

Shared Space in the Kent Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB): A New Approach to Streetscape Design

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Abstract

This paper describes work being undertaken in 2006 on behalf of Kent Downs AONB. It describes the application of shared space principles to the Kent Downs AONB, a large area within the county of Kent, located south east of London, and consequently under increasing pressure from new housing development, commuter traffic and, to a lesser extent, strategic traffic from the Kent ports and Europe.

A new approach to highway design is needed to address the following issues:

- ? the loss of key natural landscape and historic features;
- ? over engineered and “urban style” treatments, including sign clutter, inappropriate drainage, kerbing and street furniture and traffic calming measures;
- ? increasing noise and light pollution;
- ? use of safety audits in the design process;
- ? principles of user segregation, route functions and type of user;
- ? managing traffic in innovative ways; and
- ? maintenance issues.

Currently, minor improvements to highways lead to the “urbanisation” of rural areas, often as part of traffic management and safety improvements, but also often without sensitivity to the local rural character. No suitable UK guidance for rural roads is available – most guidance has been directed at the urban environment or standard design guidance, such as those for roads and bridges or for the layout of new housing estates, hence the need for this new approach.

The new design guidance will reflect the tradition of European traffic calming principles, developed over the last 30 years, and also more recent debates concerning shared space. This will take forward the integrated urban and landscape design and highway engineering agenda with an emphasis on “design ambiguity” in order to create uncertainty and eye contact between all road users and a consequent reduction in speeds. Our approach includes considerations of village gateways, reduced clutter, paving and road surfaces, street furniture, traffic management, and enhanced street life.

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