

## 4 Historic surfaces

Many towns and cities throughout the country contain areas of historic importance which are a direct link to our heritage and make a major contribution to local distinctiveness and the town's attractiveness and marketability. Historic surfaces form an essential part of these areas and are an asset which needs careful consideration to help safeguard them. These materials form the foreground to our buildings and add considerable value to the appearance of the built form.

English Heritage in 'Conservation Principles, Policies & Guidance' and in the *Streets for All* publications draws attention to the importance of historic surfaces and highlights the attributes that they contribute to the overall character of a place. Various treatment options exist to preserve, enhance and reflect historic surfaces.

Unfortunately there have been numerous cases in the past where these historic surfaces have been removed or covered over, maybe due to their rough surface and the expense of maintaining them. However their importance as a real asset rather than a liability to the street scene should be recognised as they add both character and regeneration value to the street.

Historic surfaces reveal local geology, they give authenticity to a place, add patina and particularity, and have cultural meaning and hold memories for people from many years of use and wear. Once removed such surfaces cannot easily be replaced, so it is imperative they are maintained in order to retain the benefits they provide. If this starts to compromise the use of a street and needs to be repaired or updated then a careful approach needs to be adopted so that this character is not lost.

### General Advice

- 1 The public realm strategy for the area needs to be consulted, which should include a strategy for the preservation and maintenance of historic surfaces.
- 2 Consider if any works need to be carried out adjacent to or directly affecting an historic surface. Any new material used should be sensitively chosen and not compromise the character of the street – this needs specialist advice.
- 3 Consult the local authority conservation officer or local planning authority on all historic surface street works. At an early stage consult the regional historic areas advisers at English Heritage and local historic societies.
- 4 Research the history of the site and the materials used (consult local historic groups), to increase understanding of the context. This can give a useful insight into the heritage of the area and how the street was used, which may influence any proposals which are made.
- 5 Re-use and recycle historic materials where possible. Some local authorities may keep old natural stone setts and paving when they have been removed, with an intention to use them at a later date for other schemes.
- 6 Historic surfaces have in some cases been listed under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 giving control of demolition powers, though the highway authority still has the ability under permitted development rights, to carry out works to keep the street safe to walk on. This designation can be used as a measure to improve the profile of the historic merit of the surfaces and help engender more care in treatment during maintenance.
- 7 For additional information and advice regarding historic surfaces refer to Section 2 Ground Surfaces of all English Heritage's *Streets for All* regional guidance.

## Procedures

1 Conduct a survey into the types of surface treatments and materials which exist in and around the site. Carry out a range of materials audit as part of character appraisal of the street which should be part of the public realm strategy. It can be useful to visit similar towns close by, to establish if there are local styles which should be retained or re-established.

2 Research and visit similar historic streets or case study examples of innovative approaches that have been implemented. The quality of workmanship is often the most important aspect within these types of works, so it is important to see first hand what it looks like.

3 Consult with local planning authority design and conservation officers, local residents, stakeholders, English Heritage (if in a conservation area), civic societies, local authority asset managers and the highway authority, at key stages of the design process. With historic surfaces it is particularly important to consult disability groups as some of these surfaces may not be ideal for certain groups of disabled people.

4 If the site is within a designated protection area then statutory stakeholder approval may be necessary before any work can go ahead.

5 Source suitable materials which should be locally supplied if possible. Check their street weathering credentials (density, porosity, slipperiness and skid resistance could be an issue) and if using natural stone check the wearing surface and methods of laying for best surface face. Historic tooling of the material may have originally been there for a reason (slipperiness etc) and could still be relevant.

## Relevant Documents and Legislation

- TRL Report 288, Traffic Calming in Historic Core Zones – Crossley Street, Halifax, *TRL*
- Highways Act 1980
- Traffic Calming Act 1992
- Highways (Road Humps) Regulations 1999 (SI 1996/1483)
- Highways (Traffic Calming Regulations) 1993 (SI 1993/1849) & 1999
- 1/96, Traffic Management in Historic Areas, *DfT Traffic Advisory Leaflet*<sup>1</sup>
- Planning Policy Guidance Note 15: Planning and the Historic Environment – 1994
- Street Improvements in Historic Areas, *English Heritage*, 1993
- Guidance on the management of Conservation Areas, *English Heritage*, February 2006
- Traffic Measures in Historic Towns, *Civic Trust/English Historic Towns Forum*, 1993
- Traffic in Historic Town Centres, *English Historic Towns Forum*, 1994
- Traffic in Townscape: Ideas from Europe, *Civic Trust/English Historic Towns Forum*, 1994
- Conservation Principles, Policies and Guidance, *English Heritage*, April 2008
- Database of Regional Distinctive Paving, *University of West of England*
- Pattern of English Building, *Alec Clifton-Taylor*, 1975
- Common Ground: <http://www.english-in-particular.info/>
- Manual for Historic Streets *English Historic Towns Forum*, May 2008
- Traffic Management and Streetscape LTN 1/08 *Department for Transport*, March 2008
- All regional *Streets for All* guidance documents produced by English Heritage.

<sup>1</sup> Note that this guidance should be used with care as it pre-dates the current 2002 TSRGD.

## Supporting Case Study

### Hawes, Yorkshire

Located on the A684 in Upper Wensleydale, the historic town of Hawes lies within the Yorkshire Dales National Park. The A684 passes through the centre of the town, including the main retail areas and historic market place. The town serves the local community and is an economic centre for the wider rural community as well as a tourist destination.

The cobbled section of the A684 through the Hawes Conservation Area was renovated using new pink granite setts combined with some of the existing historic setts that were recovered from excavation in the street during road works. Many of the original granite setts in the carriageway were in poor condition and could not be re-used due to degradation. After a detailed study the scheme was extended to include re-laying granite setts in the areas where degradation was occurring or likely to occur.

To minimise the amount of new material used within the scheme, many of the existing cobbles which were still in good condition were re-used. This required a considerable amount of effort, both to clean off the existing mortar material and to re-texture the granite setts to achieve adequate skid resistance for traffic. It was achieved by mechanical means, using a tumbling technique, and manually by chipping off old mortar with a mason's hammer.

The final scheme enabled footways to be widened to accommodate safe use for wheelchair users. Pedestrian crossing points were included at either end of the renovated section together with dropped kerbs to ensure continuity of off-carriageway movement for those who are mobility impaired. Narrowing of the carriageway has encouraged lower vehicular speeds, with a corresponding increase in safety for all users of the street environment. The re-laying and replacement of the granite setts ensured that trip hazards in the carriageway are now eliminated, whilst maintaining the historic feel of the streetscape through the western section of the one-way system.



**01 Before:** Historic setts had been covered over by tarmac

**02 During:** Careful excavation of the carriageway in order to save the existing setts for reuse

**03 During:** New setts were mixed with old to ensure a natural effect to the street

**04 After:** The final affect looked as though it had been there for many years and enhanced the overall character of the town

01



01 Listed cobbles in Broad Street, Ludlow, Shropshire from © Peter Burden

02



02 The existence of historic material within the street has often been undervalued in the past and removed due to the misunderstood cost of maintenance

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This is one of a series of *Streets for All Practical Case Studies*. Please refer to the overarching document *Streets for All Practical Case Studies: A Summary*, published by English Heritage March 2008. Product Code 51423, and to the nine regional *Streets for All* Volumes, published in 2005. Published by English Heritage May 2008. [www.english-heritage.org.uk](http://www.english-heritage.org.uk)

Case studies researched and written by the Mouchel Group.

