



Historic England

# Streets for All East Midlands



# Summary

In 2017 Historic England published an updated national edition of *Streets for All*, a practical guide for anyone involved in planning and implementing highways and other public realm works in sensitive historic locations. It shows how improvements can be made to public spaces without harming their valued character, including specific recommendations for works to surfaces, street furniture, new equipment, traffic management infrastructure and environmental improvements.

This supplementary document summarises the key messages of *Streets for All* in the context of the East Midlands. It begins by explaining how historic character adds value to the region's contemporary public realm before summarising some of the priorities and opportunities for further improvements to the East Midlands' streetscapes.

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## Front cover: Boston Market Place

Open air cafés and outdoor cultural events are helping to bring life back to Boston's important but previously run-down market place.

## The public realm

From the mountainous Peak District via its 19th-century industrial heartland to the Lincolnshire fens, the quality and diversity of the East Midlands is eloquently expressed in its historic cities, towns and villages.

It is not only fine buildings that give these places their special character. Just as important are their public spaces – the streets and paths through which people move and the squares and precincts in which they connect.

Many have evolved over hundreds of years and are rich in inherited character, though sometimes it will have been degraded by neglect or the remorseless pressure of cars and lorries.

Today, the focus has shifted from the free flow of cars to making the public realm a better place for drivers and pedestrians alike. As well as improving traffic flows this means placing a greater emphasis on walking and cycling, on the value of public transport, on the safety of children, and on accessibility for everyone.

*Streets for All* shows how practical solutions to common highway problems can be achieved without harm to the valued character of places. The underlying principles are to reduce clutter, co-ordinate design and to reinforce local character, while maintaining safety for all.

*Streets for All* also demonstrates how opportunities can be translated into action. In a world of scarce resources and competing priorities it sets a clear agenda not only for councils but also for local communities and businesses.

It begins by identifying the elements that make an area distinctive – its landscape, its building materials and its traditional detailing. It then addresses some of the common problems that can diminish the quality of public areas and explains how integrated townscape management can provide answers.



Nottingham City Council has recently made significant enhancements to the historic Lace Market conservation area. Tax Increment Financing was used to fund public realm improvements that follow the principles set out in the City Council's Streetscape Design Manual. In a series of linked projects, footways and crossings have been systematically upgraded with the aim of providing more space for pedestrians and less dominance of parked cars.  
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## Identifying local distinctiveness

The character of the built environment of the East Midlands has been shaped by its richly diverse industrial and rural past. This is inextricably linked to its underlying geology – the source of natural materials from which its buildings and often its streets have traditionally been constructed.

From Nottingham's Old Market Square to Lincoln's Steep Hill, the distinctive character of public spaces needs to be thoroughly understood if they are to be properly conserved.

The protection and enhancement of this distinctiveness helps to foster greater local identity throughout the region, and has the potential to make its historic centres more attractive to inward investment and cultural tourism.

A successful public realm is one in which the differing needs of drivers and pedestrians are

served without the need for excessive signs, road markings or physical barriers. Traffic calming measures should be fitted sensitively into the street scene as though they were part of the original design of the area.

Public spaces can be thought of as 'outdoor rooms' enclosed by buildings. To avoid unsightly clutter, their street furniture needs to be placed with the same care as the objects in an indoor space. Traditional lamp-posts, bollards and seating are all important sources of local character, but high-quality new design can enrich the public realm and encourage its greater use.

Streets that are safe and attractive places for people to live and work need to be the rule, not the exception. That's why good design needs to be at the heart of the East Midlands' cities, towns and villages.



The commercial viability of the Robin Hood Hotel, once one of Newark-on-Trent's finest, has for a number of years been blighted by a busy road junction bearing an accretion of signals, barriers, signs and bollards. These have appeared over time, seemingly without any overall design rationale. The hotel was partially demolished in 2010 and three Grade II listed 18th-century townhouses are all that remain. Arguments have since raged about how best to restore the character and prosperity of this seriously compromised Conservation Area and its public realm.

## Opportunity into action

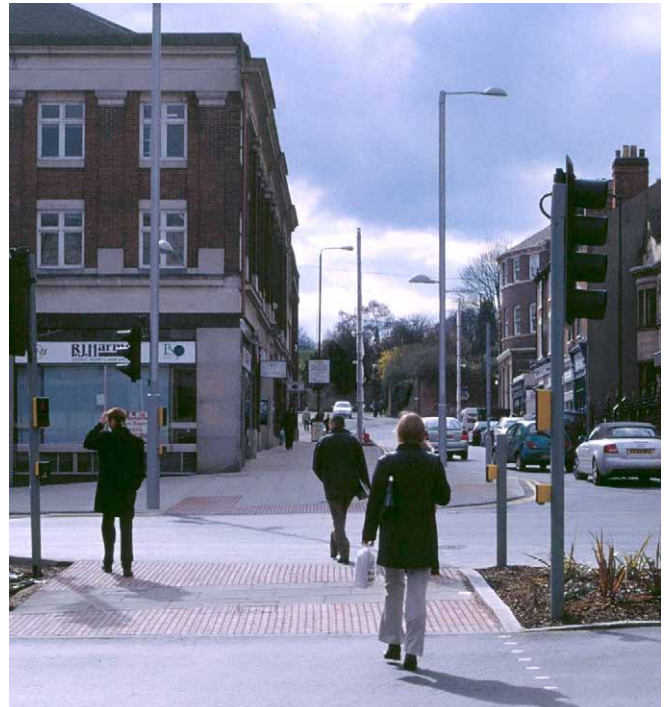
The garden city movement of the late 19th and early 20th centuries saw the relationship between suburbs and town centres as critical in the provision of mass housing. More recently the motor car weakened that relationship, but the need for sustainable housing growth, the plight of the high street and the desire for liveability have brought it back into sharp focus. Recent practice has shown that the relationship between new urban extensions and market towns can be to their mutual benefit.

Unfortunately, the legacy of traffic planning often blights this opportunity. Leisure time is difficult to enjoy where the environment is characterised by highway engineering, surface car parks and busy roads. This has an effect on property values and ultimately the local economy, but the potential of reversing these changes to stitch historic towns back together is now being more widely appreciated.

Larger cities recognised this in the 1990s, but the principles apply equally to smaller centres. The challenge, more urgent now than at any time since the post-war period, is to ensure that the delivery of housing is assisted by making the most of the historic towns they add to.

Equally, housing development can help provide the resources necessary to do this. This is not inevitable, however, and requires co-ordination, strategic thinking, partnership, expertise and strong leadership.

The careful planning of new settlements to avoid adding to the traffic in town centres (and perhaps even ease existing traffic levels), the use of Section 106 agreements to fund public realm improvements, de-cluttering and reverse engineering all have a part to play. Inevitably, the development plan needs to lie at the heart of the strategy.



Pedestrians, cyclists and public transport are the principal beneficiaries of an enhanced public realm.



Returning the high street to the pedestrian can be the key to economic regeneration of market towns, but it requires strong local vision and leadership.

## Case study: Grantham Market Place, Lincolnshire

Grantham Market Place is a multi-purpose space surrounded by important historic buildings and structures, including a medieval market cross and a 16th-century conduit house. In recent years, economic decline and the dominance of cars in the town centre had so severely damaged its historic character that it had to be added to Historic England's register of [Conservation Areas at Risk](#).

The refurbishment of the market place in 2011 was an important element of a series of schemes to improve the public realm in Grantham. Following extensive public consultation, most of the parking was removed from the Market Place and large areas reclaimed for pedestrian use.

The remaining car parking spaces have been surfaced using Yorkstone setts and the pedestrian areas with York stone slabs edged by pink granite kerbs to match those historically used in this area. The traditional drainage channels running along the kerb line have lines of small pink granite setts sourced from Mountsorrel in Leicestershire.

The aim of decluttering meant careful consideration had to be given to the design and location of signs, posts, bollards, street lighting, bins and tree planters, which all had to be removable to accommodate the Grantham's Mid Lent Fair.

A competition for a public work of art based on the life and work of Sir Isaac Newton was won by Paul Lewthwaite for an installation of plaques and freestanding pieces representing the movement of bodies in the solar system.

The project was promoted by the County Council Area Highways Manager with funding from the Highway maintenance budget and from South Kesteven District Council.

### Conclusion

As well as creating a safer and more pleasant public space, the Market Place scheme served as the catalyst for the launch of a shop front improvement scheme designed to further stimulate the economic regeneration of the town centre.



New Yorkstone paving and contemporary planters complement the historic buildings and cross of Grantham's newly refurbished market square.



# Historic England

We are the public body that looks after England's historic environment. We champion historic places, helping people understand, value and care for them.

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