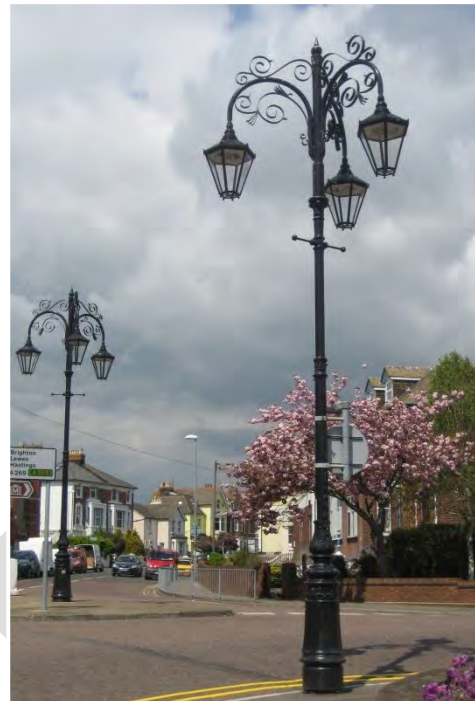


ROTHER DISTRICT PUBLIC REALM STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK



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Foreword

Rother District Council's Public Realm Strategic Framework is an ambitious and forward thinking document. It will help enable RDC to fulfil its important civic responsibility of good management of the Public Realm and work in partnership with other agencies to not only achieve this, but also our Corporate Vision; that Rother District will be recognised for its high quality of life, as a place where there is a strong emphasis on community and neighbourhoods.

Such a quality environment needs a quality public realm! Research has established the importance of innovative ideas and good management of public realm to regeneration and economic growth and to health and social well-being, as well as contributing significantly to the character and uniqueness of our towns, villages and countryside. Tourism, retail trade, commerce, community life, traffic management and day to day living depend upon a quality public realm.

We are immensely proud of the inspiring and hard work Rother Officers and Councillors have undertaken to produce this important piece of work. The implementation of the public realm initiatives put forward in the Framework will result in real socio-economic and environmental benefits across our District and reflects the confidence we have in our built and landscape environment, our people and our businesses.



Councillor Doug Oliver
Leader of the Council



Councillor Mrs Deirdre Earl-Williams
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Section 1: Introductions, Vision & Strategic Objectives

The Purpose of the Strategic Framework document

The Public Realm Strategic Framework (PRSF) is a strategic document that sets out the vision, objectives and key principles for the public realm in Rother district. Supporting Rother's Corporate Plan Vision and helping deliver the Rother Local Plan Core Strategy policies with regard to the public realm, the PRSF aims to guide successful management of, and improvements in, Rother district's public realm in co-operation with relevant stakeholders.

The PRSF provides an overview of the current quality and condition of the public realm across the district. It proposes general and place-specific priorities and principles for public realm management, maintenance and potential intervention, and sets out a number of future actions to be developed through a collaborative, multi-agency approach.

The PRSF will drive a cultural step change to embed the goal of achieving a quality public realm in Rother. It seeks to encourage a more co-ordinated and consistent approach to the design, quality, maintenance and appearance of the public realm throughout the district and will promote local distinctiveness. It will help deliver a number of the Core Aims and Broad Outcomes within Rother District Council's Corporate Plan 2014 - 2021. The PRSF is considered important to help protect and enhance the district. Works affecting the public realm should take into account the principles set out in this Framework.

Detailed place-specific public realm proposals will be developed through other policy and delivery mechanisms, including the Development & Site Allocations Local Plan, supplementary planning documents, Local Transport Plans, and negotiated stakeholder protocols.

What is the Public Realm?

'The public realm embraces the external places in our towns and cities that are accessible to all. These are the everyday spaces that we move through and linger within, the places where we live, work and play'¹

The widely-used term 'public realm' provides a useful unifying concept for open spaces in public ownership. The public realm is a matter of importance for all. The way a streetscape presents itself to those who use it has an effect on quality of life, safety and prosperity at many levels. Good design and ongoing upkeep is vital to protect the social and economic benefit derived from public spaces. Quality public realm has the power to inspire joy, a sense of well-being, community and civic pride, and the economic prosperity of a place.

The term 'public realm' is used in this context to include spaces that are in public ownership and are open and accessible to all to go about their daily lives, including open spaces, squares, streets, pavements, and other routes. The term is further taken to include all the surfacing, furniture and fixings and other elements that are provided for common use. This might for example include road and pavement surfaces, drainage fittings, lighting, street furniture, railings, signage of all types and purposes, nameplates, shelters, line painting, trees and planting. Together these elements make up the public streetscape and over time contribute to the sense of place and heritage.

The quality of the public realm in terms of circulation, connectivity, activity, place-making and visual appearance is a key component of successful places and is highlighted in the document ['Streets for All: South East'](#)

Successful management of the public realm is an important civic responsibility shared between a range of agencies and one which contributes significantly to the well-being, distinctiveness, character and prosperity of Rother district.

The design and management of the spaces in-between the buildings, whether simply highways or larger spaces, determines much of the success of a place in community and economic terms. A run down, badly maintained or cluttered streetscape will contribute much to determining the fortunes of those who live and work within it. Cleanliness, repair and renewal of the public realm will be an important part of sustaining the success of our communities.

Meanwhile investment into new public realm schemes can offer opportunities to create new public spaces and routes which can help meet regenerative and urban design aims of better connecting town centres, improving pedestrian circulation, providing venues for market place and street activity and promoting local pride and sense of place.

Parks and recreation grounds, allotments, beaches and cemeteries, although part of the public realm, are not considered within the scope of this document, being subject to a different range of uses and maintenance regimes. Equally, the interface with shop, office and residential frontages and other 'private realm' issues, subject to separate enforcement regimes, have not been included in this PRSF document.

¹ [Public realm design – Atkins](#)
SNC-Lavalin's Atkins May 2018

Rother District – the Local Context

Background

Rother District covers some 200 square miles and is a predominately rural district. The district population is 94,997², living in approximately 43,000 households, many dispersed across the rural area, but with nearly half being in the town of Bexhill.

It is an attractive place to live, benefiting from a blend of some of the most beautiful countryside and coastline in South East England and contains three towns; the historic market towns of Battle and Rye, the Victorian / Edwardian seaside town of Bexhill, along with many picturesque villages and hamlets. The settlements each have their own distinctive character influenced by their history and landscape setting. The importance of the environment is evidenced by the extent of the district – some 82% - designated as the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), the large areas of national and international nature conservation value, its number of Conservation Areas and the role that heritage plays in tourism.

These qualities and their wider role are recognised in the East Sussex Cultural Strategy 2013-2023³, coordinated by East Sussex County Council, which sets out in Priority Action 3 to *“Develop and promote well packaged cultural tourism offers which celebrate the identity of East Sussex, raise its profile and attract more visitors and businesses to the County”* and which recognises that East Sussex generally enjoys an outstanding local environment and cultural assets which are some of the key attractions which support the visitor economy in the County. The Strategic Outcome for Priority Action 3 is *“A thriving and high value visitor economy, with great places to visit and enjoy, renowned for its natural assets, unique heritage, culture, market and coastal towns”* and clearly the quality of the public realm has a key role to play in this.

² Mid-2017 Population Estimates (MYE), Office for National Statistics

³ <https://www.eastsussex.gov.uk/media/1320/countywide-cultural-strategy-ebook.pdf>

The Public Realm in Rother

Rother district is fortunate to possess a quality historic public realm, including for example the listed cobbled streets of Rye, brick paving in Winchelsea and Robertsbridge, raised pavements in Battle and the Edwardian and later seaside features of Bexhill. These all are important in defining the special character and local distinctiveness of individual settlements. The materials, finishes and elements used within the public realm often make a significant contribution to an area's sense of place, and the retention and sensitive repair, and, where appropriate, reinstatement of such features is important in maintaining such character.

However, it is not just within the urban context that public realm is important in defining local character and sense of place. Rural areas can suffer suburbanisation through inappropriate creation of footways with raised kerbs, the loss of grass verges and excessive road signage. Historic features such as milestones, historic fingerpost signs and red telephone kiosks and letterboxes contribute positively to the character of the rural public realm. Green public realm infrastructure, such as street trees and other soft landscaping, in urban and rural areas, can also support biodiversity, providing valuable wildlife habitat, and also contribute to carbon storage and sequestration, helping meet the climate change challenge.

Meanwhile the public realm plays an important function in the quality of everyday life in the district, from the accessibility and convenience of bus stops, benches and litter bins, to the community activities and events enabled by quality public spaces, for example the Bexhill Farmers' Market in Devonshire Square, Fairs and Bonfire celebrations on the Salts in Rye, and arts events on Battle's Abbey Green.

The individual character and identity of the district's towns, villages and rural environment is further enriched by positive improvements in the quality of public spaces through high standards of design, materials and maintenance.



Policy Context

As outlined in both the Corporate Plan and the Local Plan Core Strategy, the Council is committed to lead by example in managing change within the public realm.

Rother Local Plan Core Strategy⁴ contains Policy EN4: Management of the Public Realm, which sets out that:

“Priority will be given to working with the relevant agencies to:

- (i) apply the principles of ‘Streets for All: South East’, to ensure high quality management and maintenance of the district’s public realm, with appropriate materials and strategic design vision, to ensure local distinctiveness in both urban and rural areas is respected, and historic features are retained;*
- (ii) develop investment programmes in public realm improvements and enhancements, including reduction of street clutter and road signage;*
- (iii) continue to bring forward programmes to enhance activity and the use of public space.”*

The Council’s strategic intention with regard to the public realm is set out in a number of the Core Aims and Broad Objectives of the Corporate Plan⁵, specifically under Core Aim 4: A Quality Physical Environment (Quality Public Realm) but also under Core Aim 2: Sustainable Economic Prosperity (Town Centre Improvement) and Core Aim 3: Stronger, Safer Communities.

However, there is currently no collaborative strategic direction or lead on how the public realm is treated, maintained and developed. Therefore, there is a need for a more co-ordinated approach to investment in, and management of, the public realm that contributes to the quality of life for people living and working in Rother district, attracts tourists and encourages investment by businesses.

⁴ <http://www.rother.gov.uk/CoreStrategy>

⁵ <http://www.rother.gov.uk/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=22528&p=0>

Vision & Strategic Objectives

Recognising the value of quality public realm to the community, and developing the 'Broad Outcomes' of the Corporate Plan, the Council's vision for the public realm of the district is:

"An attractive, well-maintained, quality public realm, delivered collaboratively by statutory bodies and stakeholders, that protects the locally distinctive character and identity of the district, whilst embracing the potential for new design to create public realm that fosters civic pride and contributes to regeneration aims."

The vision for the district's public realm is underpinned by the four Strategic Objectives set out on the facing page:

In addition to the overarching public realm policy Rother Local Plan Core Strategy Policy EN4, these Strategic Objectives relate to a number of topic or spatial Core Strategy policies:

- SO1: Core Strategy policy EN2 plus relevant spatial policies for each area.
- SO2: Core Strategy policy EN3 plus relevant spatial policies for each area: BX1 (Bexhill), BX2 (Bexhill Town Centre), BA1 (Battle), RY1 (Rye), RA1 (Rural Areas - Villages), RA2 (Rural Areas – Countryside)
- SO3: Core Strategy policies EN1, EN5, and RA2.
- SO4: Core Strategy Policies EN3, TR2, TR3, and CO6.

SO1: Recognising the Value of the District's Unique Heritage Assets

- Recognising that elements of the historic public realm are themselves valuable heritage assets in the district requiring conservation, preservation and enhancement in public realm decisions.
- Understanding the role the public realm plays in the character of the wider historic built environment in the district, including conservations areas, the setting of listed buildings, the unique medieval landscape, and other heritage assets.

SO2: Promoting Distinct Local Identity

- Creating a public realm that maintains and enhances the local sense of place, distinctiveness and identity.
- Promoting civic pride, where the culture and sense of place is valued, shared and celebrated.

SO3: Promoting the Natural Environment

- Understanding the role the public realm plays in the character of the rural areas of the district, including the distinctive historic landscape character of the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.
- Maintenance and enhancement of the district's distinct and connected natural environment in public realm decisions.
- Promotion of green public realm initiatives in the district and encouragement of best practice sustainability initiatives.

SO4: Promoting Vibrant, Accessible and Safe Public Places

- Promotion of public places that provide for diverse and vibrant activity, fun and enjoyment, that strengthen social connections, improve community health and well-being.
- Safe places that are used and enjoyed by resident and visitors alike, day and night.
- Enhancement of connectivity and ease of movement and access, especially for pedestrians and cyclists
- Recognising the value of well-maintained, quality public places, spaces and routes that attract visitors, investors and businesses to underpin economic growth.

Public Realm Responsibilities – A Multi-Agency Approach

It is important to recognise that no single organisation is individually accountable for the overall appearance of the district's public realm, but rather a range of authorities, statutory undertakers, and other agencies organisations, including:

- Rother District Council
- East Sussex County Council
- Other government agencies, e.g. Highways England, the Environment Agency and National Rail
- Statutory Utilities Undertakers
- Town/Parish Councils
- Local Amenity Societies and other volunteer groups
- Developers

It is clear that successful management of Rother's public realm requires a coordinated and committed, multi-agency approach; the importance of effective collaboration, communication and sharing of information between the various organisations is critical to delivering the vision for the District's public realm promoted by the PRSF. This is developed further in Section 3 of the PRSF.

The proposed vision and strategic objectives for the public realm set out in this PRSF aim to help achieve such a joined-up approach and are intended to complement and support the Council's overall vision and priorities for the district - as expressed in RDC's Local Plan Core Strategy, Corporate Plan, Regeneration Strategy and the Bexhill Town Centre Strategy. They also seek to support the strategic objectives of East Sussex County Council's (ESCC) Local Transport Plan and Economic Development Strategy.

Conservation Areas

Under Section 72 of the Planning (Listed Buildings & Conservation Areas) Act 1990, anyone exercising any functions under the Planning Acts on land in a Conservation Area has a statutory duty to pay special attention to 'the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of that area'.

This sets a bench-mark requirement for works to the public realm in Conservation Areas, regardless of who is carrying them out.

Designated Conservation Areas in Rother district are:

- Battle
- Bexhill Town Centre
- Bexhill Old Town
- Burwash
- Northiam
- Robertsbridge & Northbridge Street
- Rye
- Sedlescombe
- Ticehurst
- Winchelsea

The Council has adopted and published Conservation Area Appraisals for a number of these, which in some instances include analysis of the role of the public realm in contributing to the characters of individual Conservation Areas.

Best Practice Guidance

A range of best practice guidance for the management of the public realm exists, prepared by organisations including the Department for Transport, and Historic England, as well as local amenity societies, though the degree to which the advice is currently followed is variable.

Streets for All: Advice for Highway and Public Realm Works in Historic Places (2018)

This guidance has been prepared by Historic England with assistance from the DfT, and expands the previous Streets for All publications. It provides updated practical advice for those planning and implementing highways and other public realm works in sensitive historic locations. It highlights the importance of public spaces to the special character of England's historic towns and villages, and sets out that protecting the distinctiveness of the public realm is a vital means of creating enjoyable places for people to live and work as well as to visit. The aim of *Streets for All* is to demonstrate what can be achieved through more thoughtful planning of routine maintenance and one-off improvements to the streetscape.

Streets for All; South East (English Heritage/Dft) 2005

This manual, now archived, nevertheless offers detailed guidance on the way in which streets and public open spaces are managed. It recognises that the appearance of the public realm is often the product of several different agencies each with its own priorities, and sets out that a coordinated approach can help provide an environment that is safe, enjoyable and appropriate to its surroundings. It aims to make good practice into everyday practice, and its underlying principles are to reduce clutter, co-ordinate design and to reinforce local character. Specifically, it covers aspects including ground surfaces, street furniture, new equipment, traffic management and environmental improvements.

Historic England has also developed a useful web resource, under the 'Improve your Street' brand, with specific advice for Highway Engineers and Designers.

DfT Traffic Advisory Leaflet 01/13: Reducing Sign Clutter

This guidance recognises that over-provision of traffic signs can have a detrimental impact on the environment and gives practical advice on reducing sign clutter.

DfT Traffic Advisory Leaflet 6/05: Traditional Directional Signs

This guidance provides advice on the use of traditional direction signs, on the repair and conservation of existing examples, and guidance on their reintroduction in appropriate locations. It recognises that traditional direction signs (sometimes called fingerposts) make a very important contribution to the local character and identity of villages and rural areas across the country, and sets out that they are attractive items of street furniture that should be retained, repaired, and reintroduced where appropriate.

Royal Mail Post Boxes: A Joint Policy Statement by Royal Mail & Historic England (2015).

This is a renewed statement of the joint commitment by Historic England and Royal Mail to finding the best ways to ensure that post boxes are retained and well cared for wherever possible. The guidance recognises that traditional red post boxes are a valued part of the local street furniture scene, a useful local amenity which make a significant contribution to the character and appearance of the area. The document contains Royal Mail's policy commitment to retain all post boxes in operational service in their existing positions (unless circumstances or operational need mean that they have to be relocated or removed). It also sets out Royal Mail's standards for the repair, refurbishment and repainting of post boxes to retain them in good order, including livery specifications, following traditional painting schemes.

K6 Telephone Boxes, Sussex Heritage Trust, 2016

This document sets out that the historic red 'K6' public telephone box is an iconic feature of the British landscape and streetscene, and recognises the threat to their survival by increasing mobile technology, neglect and vandalism. It sets out how local communities can take ownership of their historic red telephone boxes, promotes imaginative re-use to retain these public realm features, and sets out detailed repair specifications.

Challenges and Opportunities for the Public Realm in Rother

The Rother District Council Member-led Public Realm Working Group met over a two year period, and identified that, whilst the character and role of the public realm within Rother inevitably varies across the district, and presents a number of strengths and opportunities, there is a commonality to the management issues and challenges it faces.

Multi-agency responsibility

The complexities of multi-agency responsibility for the public realm leads to confusion about who to report faults or problems to, and who to liaise with to bring forward public realm improvement plans.

Maintenance

Many areas of the public realm have suffered from lack of care and attention by public bodies and stakeholder utility providers, resulting in poor maintenance and management; cracked or broken paving slabs, uneven drainage grills, weeds in paved surfaces, faulty litter bins and streetlamps, dirty signage, poor restitution with patch repairs in inappropriate, non-matching materials, peeling paint on letter boxes and so on. These all combine to devalue the quality and appearance of a place, making the public realm less appealing and even unsafe to use. A further concern is the number of redundant 'abandoned' modern style telephone boxes, which attract vandalism and fly-posting.

The PRSF can help shape the future development of maintenance regimes and management protocols, including consultation arrangements, funding agreements, specialist detailed repair specifications, volunteer protocols, and fault-reporting mechanisms.

Poor Quality Materials / Products

In certain locations, the specification, low quality materials and dated product choices contribute to an overall feeling of a tired and uncoordinated public realm character and appearance.

Clutter

Over time a number of ad-hoc alterations, additions and 'improvements' has in many cases led to a cluttered and uncoordinated public realm.

Inappropriate or excessive yellow line painting can have an adverse effect on the character of the public realm streetscene, particularly in historic areas.

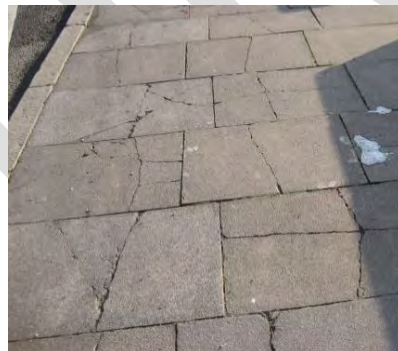
Street furniture (benches, planters, cycle racks, etc) has often been installed without a clear strategy. As well as the lack of consistency of style of products used, there is often a lack of successful integration of such elements into the layout of streetscapes and spaces. This is compounded by the installation of a whole range of other street elements such as bus shelters and signs, phone boxes, utilities boxes, parking ticket machines, post boxes, signage, etc. These items are often installed in the street without due regard to the movement of pedestrians, resulting in clutter and obstructions, while the cumulative visual impact of all these items is often damaging to the character of the place.

This issue will be heightened with the likely roll-out of Civil Parking Enforcement in 2020, which will bring the challenge of more parking ticket machines and signs to the streets in the district. The locations and quantum of these will need careful detailed consideration so as not to impact negatively on the character of the public realm.

Funding

The public sector as a whole faces great funding pressures, which has inevitably impacted on public realm management and maintenance. It is the recognition of this that makes the PRSF so important; to ensure that precious funds are spent wisely, to deliver the maximum positive impact for the public realm.

The PRSF can also be used to attract external funding for improvement schemes, and to direct developer contributions via CIL income, to appropriate works.



Key strengths and opportunities presented by the public realm in the district include:

- A rich and varied historic environment, with many locally distinctive public realm features.
- A strong civic pride and sense of community engagement and volunteering.
- Strong partnerships with evidence of recent progress e.g. with ESCC at Marina Court Gardens and Sackville roundabout.
- A corporate awareness as to the importance of the public realm in economic regeneration and social benefit.

Key strategic public realm issues and challenges in the district include:

- Joyless, uninspiring and cluttered public spaces with unattractive, dated products,
- Poorly maintained public realm features,
- Clutter of signage and yellow lining,
- Un-coordinated and inconsistent approaches to public realm by statutory bodies,
- Lack of communication between statutory bodies and other stakeholders,
- Lack of clarity about roles and responsibilities and who to report issues to.
- Limited resources in agencies responsible for the public realm

Case Studies: What Can be Achieved in the Public Realm

Case Study 1: Marina & Marina Court Garden, Bexhill

This comprises two interlinked projects; highways improvements to a stretch of road known as Marina, funded by East Sussex County Council as Highways Authority, and public space improvements to an area of local authority owned land, funded by Rother District Council.

The projects were created to collectively improve pedestrian links from Bexhill town centre to the seafront, and make a more attractive public space.

The width of the carriageway was reduced to make the crossing easier to use, a new plaza style walkway laid out as a direct route from the crossing to avoid pedestrians having to walk through the car park, and new and relocated signage and cycle-parking was provided. Tired and unattractive low walls were removed, and a new public garden set out with additional seating and planting.

The schemes were designed in a highly collaborative manner between ESCC and RDC, to ensure that the traffic management, regenerative and place-making aims of both authorities were met, along with liaison with local disability and access groups and the Bexhill Town Team and Town Centre Steering Group.

This approach has resulted in a high quality scheme that has significantly improved the environment in this location.

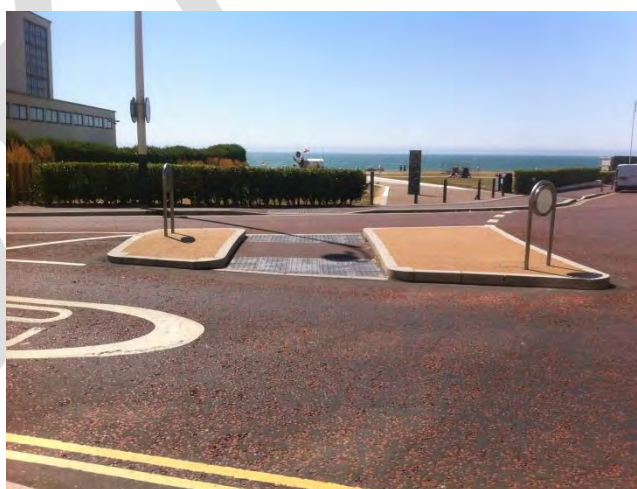


Top – before



Below - after





Case Study 2: Next Wave: West Parade Improvements, Bexhill-on Sea

This project represented a major investment in the public realm by RDC, supported by a £1m grant from the Commission for Architecture & the Built Environment.

The project recognised that when combined with the presence of the iconic Grade I listed De La Warr Pavilion,(DLWP), the core section of Bexhill's seafront offers a real opportunity to become a high-quality destination for both residents and visitors, with consequential regeneration benefits for the whole town.

The scheme sought a cohesive approach to seafront regeneration, including

- improving the landscape setting of the DLWP, and the relationship of the DLWP with the seafront,
- improving the physical connectivity of this part of the seafront with the wider town,
- a new landscape for West Parade, a stretch of some 1km of seafront promenade, including a new series of seafront shelters, a suite of street furniture and planting palette influenced by the contemporary architectural style of the DLWP.

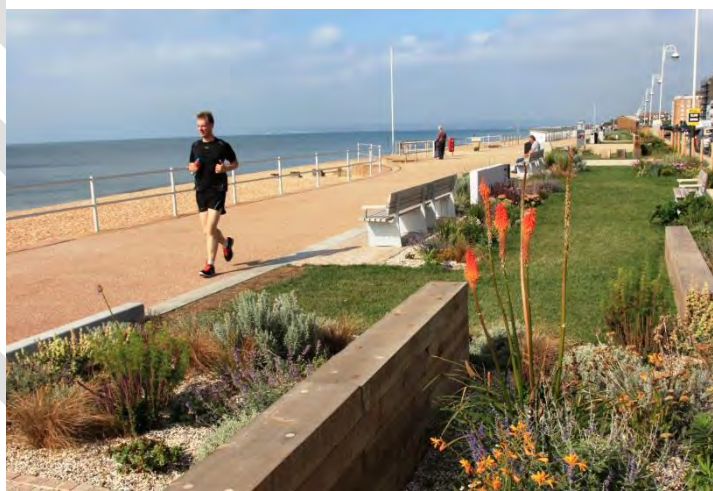
The scheme has been hugely well-received, creating attractive places and spaces that people enjoy using, resulting in a more active seafront year-round.



Top – before



Below - after



Case Study 3: Ticehurst Village Square

RDC is working with Ticehurst Parish Council on a pilot project to identify best practice in a multi-agency approach to driving practical improvements in the safety and amenity value of the public realm.

Ticehurst Parish Council have been working for a number of years on a public realm project focussed on the village square, to create a strong, attractive public space and focal point for activities at the heart of the village, in the Conservation Area.

The scheme aims to better manage traffic flow and direction, speed, and parking in this space, and will use surfacing materials to create a 'shared space' character in the square, and tree planting to define and contain the space, and a pedestrian crossing over the B2099 adjacent to the square for better access and movement around the village.

The project is at concept design stage and valuable lessons have been learned in how parish, district and county authorities can work together to eliminate some of the barriers to effective development and public realm improvements.



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Section 2: Rother Public Realm Spatial Analysis

Rother Public Realm Spatial Analysis

This section of the document considers cross-district public realm characteristics and priorities, as well as those particularly relevant to distinct areas of Rother District. It provides a strategic overview of the public realm characteristics of each, and the particular challenges they face, and opportunities that exist, with reference to the Strategic Objectives.

The spatial areas considered are:

- **Towns**
 - **Battle**
 - **Bexhill**
 - **Rye**
- **Villages**
- **Rural areas**

A number of Priority Actions for the specific areas is set out, providing a checklist for those engaged in public realm to respond positively to, and which can help inform the Delivery Actions allocated to different agencies in Section 3 of the Framework.

Cross-district Public Realm Principles & Priorities

Aim: To deliver under the four Public Realm Strategic Objectives;

- SO1 Recognising the value of the District's unique Heritage Assets
- SO2 Promoting Distinct Local Identity
- SO3 Promoting the Natural Environment
- SO4 Promoting Vibrant, Accessible and Safe Public Spaces

Principles & Priority Actions:

- 1. Ensure that current national and local policy requirements and best practice in public realm management is followed by relevant organisations, statutory undertakers and other stakeholders.**
- 2. Adopt a particularly sensitive approach within areas of historic significance such as Conservation Areas and valued landscapes. In these areas, the careful selection and coordination of materials and finishes are critical to ensure the protection and enhancement of the historic public realm, specifically:**
 - Yellow lines in Conservation Areas should be the narrow conservation type in pale yellow.
 - The painting of lines or other highways markings on historic paving materials, kerbs etc should be avoided.
 - Signage in Conservation Areas should be kept to a minimum, and sited carefully within the historic streetscene.
 - There must be a presumption to retain and repair historic public realm features and materials, as valued heritage assets in their own right.
- 3. Develop easy and effective fault reporting mechanisms for public realm issues.**
- 4. Develop a consistent palette of materials to express visual co-ordination across the district's public realm, that responds to its unique character.** However, it is important that the use of standardised palettes do not inhibit innovative design responses that reflect locally distinctive townscape characteristics and features of particular settlements. In this context, more detailed materials palettes will be required to identify settlement-specific variations in materiality and/or detailing.
- 5. Seek to minimise clutter, particularly signage, wherever possible.** Signage should be limited to that which is statutorily necessary, or helpful in promoting tourism and the enjoyment of a place. Signage should be carefully sited in its context, it may often be appropriate to combine signs on one post to minimise impact, but confusion should always be avoided. Signage posts may be painted in the appropriate colours for a town or village, rather than left the more utilitarian grey metal.
- 6. Ensure the timely removal of redundant street furniture and other apparatus (where these are not of heritage value).**
- 7. Support the role of arts and culture in the public realm.** This may be through the introduction of bespoke design features, or developing cultural activity programmes in public spaces.

BATTLE

Character & Public Realm Analysis

Battle is a small, historic market town. Although populated by just over 6,000 people, it provides an important service centre role for its residents and those of surrounding villages. In addition, Battle is a popular tourist destination for domestic and foreign visitors.

The whole town of Battle and the immediate surrounding countryside is within the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). The town centre, with its high concentration of listed buildings, the historic Battle Abbey and the designated battlefield form the historic core, and were first designated as a Conservation Area in 1971, reviewed in 2006.

In terms of the public realm, of particular local interest, the Conservation Area Appraisal makes reference to the metal post-and-railing of traditional and ornate design on the south side of Mount Street, a visually attractive treatment to protect the footpath from the highway here, and the raised pavement to the west side of the High Street, accessed by a long continuous run of two steps, along with a similarly high pavement which runs down Upper Lake alongside the medieval wall. However, the town suffers from poor maintenance of much of its public realm, and lacks a coordinated approach to street furniture.

Public realm improvements in the early 2000s included the reclaiming of Abbey Green as a public meeting place, turning it from the car-park it had become, into a visually attractive venue for community activities. Resurfaced in a buff-coloured resin bonded gravel, the Green now contributes positively in aesthetic terms to the setting of the Abbey Gatehouse in particular.

The town suffers from congestion, particularly in the peak summer tourist season, as traffic is channelled along through the town centre.



Public Realm Priorities for Battle

Core Strategy Objective: To support the market town and tourist centre role and character of Battle, and conserve its historic core and setting.

Priority Actions:

1. Ensure that the quality of the public realm is given due weight in the delivery of the ESCC Local Transport Plan for Battle, which proposes to (inter alia):
 - a. work with Rother District Council to identify improvements to transport infrastructure to support sustainable development in Battle,
 - b. focus on improvements on safe, coherent walking and cycling routes on key routes/corridors in Battle,
 - c. focus on reducing traffic congestion in Battle town centre through careful siting of new development and improving access to the railway station by sustainable transport.
2. Develop a concise database of public realm products and material specifications to aid appropriate repair/replacement works.
3. Ensure that existing heritage style public realm features (street furniture, railings, kerbings) are either repaired in situ or replaced on a like-for like basis.
4. Develop a coordinated approach to street furniture, with agreed suite of products for cycle racks, seating, signage and public noticeboards etc.
5. Ensure works in Abbey Green (including planting and street furniture) maintain the open character of the space, and do not compromise the setting and views of Battle Abbey Gatehouse within the Conservation Area.

BEXHILL

Character & Public Realm Analysis

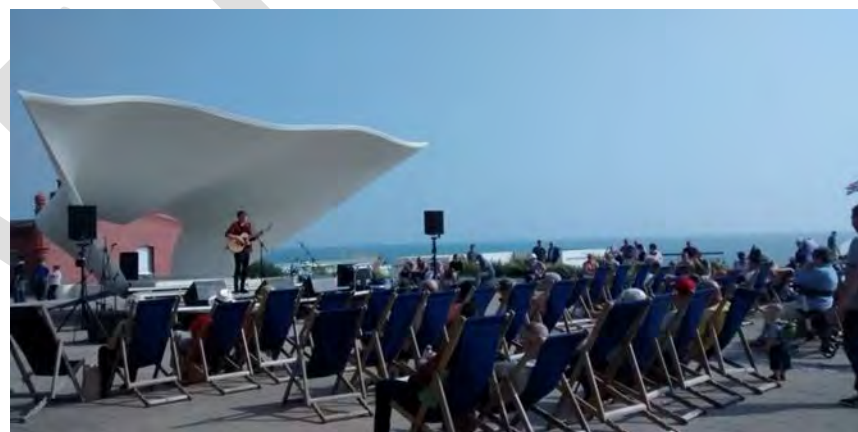
Bexhill is by far the largest settlement in Rother district. It has a population of around 44,000 people, equivalent to some 48% of that of the district as a whole.

The combination of the town's demographic profile (skewed to a high proportion of older people), history and seaside character, and built environment help give it a genteel character. Public consultation has highlighted a general desire for the town to continue to serve its older, and ageing, population, while at the same time, improving its opportunities and attractiveness to younger people.

The town contains two designated Conservation Area; Bexhill-on-Sea Town Centre, and Bexhill Old Town, each with their own distinct heritage and identity. A series of town centre regeneration and planning studies that have been prepared for Bexhill-on-Sea have identified that the quality and accessibility of the historic environment, including the public realm, is a key factor for enhancing the economy of the town, attracting visitors and improving footfall.

The seafront is one of the town's strongest assets, and a significant piece of public realm. It is a key focus for the Council's heritage-led regeneration initiatives, both in terms of improving the quality and appearance of the place, and improving accessibility and connectivity with the Sustrans Connect2 coastal cycle link and the Coastal Cultural Trail between the towns of Bexhill-on-Sea, Hastings and Eastbourne, designed to boost the economy and support sustainable transport.

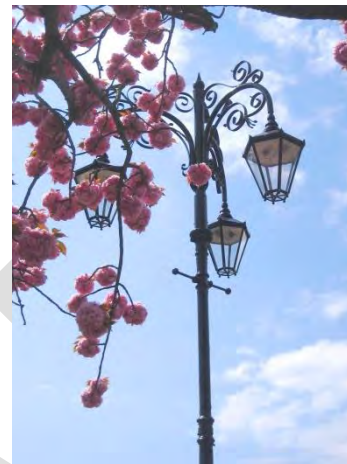
The town centre has two distinct architectural characters; the late-Victorian/Edwardian planned town that forms the bulk of the commercial and residential streets along with the Grade II listed shelters on East Parade, and the central and western seafront boasting the modernist Grade I listed icon that is the De La Warr Pavilion. As a result, a conscious decision has been taken to develop two distinct public realm 'palettes', one to respond to each character area.



Edwardian Core

The 'Edwardian Core' utilises a mix of existing historic public realm features and reproduction elements in a late-Victorian/ Edwardian style. These include street lighting in Devonshire Road and Sackville Road installed as part of Heritage Economic Regeneration Schemes in the mid-2000s, using a combination of RDC funding, ESCC Local Transport Plan funding, and grant funding from English Heritage. Also a range of amenity signage funded through the Coastal Communities Fund, and a suite of sundry items in coordinating styles, including, bollards, benches, cycle stands and planters, some installed via the Town Centre Steering Group using £106 monies for town centre improvements.

These items are all to be painted in the Bexhill livery of green (BS 12B29) with gold highlighting. The green paint has also been successfully used in some instances on ESCC road signage columns to tie in the materials palette, and may be appropriate on the new infrastructure associated with the implementation of CPE. Traditional street trees are an important part of the public realm in this part of the town centre.



Contemporary Seafront

The public realm of the central and western stretch of town centre seafront draws on the clean, modernist architecture of the De La Warr Pavilion, to provide a coherent and appropriate setting for this Grade I listed building, along with the simple white lines of the Colonnade. West Parade was refurbished as part of the Next Wave project in 2009, and Marina Court Garden in 2015, both using a palette of white rendered walls, contemporary oak benches, and perennial coastal planting. The style has been continued in monolith amenity signage, stainless steel cycle parking and litter bins, and in highway works such as stainless steel bollards and pavement studs at crossing points, and slot pavement drainage. This design strategy and materials palette should be deployed in future public realm works in this area of the town centre.



Public Realm Priorities for Bexhill

Core Strategy Objective: To strengthen the identity of Bexhill and for it to become one of the most attractive places to live on the south coast, attractive to families, the young and elderly alike, within an integrated approach to securing a more prosperous future for the Bexhill and Hastings area.

Priority Actions:

1. Ensure that the quality of the public realm is given due weight in the delivery of the ESCC Local Transport Plan for Bexhill, which proposes to:
 - a. deliver a package of complementary measures to the Combe Valley Way to enhance the positive impacts of the scheme and enable access by sustainable modes of transport,
 - b. focus on improvements and safety of key walking routes,
 - c. develop and implement the cycle route networks for Bexhill, focusing on key routes into the town centre, along the seafront and providing links to existing and future residential and employment areas.
2. Ensure that the quality of the public realm is considered by the Bexhill Town Centre Steering Group and reflected in the Bexhill Town Centre Strategy and in any investment/improvement projects it delivers.
3. Promote sense of arrival and improve approaches into town; address unattractive arrival points for Bexhill, including London Road, and the gateway to Combe Valley Countryside Park, and improve connectivity between Bexhill town centre and Bexhill Old Town.
4. Develop a concise database of public realm products and materials specifications to aid appropriate repair/replacement works.
5. Ensure that existing heritage style public realm features (street lighting, street furniture, coloured tarmac paving) are either repaired in situ or replaced on a like-for like basis.
6. Improve management of street trees and other horticultural features within the town centre.
7. Promote a sense of community through promoting of events, activities and organisations etc that make strong use of public space, help foster the legitimate use of space and avoid anti-social behaviour.
8. Use a combination of enforcement actions and improved maintenance and facilities (including reviewing bin and street lighting provision) to encourage appropriate behaviour in the public realm, to deter people from creating litter and other negative environmental actions.
9. Consider the replacement schedule for Bexhill bus shelters (maintenance of these being the responsibility of RDC) and liaise with UK Power Networks to disconnect any unnecessary power supply.
10. Examine the routine redecoration programme of Bexhill street furniture and consider the possibility of shortening the cycle for the routine maintenance of public benches in the Town Centre as these get a lot of use and subsequent wear and tear.

RYE

Character & Public Realm Analysis

Rye is a historic market town in the eastern half of the district near the Kent border. The town is the main service and employment centre in eastern Rother, with a population of some 4,500.

Rye is a successful market town attracting a significant number of visitors in the summer months. As a Cinque Port town, the town centre around and including the ancient Citadel forms the historic core, designated as a Conservation Area in 1969, and reviewed in 2006. The town centre is of very high architectural value, with a predominantly medieval street layout and building stock, and the historic public realm is a key part of the character of the Conservation Area. Also important is the town's visual appearance in the landscape, with the Citadel on a sandstone outcrop rising like an island above the low-lying surrounding salt marshes and tidal waters. The countryside surrounding Rye is subject to a number of environmental designations, signifying its landscape character and conservation importance.

The local economy of Rye is dominated by tourism, the main attractions being the historic core of the town and the surrounding countryside. The town boasts a high cultural offer, with a number of regionally noteworthy annual festivals, including the high-profile Rye Arts Festival, the Rye Bay Scallop Festival, and the Rye Bonfire Procession. The quality of the public realm, both in terms of visual appearance, maintenance, and functionality, is key to these tourism and community activities.

The principal transport link through Rye is the A259 trunk road and carries the majority of medium and longer distance east-west traffic. The trunk road at certain sections experiences heavy congestion and journey times can be lengthy. Many visitors come to Rye by car and traffic management is a priority for the town. The town is also served by the East Coastway rail link between Ashford and Hastings.



Twittens and walkways

A defining characteristic of the historic core of Rye is the abundance of pedestrian ways known as 'twittens'. These are typically formed of a combination of historic paving materials, with an absence of 'engineering' based features – no lines or road markings, no highway signage, and minimal lighting – if any, usually just amenity level rather than conventional street lighting. It is important that repairs or other works to these twittens maintain their distinct character and detailing.

Street surfacing

The Citadel of Rye possesses a number of historic paving treatments; cobbles and stone setts. A number of these are listed grade II in their own right, which is highly unusual and testament to their importance as designated heritage assets. Listed Building Consent would be required for any alterations to these listed streets which affects their character.

To aid repairs, Rye Conservation Society have produced a detailed repair specification which sets out how highway authorities and statutory undertakers should reinstate historic cobbles once they have completed works.

Accessibility for those with mobility problems can be a concern with such street surfaces, however, ingenious solutions have been used to create localised 'crossing points' with strips of smoother stone setts, whilst still maintaining the distinctive visual and historic character of the streets.

The absence of yellow or white lines on these streets and lanes, or any 'standardised' highway signage, is very important to their character and appearance.



Public Realm Priorities for Rye

Core Strategy Objective: To improve the economic and social well-being of Rye, including in relation to its market town role, tourism and the Port of Rye, whilst fully respecting and sensitively managing its historic character, vulnerability to flooding and ecologically important setting.

Priority Actions:

1. Ensure that the quality of the public realm is given due weight in the delivery of the ESCC Local Transport Plan for Rye, which proposes to (inter alias):
 - a. work with RDC to identify improvements to transport infrastructure to support sustainable development in Rye,
 - b. focus on improvements on safe, coherent walking and cycling routes on key routes/corridors in and around Rye,
 - c. focus on improvements to public transport on key routes and corridors in Battle and Rye,
 - d. focus on reducing traffic congestion in Rye town centre through careful siting of new development and improving access to the railway station by sustainable transport,
 2. Develop a concise database of public realm products and materials specifications to aid appropriate repair/preplacement works, and promote use of the existing historic cobbled streets repair guidance by making available to East Sussex Highways and utilities companies.
 3. Ensure that existing historic and heritage style public realm features (paving and surfacing, kerbing, street lighting, street furniture etc) are either repaired in situ or replaced on a like-for-like basis.
4. Ensure that the quality of the public realm is given due weight in the delivery of the relevant Community Aspirations set out in the Rye Neighbourhood Plan, including:
 - a. Community Aspiration 6 – Town Gateways:
To consider innovative approaches to the town gateways, including a form of ‘shared space’ street environment at the junction of Mermaid Street, Wish Ward and the Strand. (to be more pedestrian friendly and conducive for visitors).
 - b. Community Aspiration 7 – Ferry Road/Station Approach:
To consider innovative improvements to Station Approach to make it more pedestrian friendly, accessible to cyclists and enhancing its appearance. Any approach might include improved pedestrian crossings perhaps combined with system of “shared space”. Clearer signage should also be provided.
 - c. Community Aspiration 8 – Parking Strategy:
This will need to develop to reflect the roll-out of CPE, having regard to an improved town centre allocation of short term on-street car parking, with better clarity for users, including loading bays and blue badge spaces. Clear signage and delineation of car parking bay areas **without** yellow lining is required.
 - d. Community Aspiration 11 – Improved Road Signage:
To encourage a holistic review of all road and pedestrian signage with a view to redesigning to better guide visitors to “interceptor car parks” and to aid through traffic.
- Other Community Aspirations seek solutions to address issues of traffic management within the Citadel associated with anti-social driving and parking behaviours damaging the historic public realm including historic cobbles and kerbing.

THE VILLAGES

Character and Public Realm Analysis

Rother district has a high number of villages and hamlets scattered across the High Weald AONB and the coastal belt, many highly picturesque in character. The Rother Local Plan Core Strategy looks to promote attractive, prosperous and vibrant villages where people want to live, work and do business, and recognises that is the responsibility of all local partners in the public, voluntary and the business sectors.

The quality of the public realm plays an important role in this; the juxtaposition of historic public realm features and street furniture with the streetscape of historic building stock is often an important part of the distinctive character of a particular village or hamlet. The state of repair and standard of maintenance of public realm features such as verges, pavements, signage and modern apparatus, greatly influences the overall quality and appearance of villages, important in their intrinsic vitality, their role in the local community, and their tourism appeal.

New Development

Significant new housing development for many of the district's villages is allocated in the Rother Local Plan Core Strategy, and subsequently via either the Development & Site Allocations document, or via emerging Neighbourhood Plans in parishes that have chosen to pursue that route.

Such developments inevitably create their own new public realm, and it is important that this is designed to avoid standardised, generic approaches but instead to reflect and reinforce the distinctive character of individual settlements, in terms of strategic approach, scale, detailing and materials specification.



Road, Kerb and Edge detailing

A characteristic of many villages and hamlets is grass verges with no hard kerbing. The introduction of formal kerbs would significantly undermine the visual quality of the streetscene in these instances.

Many village roads have minimal or no road markings, often no central white lines or edge lines using instead their scale, or surfacing changes to indicate priorities, and with painted lines only where absolutely necessary for highway safety requirements. This absence of white lines contributes to the rural character of these roads and lanes.

Green features

Green features are highly characteristic of the public realm in the district's villages, particularly those in the High Weald AONB. These include grass verges, (often planted with seasonal bulbs) street trees, and village greens. It is important that these green features are appropriately managed and maintained to ensure their attractive contribution to the streetscene is maximised.

Village entrances

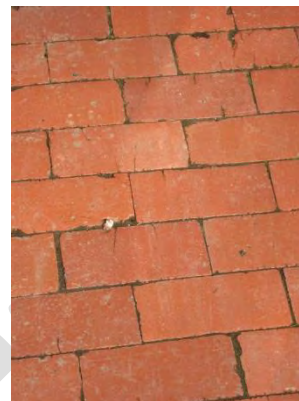
Speeding within the villages has been highlighted as a great concern by the Public Realm Working Group. The treatment of the public realm can often help in this regard; a number of villages have sought to use gateway features such as 'gate-way' structures, planters and even bulb planting to help define and reinforce the sense of entrance to the built-up settlement, to help drivers adjust their speed appropriately.



Historic Paving

A number of the villages in the district display attractive, locally distinctive historic paving treatments, for example brick, Bethersden Marble, stone flags, all which are important to the character of the place. Where these exist within designated Conservation Areas, their importance is often highlighted in the Conservation Area Appraisals.

It is important that these surfaces are maintained in any repair/resurfacing works, even where not in a designated Conservation Area, to maintain local distinctiveness and sense of place.



Historic Public Realm Features

The villages are populated with a variety of public realm features which define their quintessential 'English village' character; the historic K6 phone boxes and range of historic Royal Mail post boxes, including pillar boxes and wall boxes, are good examples of these, and are important to be retained and well-maintained.



Public Realm Priorities for The Villages

Core Strategy Objectives: To recognise the individual distinctiveness of villages and to retain and enhance their rich cultural heritage, and to promote thriving rural communities with a high quality of life, a strong sense of place, and broad active civic participation.

Priority Actions:

6. Ensure that the quality of the public realm is given due weight in the delivery of the ESCC Local Transport Plan for villages in Rother, which seeks to support the viability of rural villages and support the local economy, along with improving access to key local services through appropriate transport solutions.
7. Develop a series of concise local databases of public realm products and materials specifications to aid appropriate repair/preplacement works.
8. Ensure that existing historic and heritage style public realm features (paving treatments, kerbing, street lighting, and street furniture) are either repaired in situ or replaced on a like-for like basis.
9. Resist the loss of historic K6 telephone boxes and instead look for innovative re-use projects to retain them as properly maintained public realm features.
10. Support local amenity societies and community groups who wish to be more actively involved in local public realm management.

1. Develop 'templates' to promote sense of arrival and improve approaches into the villages, discouraging speeding in entrances into villages, e.g. timber 'gates' either side of the road, planters, change in road surfacing/colour, to be used as appropriate in each locality.
2. Ensure that public realm choices avoid the suburbanisation of the distinctive rural character of the district's individual villages and hamlets through introduction of inappropriate materials, street furniture, lighting in dark sky areas, or other features.
3. Ensure that characteristic green features in the public realm, e.g. grass verges, planting, street trees, and village greens are appropriately managed and maintained.
4. Ensure fulfilment of any Neighbourhood Plan policies and aims for the public realm in the villages.
5. Ensure that new public realm created in housing developments is designed to reflect and reinforce the character of the locality, and is subject to appropriate management and maintenance regimes.

RURAL AREAS

Character & Public Realm Analysis

Rother is a district of predominantly rural character, and this section addresses those parts of the district that lie beyond the built-up towns, villages and hamlets.

The countryside and undeveloped coast is highly valued for nature conservation, heritage, culture, and as a leisure resource for both residents and visitors. Predominantly situated within the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, the public realm of the rural areas has a distinctive character, informed by its environmental context.

Public Rights of Way

The rural areas also enjoy an extensive network of Public Rights of Way (PROW); footpaths, bridleways and byways, providing access to the beautiful countryside, which, along with their associated signage, stiles and so on, form an important part of the rural public realm.

Maintenance of the PROW is the responsibility of both East Sussex County Council and landowners. Landowners are responsible for maintaining stiles and gates along public rights of way, as well as ensuring paths are free from obstruction. ESCC are responsible for the surfaces of public rights of way, ensuring they are in a suitable condition, and for clearing any vegetation growing from the surface of a path. Generally, bridges along public rights of way, along with any access steps, are maintained by ESCC. Waymarkers or fingerpost signs are installed at the roadside by ESCC, along with waymarker discs along the PROW. These signs could often benefit from more frequent cleaning and maintenance, and through being designed as a suite of rural 'street furniture' with a coordinated, quality appearance befitting the rural area.

The "1066 Country Walk" is a key strategic PROW route across much of the rural district, supporting the rural tourism and leisure industries.



Historic Public Realm Features

A number of important historic public realm features exist in the rural areas which contribute to the character of the district. Fingerpost signs are particularly noteworthy; helping to reinforce local distinctiveness, and both timber and cast iron examples can be found within the district, and it is important that these are retained in situ and maintained on a regular basis.

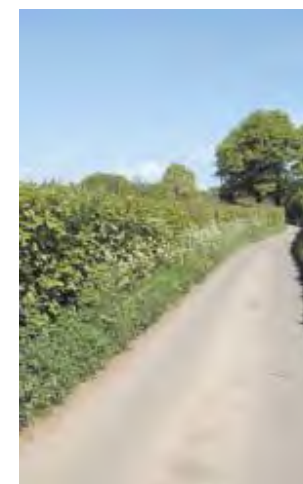
New directional signs on minor roads in rural areas can also be reintroduced as traditional fingerposts, matching the original style, material, and upper case font, following the guidance in DfT Traffic Advisory Leaflet 6/05.

Rural post boxes are typically the 'lamp box' type mounted on freestanding poles or attached to telegraph poles, set in verges, and again are quintessential features of the English rural streetscene.

Roads and Verges

Roadside verges in the rural areas are important public realm features; they provide both visual amenity and ecological habitat. East Sussex County Council have selected a number of verges known as Wildlife Verges, which have been identified as having wildlife of particular interest, either wildlife or fauna. The wildlife verges are marked with small yellow indicators. To help maintain these habitats, and to allow for the wildflowers to seed, Wildlife Verges are not normally cut between 1 March and 31 August.

Like those in villages, many rural roads are characterised by an absence of line markings.



Public Realm Priorities for Rural Areas

Core Strategy Objective: To emphasise the significant contribution of the countryside to the character and culture of the district, and to meet local needs and support vibrant and viable mixed communities in the rural areas, whilst giving particular attention to the social, economic, ecological and intrinsic value of the countryside.

Priority Actions:

1. Ensure that the quality of the public realm is given due weight in the delivery of the ESCC Local Transport Plan for the rural areas, which seeks to ensure that potential transport measures are not detrimental to the environment and protected landscapes, including the AONB, SAC and SPA designations.
2. Ensure that identified Wildlife Verges are appropriately maintained, and support the further identification of additional Wildlife Verges via the process set out on the East Sussex Highways website:
<https://www.eastsussexhighways.com/wildlife-verges>
3. Ensure that historic rural fingerpost signs are retained in situ and maintained in an appropriate conservation manner on a regular basis, with routing repainting in the traditional black and white livery, as per the government advice in DfT Traffic Advisory Leaflet 6/05.
4. Improve the cleaning regime of road signs, and the cutting back of immediate vegetation to maintain their visibility.
5. Review the quality, nature and maintenance of rural bus shelters.
6. Support the Hastings and Rother Road Safety Partnership, tasked to look into the issues of speeding on rural roads and where necessary use designed traffic calming measures other than signs.
7. Ensure that rural Royal Mail post boxes are maintained in accordance with the Joint Policy Statement by Royal Mail and Historic England (2015), including repainting on a rolling cycle to a high specification and the correct livery.
8. Encourage the timely maintenance of the PROW network, and look to develop better designed signage drawing on local character and distinctiveness in the High Weald AONB.
9. Improve the branding and appearance of the 1066 Country Walk to support rural tourism and reinforce local character, through coordinated public realm elements including signage, interpretation panels and seating.



Section 3 – Implementation & Delivery

Translation into Policy, Protocols and Delivery

This Framework provides the opportunity for local authorities, statutory undertakers/utility companies and other key stakeholders (including the local community, businesses and developers) to work collaboratively in developing a common, multi-agency approach to the planning, design and maintenance of the district's public realm, to support the delivery of the Framework's vision and strategic objectives.

This section sets out not only the particular roles of each of the relevant organisations, and stakeholders, but also a series of actions to deliver under the place-specific actions set out in Section 2 of this Framework, and to ensure the appropriate quality maintenance and improvement of the public realm in Rother.

The development of each of the actions will be a collaborative task between different departments within Rother District Council as relevant, and liaison with appropriate external agencies. A Public Realm Charter with multi-agency sign-up could detail negotiated protocols and operational agreements, which could be added as Annexes to this Framework as they are prepared.

This section also discusses funding mechanisms; the public realm currently benefits from funding from both Rother District Council and East Sussex County Council, both directly and indirectly through wider highways investment. To deliver best value for money in the public realm, it is critical that the programming of existing funding streams has regard to the Strategic Objectives set out on page 11 of this Framework.

The Role of Rother District Council

The Council has a range of statutory and discretionary responsibilities which affect public realm quality, appearance and use.

As Local Planning Authority

RDC has a particular role as the Local Planning Authority (LPA), which includes development management and the preparation of the Local Plan, including policy formulation. The Rother Local Plan Core Strategy policy specifically regarding the public realm is set out on page 16 of this document, but other policies relating to the character of the area and the design of new developments are also relevant, as are site-specific policies in the emerging Development & Site Allocations Local Plan.

The LPA is also the charging authority for CIL (Community Infrastructure Levy) and responsible for making recommendations on the spending programme for CIL receipts under the adopted Reg 123 list, which includes the public realm.

As an Enforcement Authority

Both the planning and the environmental health departments of the Council undertake enforcement activity under various statutory powers where there is a considered and detrimental impact on the environment.

S215 notices under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, Public Space Protection Orders and other powers conferred by the Anti-Social Behaviour legislation of 2014, and action under the Environmental Protection Act 1990 have all been successfully used to address specific problems in the public realm.

As Asset Managers

Public realm assets that RDC own and are responsible for include litter bins, benches, cycle racks, planters and certain localised signage. At present, records of product specifications are incomplete, and a more coordinated, planned and proactive approach could be developed to drive up the quality of maintenance and replacement. RDC are also responsible for street cleaning, a key factor in presenting a safe, clean and visually appealing public realm.

As a project instigator / facilitator

The Council has championed a number of large, high profile public realm improvement projects in Bexhill over the last few years, including the acclaimed Next Wave project on West Parade and the Colonnade, as well as works on Marina and at Marina Court Garden. The success of these projects has demonstrated the Council's ability to understand the importance of public realm in delivering attractive, vibrant spaces and routes, and to work collaboratively with external agencies and stakeholders. The public realm continues to feature in the progression of a number of Corporate Priority Projects within the Rother Corporate Plan, to support regeneration, tourism and the quality of the environment.

Delivery Actions:

In order to ensure the appropriate quality maintenance and improvement of the public realm, RDC should:

- i. Continue championing the importance of the public realm, instigating and working with partner stakeholders to drive forward new public realm improvement projects in the district.
- ii. As LPA, ensure that new developments propose quality public realm, in terms of character, purpose, access, appearance and materials specifications, and that planning permissions include appropriate conditions/legal agreements for the effective detailing and management of these schemes.
- iii. Ensure that recommendations regarding strategic public realm works are considered in the CIL spending programme where relevant to the Reg 123 List.
- iv. Continue progressing enforcement action where appropriate
- v. As asset managers, draw up full inventories of public realm assets, and place all the assets on a planned preventive maintenance schedule

The role of East Sussex County Council

In addition to its role in coordinating the East Sussex Cultural Strategy, East Sussex County Council as the Highway Authority have statutory and discretionary responsibilities for roads, pavements, highway structures, street lighting, signing, traffic regulation and road safety, public transport coordination, highway drainage, and public rights of way. ESCC also has responsibility for the roll-out of the Civil Parking Enforcement (CPE) programme in the district, and its associated infrastructure.

ESCC is also the Lead Local Flood Authority for the county and has responsibility for flooding from local sources including surface water, groundwater and ordinary watercourses.

Local Transport Plan

ESCC publishes the Local Transport Plan 3 (LTP) which sets out the County Council's future direction for providing the transport infrastructure needed to deliver sustainable economic growth and support additional housing during the plan period (2011 – 2026). ESCC's vision for LTP3 is:

"To make East Sussex a prosperous county where an effective, well managed transport infrastructure and improved travel choices help businesses to thrive and deliver better access to jobs and services, safer, healthier, sustainable and inclusive communities and a high quality environment."

LTP3 recognises that the County Council has a statutory duty to take into account the conservation of the High Weald AONB, and to enhance the special features that represent its natural beauty.

The LTP also sets out an Implementation Plan of projects to fulfil its strategic objectives. Recent investment projects have included in Bexhill town centre the Marina and Sackville roundabout, a highly successful scheme that has delivered access and connectivity improvements and a quality public realm in terms of appearance which complements the adjacent heritage assets.

Maintenance

Maintenance of ESCC highway assets is now carried out by the separate department of East Sussex Highways, who have recently re-launched a web-based fault reporting system, to make it easier for members of the public to report highways problems such as faulty street-lighting, pavements, signage, grass verges and so on. This system should help in the efficient management of the public realm, but critically relies on appropriate quality repair protocols being in place between RDC, ESCC and East Sussex Highways.

Delivery Actions:

In order to improve communication, collaboration and to ensure the appropriate quality maintenance and improvement of the public realm, ESCC will undertake to:

vi. work positively with RDC to identify and deliver strategic, creative public realm improvement schemes in the villages and towns within the district, having regard to current best practice.

and negotiated protocols will be developed to seek to ensure that ESCC:

vii. Make available to RDC the forward planning of highway works affecting the public realm, including maintenance work.

viii. Work in partnership with the district council and local town and parish councils to develop technical manuals and local materials schedules setting out agreed use of appropriate materials and finishes for maintenance, repair and other works to the public highway, including footways, particularly in Conservation Areas, and the presumption of preservation of character historic public realm features.

ix. Ensure that such manuals are shared by, and communicated with, those at East Sussex Highways, responsible for carrying out such works.

x. Involve stakeholders including RDC at early stages in the design process to discuss the proposed design, materials and street furniture for new public realm improvement schemes, including for the roll-out of CPE.

The Role of other Statutory Agencies

On Trunk roads, Highways England are the Highways Authority. In these instances, similar issues are relevant as for East Sussex County Council overleaf. Particular public realm issues on trunk roads typically include management of grass verges, including wildflower verges and cleanliness and quantum of signage. However, where trunk roads pass through settlements, such as the A259 at Strand Quay in Rye, or the A21 through Hurst Green, more extensive public realm considerations pertain.

Other agencies, such as the Environment Agency and Network Rail, are landowners whose practices and procedures can have a significant effect on the district's public realm, but who also have the potential to deliver or facilitate significant public realm enhancement schemes on their land. Often the multi department nature of these organisations – estates, operations, technical, legal – makes pursuing such public realm schemes highly complex.

Delivery Actions:

In order to improve communication, collaboration and to ensure the appropriate quality maintenance and improvement of the public realm, negotiated protocols will be developed to seek to ensure that statutory organisations:

- xi. Make available to RDC forward planning of works affecting the public realm, particularly giving adequate notice of any maintenance work, and undertake to carry out repairs/making good works to the public realm with appropriate like-for-like materials.
- xii. Ensure that agreed strategies and plans are shared by, and communicated with, those responsible for carrying out such works.
- xiii. Commit to engage positively with RDC and other relevant stakeholders on public realm enhancement schemes on or affecting their land, and to streamline internal communications to facilitate this.

The role of Statutory Undertakers

Utility companies (Gas, Water, Electricity, British Telecom, Cable Television, Post Office and other Telecommunication Companies) have statutory powers and duties to place and maintain their equipment in and on the public highway. The exercise of these powers is controlled and co-ordinated by ESCC. The quality, materials and workmanship of these repairs greatly influences the overall standard of the public realm. If appropriate repair works to the public highway do not take place, ESCC (via East Sussex Highways) has powers under the New Works and Street Works Act 1991 (NRSWA) to retrospectively enforce the Utility Company to 'make good' the surface with matching materials.

Utilities companies are also responsible for certain items of apparatus in the public realm, telephone kiosks, junction boxes and other telecoms equipment, post boxes and so on.

Delivery Actions:

In order to improve communication and to ensure the appropriate quality maintenance of the public realm, negotiated protocols will be developed to seek to ensure that statutory undertakers:

- xiv. Share details of any major repairs/installation works proposed to the public highway via Asset Management meetings with the County Council, and to make this list accessible to RDC, and undertake to carry out any repairs/making good works to the public realm (planned or emergency works) with appropriate like-for-like materials.
- xv. Consult RDC about any proposal to change the appearance of the public realm in a Conservation Area.
- xvi. Maintain the public realm in good order, including cleaning, decoration, and programming the timely removal of obsolete modern items of equipment, junction boxes, modern telephone boxes etc.

The Role of Local Town/Parish Councils, Amenity Groups & Volunteers

As well as being a valuable source of local knowledge, energy and enthusiasm Town and Parish Councils in Rother have certain responsibilities, including maintenance of bus shelters within their parishes, and the purchasing of additional pieces of street furniture (bins etc) along with paying for RDC to collect from them.

CIL receipts

A percentage of the CIL receipt is retained and allocated to the neighbourhood where the CIL was generated. This neighbourhood portion of the CIL can be spent on infrastructure by town and parish councils as they choose, so long as the proposed infrastructure meets the requirement to 'support the development of the area'. This definition would include the public realm.

Neighbourhood Planning

A number of town and parish councils have prepared, or are in the process of preparing Neighbourhood Plans (NPs). Neighbourhood planning provides the opportunity for communities to set out a positive vision for how they want their community to develop, and once made, these plans form part of the statutory development plan, sitting alongside the Rother District Local Plan. There is the potential for such plans to include specific policies relating to local public realm in the parish, and to include public realm audits as appendices.

To help deliver their vision, communities with an NP benefit from an increased neighbourhood allocation of CIL receipts; 25% of the revenues from the CIL arising from development that takes place in their area.

Local Public Realm Audits

There is potential for Town/Parish Councils and Amenity Groups to be encouraged to take greater 'ownership' of their local public spaces by undertaking 'Local Public Realm Audits' These could highlight those areas/features of local public realm which the community particularly value, as well as set out local concerns and aspirations, to help advise all parties with an influence on delivery of public realm schemes (including maintenance/repair work) on what is valued in a local area.

Volunteer Activities

Local amenity and volunteer groups also have a key role in promoting local 'civic pride', helping communities value their local environment. Groups are often keen to become actively involved in public realm improvements, and successful examples of this in the district include the work of Beautiful Battle in creating flower displays and hanging baskets in the town, Bexhill Old Town Preservation Society installing traditional brick pavements, Bexhill Heritage working on the station clock at Bexhill West station, extensive litter picking at the River Rother estuary in Rye, and engaging volunteers through the Great British Spring Clean organised by Keep Britain Tidy.

To harness this volunteer resource, the Public Realm Working Group recognised that volunteer guidance could provide a framework under which minor works in the public realm could be undertaken in a safe and managed way. The Council has recently supported the testing of volunteer guidance protocol in two trial schemes with existing volunteer groups; in Three Oaks, Guestling, with a Working Party under Guestling Parish Council, and at Little Common, Bexhill, with the Little Common & Cooden Business Association. The pilot schemes used emerging guidance on procedures, health and safety, project specifications and materials, and demonstrated the desire by local communities to carry out minor works and projects where they lived.

Delivery Actions:

In order to ensure the appropriate quality maintenance and improvement of the public realm, RDC will endeavour to liaise with town and parish councils and local groups to:

- xvii. Support the inclusion of public realm policies in Neighbourhood Plans.
- xviii. Promote that recommendations regarding public realm works are considered in the local Town or Parish CIL spending programme and encourage that such works have regard to the strategic objectives and design requirements in this PRSF.
- xix. Provide guidance on the carrying out of Local Public Realm Audits, and maintain a record of those completed, and communicate them to ESCC and other stakeholders.
- xx. Develop a campaign of public engagement to widen participation in initiatives such as the Great British Spring Clean.
- xxi. Adopt clear guidance and protocols for volunteer groups to carry out works on RDC public realm assets, to ensure works are carried out safely, and with regard to the strategic objectives and design requirements in this PRSF.
- xxii. Encourage ESCC to develop similar protocol and procedures for volunteer works on ESCC land.

The Role of Developers

The current Rother Local Plan Core Strategy seeks to deliver some 4,300 dwellings in Rother district over the remaining plan period to 2028, approximately half of which benefit from extant planning permissions, often outline. A considerable amount of new public realm will therefore be created by developers over this time, within new housing schemes.

In accordance with Local Plan design policies, developers will be expected to design their schemes to embed high quality, accessible, meaningful public realm at the heart of their schemes. The purpose and nature of public realm, be it streets, squares, multi-functional green spaces, grass verges, and so on, needs to be considered at the earliest stage of site layout in the design process. Existing site features such as trees, hedgerows, ponds and streams should be retained as part of the public realm to embed a genuine local sense of place in new schemes. New public realm character should have reference to its locality and surroundings. At a detailed level, materials choices and planting specifications can greatly impact on the success, usability, enjoyment and richness of the public realm.

Delivery Actions:

In order to deliver a high quality public realm within new housing development, developers will be expected to:

- xxiii. Draw on national and local policy and best practice guidance on public realm design, including the emerging High Weald Housing Development Design Guide, Manual for Streets, and the national PPG.
- xxiv. Seek early pre-application planning advice on their proposals.
- xxv. Look for opportunities to embed public art into public realm proposals, through the form of public spaces, choice of surface materials, and street furniture design.
- xxvi. Include appropriate management plans to ensure the long term quality maintenance of new public realm.

Funding Mechanisms

Funding mechanisms for the maintenance of, and improvements to, the district's public realm include a variety of sources, some of which will require public realm works to be delivered as part of wider programmes of works/investment. It is suggested that an investment strategy is developed to map and align planned and proposed investment into public realm so as to identify gaps and provide the basis for exploring other funding sources.

Rother District Council Revenue Funding

RDC maintains a revenue funding stream for routine repairs to, and maintenance of, public realm assets under the Council's ownership.

East Sussex County Council Capital Funding

Each year the government allocates ESCC a capital sum for highway maintenance. This is used for managing the county's road network including maintenance of roads and footways, bridges and other structures, street lights, signs and signals, all of which are part of the public realm. This Framework should help ensure that the money is spent effectively and efficiently, to deliver the best public realm possible with the budgetary constraint.

A further allocation is made for integrated transport schemes (walking, cycling, public transport and junction improvements) and road safety improvements, which support the local economy by improving access to jobs and services, improving safety, helping cut carbon emissions and improving people's quality of life. Schemes are prioritised through an assessment framework related to how the scheme supports the LTP objectives. Public realm improvements could well form part of the spending under such schemes.

East Sussex County Council Revenue Funding

Additionally, the County Council provides revenue from its annual budget towards a variety of services including further highway maintenance.

Local Growth Fund

SE LEP (South East Local Enterprise Partnership) is responsible for determining strategic transport funding from central government through the Growth Deal and Local Growth Fund; this covers prioritisation, project management and investment, cost control and approval, and programme/risk management. In SE LEP there are four federated areas, of which East Sussex is one. This identifies areas which need investment to boost economic activity, including transport.

Since 2014, East Sussex has been awarded £73.4m in Local Growth Funding, which has enabled key strategic transport projects to be prioritised and delivered following the development and approval of robust business cases. ESCC and partners will continue to develop the business case for the projects that did not receive funding, and to identify new ones, through working with SE LEP to secure funding from future rounds of the Growth Deal.

The LEP may be able to act as a catalyst providing 'enabling mechanisms' for progressing specific schemes for improving the public realm in the district to make it a more vibrant place for businesses to thrive, and may be able to contribute to the funding of a scheme through attracting financial contributions from a variety of sources.

Government (DfT) grant funding

Additionally, ESCC and RDC remain alert to the issuing of Government notices, policies and guidance from which opportunities to bid for external funding can be identified, assessed and achieved to bring forward transport infrastructure and measures identified in the LTP Implementation Plan earlier than programmed. Such grant programmes often have short application windows.

It is important in any grant-funded improvement scheme that 'whole-life' maintenance costs for on-going repairs are built into the capital allocation and transferred to ring-fenced maintenance budgets.

Development Funding

This may include developer contributions related to individual developments secured via Section 106 legal agreements, (though in the future, with the introduction of CIL, this will apply only for site specific requirements such as access), or through the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL). The Strategic Allocation of CIL receipts is allocated for spending by RDC via recommendations under the adopted Reg 123 list, while a separate certain proportion of CIL receipts are awarded direct to the relevant town and parish councils. Either of these pots could be directed to public realm funding.

External grant funds

A variety of external sources offer a range of grant schemes often with short windows for applications. 'Ready-to-go' schemes of varying sizes can be well-placed to bid for these funds as and when they become available.

Potential funds include:

- Heritage Lottery Fund – the HLF is currently (2018) reviewing its funding programmes, and is aiming to launch its new 5-year Strategic Funding Framework in early 2019. Historically, the HLF has usually only funded public realm works as part of larger townscape wide heritage capital projects.
- Coastal Communities Fund (via the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government) – this scheme encourages the economic development of UK coastal communities by giving funding to create sustainable economic growth and jobs, and has previously funded public realm improvements as part of regeneration masterplans.
- Awards for All (under the Big Lottery Fund) - Small scale funding grants for community based projects, this could help parish councils and local amenity groups fund equipment in the public realm, particularly to help facilitate events and activities.

Other funding options

- Private/business sponsorship of public space improvement projects.

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