistic to expend resources correcting that example and the many comparable situations but **the need to make the very best use of the available space in order to provide clear passage for pedestrians should be carefully considered at the design stage.**

However some obstructions are sufficiently serious to justify immediate remedial action. Cases noted during the audit are:

[1] **Guildford Park Road at the corner with the road leading to Guildford Park car park.**

Here the pavement is completely blocked by a bus shelter, and the verge where the earlier bus shelter stood is blocked by a waste bin and other clutter. It would be a simple matter to widen the pavement by incorporating the concrete base of the former shelter and moving (or removing) the clutter.

[2] **Stoke Road at the island outside the Kings Head pub.** On this island two cycle racks are placed so that when they are in use the island is entirely blocked, forcing pedestrians to walk either in the bus lay-by or in the pub service road. These racks should be re-sited where they do not block the passage of pedestrians.

Shrubbery

All too frequently shrubbery is allowed to encroach on pavements. This is as true of the Councils as it is of other people. Commonly a quarter of the width of the pavement is occupied by shrubbery, which can make an adequate pavement quite narrow or claustrophobic. It also seems to be a waste of the resources used to create the pavements.

If we are to make best use of our pavements all shrubbery needs to be cut back not just to the boundary but even further to allow for new growth before the next trimming. **This could best be achieved by a publicity campaign in Council publications and by giving clear instructions to the Council's contractors.**

Again some cases are sufficiently serious to justify immediate remedial action. Some cases are known to us, each of which concern shrubbery which could itself cause injury, they are:

[3] thorn bushes behind the Friary Centre in Onslow Street, opposite Harpers night club.

These occupy half of the narrow pavement and force pedestrians to pass in single file dangerously close to the kerb.

[4] woody shrubbery at 2 Stoke Road. This has already been cut back but not to the boundary and it still significantly reduces the width of what is already a very narrow pavement.

[5] holly hedge at 131 Stoke Road.

[6] holly hedge at 175 Stoke Road. There is also a privet hedge at the side of this property that blocks more than half of the width of the pavement in Stocton Road.

There are many similar cases in Guildford. Of those mentioned the first is quite straight-forward and the thorn hedge could be drastically cut back to the full extent necessary. The others require more care (and tact) and horticultural advice might be needed. All of these cases result from the hedges being planted too close to the boundary.

BT 15.5.09

Traffic Lights

Traffic lights affecting pedestrians are often unsatisfactory. Problems include faulty timing, pedestrians cannot see the lights which affect them, vehicles stop on crossings, push button operates wrong lights.

This note lists examples discovered in the walking audit and others which have been noted elsewhere. It is far from comprehensive.

Faulty timing

St Saviour's junction

At this junction, when the pedestrian button is pressed there is always a long delay before the green man appears even if the traffic is stationary and not about to move. This delay is unnecessary and dangerous because it tempts pedestrians to cross against the lights.

High Street/North Street junction

When traffic turns from Upper High Street into North Street the last 3 vehicles always seem to be trapped by the pedestrian crossing lights outside the Post Office. This seems unnecessary.

Pedestrians cannot see lights

This problem mainly occurs where there are traffic lights for vehicles but not for pedestrians. Sometimes it might be solved by trimming the hoods around the lights or by drilling holes in those hoods.

Stoke Road/Nightingale Road

At this junction pedestrians crossing Nightingale Road from the south cannot see any lights controlling traffic in Nightingale Road. In the reverse direction there is an uncontrolled slip road which pedestrians have to cross with traffic approaching from behind at speed. [WR4]

Stoke Road/York Road

At this junction pedestrians crossing the upper (eastern) part of York Road cannot see the lights controlling traffic from the lower part of York Road, consequently this traffic starts without warning and it is difficult to judge when it has stopped.

There is also a problem with traffic turning left from northern Stoke Road into upper York Road. For pedestrians walking south this traffic approaches from behind and is difficult to see. For pedestrians walking north vehicle indicators, even if used, can be hidden by a low wall.

Exit from Bus Station

Near the exit from the Bus Station the light controlled crossing on Woodbridge Road leaves pedestrians stranded on the island. For the remaining part of the crossing (presumably technically on Commercial Road) there are no road markings and it is impossible to see the state of the lights controlling the traffic.

Vehicles stop on crossings

This problem usually results from a tailback from an earlier set of lights, it is of course illegal to stop on a pedestrian crossing but this does not stop it happening. The result is that when the lights change pedestrians have to weave between the stationary vehicles not knowing when, or if, they will suddenly start to move.

No simple solution is obvious but a stationary vehicle detector to limit the tailback should solve the problem and probably ease traffic flow as well.

The problem occurs at:

- the St Saviour's junction on the carriageway where traffic enters Onslow Street from the north.
- the top of North Street outside the Post Office.
- on all lanes at the exit from the Bus Station.

Lights do not control vehicles

This problem overlaps with the previous one because it is never clear whether vehicles which have stopped on crossings will move forward once the tailback which stopped them has cleared. This is a special problem at the St Saviour's crossing because the last vehicle "stop" lights are well before the pedestrian crossing and there can still be several vehicles in each lane waiting to pass the crossing when the green man appears.

Push button operates wrong lights

At the traffic lights near the town end of the Farnham Road bridge it was noticed that on the island some pedestrians crossing from the station side were pressing the push button on their right in the false expectation that it would activate the lights ahead of them. [WR6]

Tactile sensors

Since the audits our attention has been drawn to tactile sensors. Perhaps it would be sensible to check if all are working. At the Walnut Tree Close crossing the sensor on the pushbutton nearest to the train station appears to have failed.

BT 3.1.09

“The Wrong Button”

This study results from a comment in the Guildford Society’s audit of walking route WR6 and concerns delay to pedestrians crossing Farnham Road at the traffic lights near Guildford station.

The delay reported was to pedestrians crossing southward from the island and appears to be caused by those pedestrians mistakenly pressing the button controlling the northern half of the crossing. This button is sited at the western point of the triangular island and it is far from clear which half of the crossing it controls.

Between Wednesday 5 September and Saturday 8 September I took some counts, each lasting 5-10 minutes, of the groups of people using the southern half of the crossing in a southerly direction. The table below records whether they pressed the correct button, the wrong button or neither. Each group consisted of 1-4 people walking together.

	Correct	Wrong	Neither	Total
Wed 3pm	1	3	1	5
Thur 7.30pm	3	1	9	13
Sat 1.40pm	0	4	12	16
Sat 4pm	3	4	22	29
Total	7	12	44	63

The most obvious conclusion to be drawn is that most users make no attempt to press either button. Whatever the reason for this, it minimizes delays to traffic so it is hardly to be condemned.

The second most obvious conclusion is that more users press the wrong button than the correct one. The effect of pressing the wrong button is that the pedestrian is left waiting for the green man who is not coming. In addition on the north side (i.e. behind the pedestrian) the traffic is being held up for a pedestrian who is not crossing. Clearly this is not a satisfactory situation.

A possible solution would be to put the “correct” button next to the “wrong” button on the same post. This would show which button applied to each half of the crossing.

B T 9.9.07

LIST OF POTENTIAL ROUTES

This lists all the routes suggested for audit. Not all are of equal importance. Indeed those more than about 1 mile from the town centre (marked OS) are very unlikely to be followed up by The Guildford Society. The routes marked with a WR number were prepared for audit. Those marked with * have been audited.

-
- WR1 University to Town Centre via Guildford Park car park
 - WR2 Guildford College to Bus Station
 - WR3 Guildford College to Railway Station
 - WR4 * Guildford College to Town Centre
 - WR5 * RSC Hospital to Railway Station
 - WR6 * Railway Station to Town Centre via Farnham Rd west
 - WR7 * ditto via Farnham Rd east
 - WR8 * ditto via steps behind YMCA
 - WR9 Railway Station to Bus Station via Bridge St south
 - WR10 ditto via Bridge St north
 - WR11 * ditto via Bedford Rd
 - WR12 ditto via multi-storey car park
 - WR13 ditto via Laundry Rd
 - WR14 * College of Law to Railway Station, direct route
 - WR15 * The Meadows to Railway Station, via Buryfields
 - WR16 * Lawn Road to Town Centre, via Millbrook
 - WR17 * Lower Edgeborough Road to Lower Warren Road (St. Luke's Pharmacy)
 - WR18 * Guildford Station to University via Yorkie's Bridge
 - WR19 ditto via Scholars Walk
 - OS Burpham to Bellfields/Stoughton
 - OS Burpham to Merrow
 - OS Merrow to Spectrum/Stoke Park
 - Spectrum/Stoke Park to Ladymead
 - Spectrum/Stoke Park to Town Centre Bus Station
 - Town Centre Bus Station to Shalford
 - Town Centre Bus Station to St Catherines
 - Railway Station to Woodbridge Hill
 - Woodbridge Hill to University
 - OS Woodbridge Hill to Westborough
 - OS Woodbridge Hill to Bellfields/Stoughton
 - OS Bellfields/Stoughton to Ladymead
 - Woodbridge Hill to Ladymead
 - Falcon Rd to Sainsbury's Central
 - Falcon Rd to Dapdune House Surgery
 - Great Quarry to Debenhams
 - Guildford County School to Bus Station

INSTRUCTIONS FOR AUDIT OF WALKING ROUTES

The method proposed here has 3 stages. The first stage is to prepare a “long” list of all the routes proposed for consideration. As well as “key routes” the list should include some routes which are representative of those used for ordinary everyday activities, e.g. from home to shop. For this reason preparation of the list should include a degree of public participation.

The second stage is to specify each (or most) of the routes on the “long” list in some detail including, for example, which side of the road is to be followed. This could be done from memory but it should have actually been walked at some time. There might be perhaps 50-100 routes at this stage.

The third stage is the audit proper. Between 10 and 20 routes should be selected as representative of the whole of Guildford. Each of these routes should be walked at least once in each direction. The report should describe each section of the route separately.

Equipment needed for audit

Suitable clothing

These instructions and the detailed description of the route

Notepad and sharp pencils (biros will not write on wet paper)

Tape measure

Camera (if available)

Plastic bag (to keep things dry when it rains)

Procedure for audit

The audit can begin at any point on the route as long as the whole length is walked in both directions. The report should be written as each section of the route is being walked. If any feature cannot be convincingly described in words it may be photographed or a note made for someone else to do so. If any part of the stated route proves to be unworkable then the route should be amended and the change noted.

For pavements and footpaths the report should cover:

- width, either a measurement or whether it has a clear width sufficient for:
 - a) one person, b) 2 people, or
 - c) 2 couples or 2 double pushchairs to pass each other.
- condition of the surface.
- whether hedges or bushes encroach.
- whether passing traffic throws up water.
- obstruction by street furniture, etc.
- whether direction signs are correct and adequate.
- how many pedestrians pass in, say, 5 minutes.
- anything else which appears relevant.

For road crossings the report should cover:

- type of crossing.
- is it in the best place?
- whether there is undue waiting or overcrowding.
- difficulties caused by puddles, etc.
- for controlled crossings, whether it is possible to deduce when it is safe to cross.
- for uncontrolled crossings, whether sightlines are adequate.
- etc.

Other features should be reported upon in the way which seems most appropriate.

After the route has been walked a fair copy of the report should be made which expands any abbreviations. Conclusions may be drawn if appropriate.