

Guildford High Street

What makes Guildford High Street Special?

Pevsner's Architectural Guide to Surrey says "What gives Guildford its character is the High Street, which is steep, convex and immediately answered by the Mount on the other side of the river. A linear town is thus given a linear fulfilment, unlike so many High Streets, which simply fade out at either end, and the way this is complimented by the buildings makes Guildford one of the best old towns near London".



Other Historic Towns, such as, Winchester and Chichester, have followed the advice of English Heritage and developed a Streetscape Manual to protect their historic streets. **We urge Guildford to do the same.**

The Streetscape Manual should define the Character of Guildford's historic streets. What they should look like and the standards to which they should be maintained. Since it will cover both Highways and Conservation Areas, it needs to be jointly produced, adopted and funded by both Surrey County Council and Guildford Borough Council. It will include the roads, pavements, signs and street furniture. It will enable designing, planning and budgeting for a conservation programme for Guildford's Streets.

The Streetscape manual needs to define which streets should be conserved and identify their special character. They may have historic and / or commercial value. Many people come to Guildford because it is an attractive town. The High Street, Mill Lane, Quarry Street, Swan Lane, Angel Gate, Tunsgate, Milkhouse Gate, The Mount, Castle Street, Castle Hill, North Street, Friary Street and Chapel Street are all potential candidates. We suggest starting with the High Street.

The problems in the High Street are the Setts, the Pavements and the Street Furniture.

Damage to **the Setts** is largely due to utility companies digging up the road and failing to reinstate it properly in spite of having a statutory duty to do so.



Utilities have the right under the Traffic Management Act (2004) to dig up the road; they must get a licence from SCC Highways Department, This includes a deposit and an inspection fee (£150). There are problems with this system. The inspection fee is less than half the cost of inspection. Because its costs are not covered, SCC does not appear to inspect all the work, and poor work goes uncorrected. If the work is not rejected, deposits must be returned, and after six months the statutory duty to repair the road reverts to SCC and the cost

falls on the Council Tax payer. The Minister for Transport should be lobbied to allow Highways Authorities set a fee which covers their costs.



Utilities are required to provide certificates of competence for the supervisor and workmen. But SCC Highways Department only requires NRSWA Streetworks qualifications. Re-instating Setts and historic streets needs additional skills.

The pavements were originally paved with York Stone slabs and edged with granite kerbs. Slabs have been cracked by cars and lorries mounting the pavements to park or unload.

Accidents to pedestrians have been caused and the SCC has had to pay claims for injuries and damage.



The pictures illustrate the unsightly repairs carried by SCC. Note the Historic Guildford marker (top left) and the unsafe repair of a disabled crossing (left).

The Streetscape manual should define where Historic or special surfaces should be retained.

Street furniture is a motley collection of litter bins, bollards, railings, signs etc disfiguring our streets. Once these have been officially identified and adopted, a policy of removing street furniture wherever possible should be implemented, and a particular style and colouring of necessary furniture should be chosen and applied throughout.

Recently Guildford Borough Council and Surrey County Council have jointly funded maintenance of the High Street Setts.

Recommendation: The High Street is one of Guildford's major assets. The Guildford Society urges Surrey County Council and Guildford Borough Council to continue this cooperation by jointly developing a Streetscape Manual to set a standard for the conservation of Guildford's Historic Streets.



Photographs: Doug Scott

