

Task and Finish Review

Tourist and Temporary Event Signage Review

Background

1. On 27th July 2011 the Overview and Scrutiny Committee commissioned a Task and Finish Group to undertake a review of Tourist signing (Brown Signs) and agreed a scoping statement for that review. At the first meeting of the group it was considered that temporary event signage had a close bearing on the subject and therefore in accordance with the Council's Constitution the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny committee agreed that the scope should be extended to include temporary event signage. Therefore the agreed terms of reference of the task and finish group were:
 - To review Tourist Signing policy
 - To review Tourist Signing Delivery
 - To review the guidance provided on temporary event signage
 - To review the temporary event signage delivery
2. The full Scoping Statement for the review is set out in appendix 1
3. The task and finish group was made up of Councillors R Preece (Chair); WLS Bowen; ACR Chappell; EMK Chave and PGH Cutter. Officers supporting the review Group were: R Hemblade (Parks, Countryside and Leisure Development Manager) as the Lead Officer, A Lee-Jones (Lead Engineer (Traffic)| Local Government – Amey), PR James (Democratic Services Officer).
4. Between July and November 2011 the group carried out research and convened meetings, interviews and a site visit to gather as much background information and seek as many views as was required to make recommendations. For information on the interviews and the background information pack see appendix 2.

Overview

Tourist Signing

5. Tourist signing is the white on brown signs that are placed along highways to provide directional information to vehicle drivers in order to guide them safely to their destination. They are not intended to be a form of advertising. Nationally, tourism signing falls under circular roads 93/04 "Traffic signs for tourist attractions and facilities in England" and the type of signs that can be used is defined by the Traffic Sign Regulations and general directions 2002 as issued by the Department of Transport. Within these boundaries, Herefordshire Council has its own Tourism Signing Policy (appendix 3) which was last reviewed in February 2003. Amey Herefordshire deliver the policy for Herefordshire Council as part of the Strategic Partnership to deliver the highway services.

Temporary event signage

6. Temporary event signage covers both advertising and directional signs within a highway boundary. This signage falls under two different areas of legislation, planning and highways. Herefordshire Council produced guidance notes in 2009 entitled 'Signs placed within the highway boundary in Herefordshire' (appendix 4) to advise those involved in running an event as to what can and cannot be placed in the highways and for how long. Advertising signs of a more permanent nature are covered under planning regulations and are not part of this review.
7. Both tourist signs and temporary event signs affect the local economy and can have a major impact on how successful a businesses or event is. However signs also have an impact on highway safety and environmental clutter. Therefore the key elements are to ensure an appropriate balance is made between keeping the highway network safe and managing traffic, supporting the economy and to avoid damaging the environment. The key questions that have been addressed by the task and finish group are therefore:
 - Is Herefordshire Council's approach affecting business?
 - Have we got the balance right between business support, clutter and road safety?
 - Is there a potential source of revenue?
 - How do we compare with other authorities?
 - What will the impact of any variation in the current approach be on the environment?
8. This report addresses these 5 key question and sets out a number of recommendations

Is Herefordshire Council's approach affecting business?

Tourism Signage

9. Within legislation, local authorities are left to set the criteria which are most relevant to their area. Criteria are the standards or requirements a local authority requires the attraction or facility manager to meet in order that they be considered eligible for a brown sign. Depending on the destination this includes such matters as: quality standards, number of camping pitches available, hygiene and disabled provision. The research highlighted a number of areas where the quality standard requirements were out of date and not fit for purpose. The interview with Visit Herefordshire also highlighted the fact the quality standards were based on nationally set ones e.g. AA or RAC ratings, rather than any local ones which a number of local authorities are starting to develop. The research also identified a number of areas that were considered as too onerous and not reflective of local businesses. The interview with the Council for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE)

emphasised the fact that used sensitively, more use could be made of brown signs to spread the impact of excessive tourism from honey pot areas and to ensure the wider county benefits from tourism income.

10. The Group have been made aware that the government has recently issued two documents namely: Signing the Way – Traffic Signs Policy Paper and the ‘Government Tourism Policy’ both of which will provide guidance on any revised local policy.

Recommendation 1

- a) That the Herefordshire Tourist Signing Policy be reviewed;**
- b) That all criteria requirements are reviewed with the emphasis on encouraging more businesses to apply for brown signs and in particular :**
 - I. The requirements for a national quality scheme are reviewed and, where appropriate, a local quality assurance scheme is used instead of a national quality scheme or as an alternative.**
 - II. All quality assurance schemes should be relevant and valid**
 - III. The criteria around the “i” Tourist Information Centre is revised.**

Temporary event signage

11. The catch 22 situation for the local highway authority is that they can only formally authorise signs within the highway boundary if they meet national signing requirements. In reality the cost of doing this would be prohibitive for most events which are generally run on a very limited budget. Any signs that are not authorised by Herefordshire Council are, in the eyes of the Highways Act 1980, obstructions. As such the reality of the guidance produced provides advice to those who are running events about which signage Herefordshire Council will tolerate and not take enforcement action against. It is seen as a common sense approach to what should be a temporary occurrence.
12. The current guidance issued by Herefordshire Council (appendix 4) makes clear distinctions between commercial and non commercial events. For example organisers of a non commercial event who wish to put up temporary signage **advertising** the event can, with certain provisos, do so up to 21 days in advance of the event. The organisers of a commercial event on the other hand may only install **directional** signage up to 72 hours before the event, they cannot put in place temporary advertising signage at all unless it is properly authorised.

13. The reality is most non-commercial events (village fetes etc) have a commercial element to them and many commercial events include not for profit organisations amongst the stall holders. As such it can be unclear as to what is a commercial and non-commercial advert. The group therefore concluded that there are some clear discrepancies within the guidance.
14. The Group are aware that temporary event signage is a contentious issue and therefore any revised guidance must be made as clear as possible – possibly with the inclusion of pictures giving examples of the type of signs being referred to.

Recommendation 2

The current Guidance note entitled Guidance Note: Signs placed within the highway boundary in Herefordshire should be reviewed and in particular the following points should be addressed:-

- a) **The different rules for commercial and non-commercial events should be removed**
- b) **Directional signage should be allowed early than 72 hours in advance**
- c) **The rapid removal of signs by the event organiser after an event should be rigorously enforced.**

Have we got the balance right between business support, clutter and road safety?

15. Road safety and business support is dealt with above and within national guidelines. In regards to clutter, both tourism and temporary event signage need to be considered in the context of the wider signing policy which is beyond the scope of this review. However a few simple changes to the current Tourist Signing Policy can help reduce sign clutter. One of the main problems is caused by new businesses opening up and new brown signs being added to existing signage as shown in appendix 5a. The alternative is to make greater usage of symbols and signs which show multiple symbols, see appendix 5b. It is acknowledged that the cost of these signs could be excessively expensive for some businesses particularly when they are trying to become established. One of the solutions therefore is for a number of local attractions, along with the parish council to share the costs. Along with this, the prompt removal of redundant signs will also reduce clutter.

Recommendation 3

Wherever possible, usage should be made of symbols rather than words and local communities should be encouraged to make more use of multiple symbol signage.

Recommendation 4

Redundant signs should be removed as soon as possible after the highway authority have been made aware of the fact that they are no longer required.

Is there a potential source of revenue?

16. Herefordshire Council Tourism Signage Policy sets out an itemised set of charges for initial application and costs of supply and installing brown signs. These costs are regularly reviewed to ensure they cover the actual costs incurred by Herefordshire Council in administering this area of responsibility. The group considered the option of whether there is an opportunity to derive additional revenue over and above meeting reasonable costs but believe that this would be contra to the Council's wish to encourage tourist attraction and facilities and obligation to undertake proper traffic management.

Recommendation 5

A review should be carried out to ensure reasonable costs are met but that the Herefordshire Council should not seek to make a profit on the administration of tourism signing responsibilities.

How do we compare with other authorities?

17. Officers supporting the group carried out a desk top benchmarking exercise to compare neighbouring authorities who could be considered the main tourist competitors. The exercise concentrated on the criteria requirements as this was felt to be the most influencing factor on a tourism business and also the area the council has most control over. Appendix 6 sets out the results of the main areas of comparison. The view was that all Local Authorities are governed by the same rules and regulations set by the Highways Agency but that generally Herefordshire Council policies compare quite favourably with other authorities.

What will the impact of any variation in the current approach be on the environment?

18. As set out above, the main environmental impact of signage is clutter. In order to have any significant impact on Signage Clutter a wider review of general highway signage should be carried out.

Recommendation 6

That a wider review of all highway signage and delivery is carried out with a priority being to reduce sign clutter wherever possible.

Other matters

19. The review also brought up a discrepancy between Highways related signage guidance produced by the Highways team and planning regulation. The discrepancy relates to temporary event signage and has the potential to cause confusion at best and the council acting ultra-vires at worst.

Recommendation 7

A review of all signage across the authority is carried out and all guidance documents relating to signage issued by either the planning or highway authority are reconciled with current regulations

20. The Localism Act came into being in November 2011 and the wider implications from the Act for communities are still to be assessed within the Council. However, the Group suggest that any revised Tourist Signing Policy should highlight the importance of having local community support for any application for new or revised signage. The same goes for those organisations arranging events for which temporary signage is needed.

Recommendation 8

In revising both the 'Herefordshire Tourist Signing Policy' (at Recommendation 1) and the guidance note: Signs placed within the highway boundary in Hereford, (at Recommendation 2) the Executive consider the role that Town & Parish Councils could play in the future in respect of these areas, in line with the localism agenda.

Acknowledgement

21. The Review Group would like to thank Sir Ben Gill; Mr B Widdowson and the officers for their part in the review.

Task & Finish Review Group
February 2012