

10 How to do a street audit

The purpose of a street audit is to look at the quality of the street environment in an objective way. It enables each of the elements within it to be valued in accordance with their purpose and quality. A range of toolkits is available for both the professional and community to use. The range and type of audit requirements will depend on the criteria and final use for which the appraisal is intended, but generally speaking they involve consulting a range of people so as to include a broad spectrum of views, often beyond the usual highway engineer's expertise.

The common audit toolkits deal with aesthetic as well as functional issues. Some examples are given below.

A Streetscape Visual Audit – Used to identify areas of clutter within the street which are in need of removal or simplification. They can be carried out by almost anyone but for credibility's sake the auditors must have some knowledge of the need and purpose of signing. English Heritage has a standard form to download from their website which gives a basic checklist to cover and is aimed primarily at non-experts, for example local people and community groups.

B Townscape/landscape and visual impact assessment – Used to analyse and compare proposal options which will have an impact on their surrounding environment. It can be used as part of a planning application to objectively analyse proposals under standard criteria and methods of assessment. The Landscape Institute and Highways Agency have each produced their own standard form of assessment which is adaptable for use in larger scheme appraisals.

C Walkability & Community Street Audit – These can be carried out by members of the public, local stakeholders or by consultants who wish to assess the existing walking conditions of the local street environment. Living Streets has published a guidance document on organising and undertaking one.

D Pedestrian Environment Review System (PERS) – This is an assessment toolkit developed by TRL which enables the pedestrian environment to be reviewed under a wide range of topics, for example links, crossings, routes, public transport, interchanges and public space.

E Placecheck – Developed by the cross professional group Urban Design Alliance (UDAL), 'Placecheck' is a method of assessing the qualities of a place, showing what improvements are needed, and focusing people on working together to achieve them.

F Transport Asset Management Plans – Since October 2005 local highway authorities are required to gather and retain detailed information regarding the street to ensure capital funding and existing assets are used as efficiently and effectively as possible. This maintains a live record of street materials and furniture. Guidelines are published by the County Surveyors Society.

G Other techniques include cycle audits, safety audits and accessibility audits.

Within more sensitive heritage locations an Asset Management Plan may need to be adapted to combine with detailed audits of the street furniture and materials that may hold historic value. These may record information such as the furniture type, location, material, its condition in relation to its surrounding and the contribution it gives to its local environment. A detailed database of information covering the entire borough/county could eventually be created and a site specific strategy developed to safeguard important features which are currently unable to be listed. These can be GIS based and linked to ground level or low level aerial photographs.



General Advice

- 1 Using a street audit is a thorough and inclusive way of assessing the local environment which can then influence small scale improvements to the street, for example, the 'London Borough of Southwark' Street Leader initiative.
- 2 A street audit can be a time consuming task to organise and undertake, but can be very worthwhile, especially if the public or local stakeholders, particularly disabled people, are involved. It is important to make sufficient time and financial allowances available to ensure it is done thoroughly.
- 3 An audit is a rewarding exercise and should be enjoyable for all concerned. Make sure participants get feedback and that opportunities for change identified are given due attention and followed up.

Procedures

- 1 The need for a street audit should be identified at the beginning of a project to enable sufficient resources to be made available. Decide on whether it is a group or individual based event.
- 2 Establish the parameters of the audit in order to address the needs of the project.
- 3 Contact all interested parties, for example client, colleagues, stakeholders and public that need to be involved.
- 4 Prepare mapping and recording material. Ordnance survey plans are usually suitable. Disposable cameras are useful for community groups. Order a topographical survey of the study area to be undertaken, if this will assist with establishing the precise locations of particular street elements of interest.
- 5 Prepare the data sheet that is to be filled in on the day using a standard form or adapting/creating your own to best suit your needs.
- 6 Work out the route you intend to follow. Even if the audit is only to be undertaken by yourself and a colleague it is important to be thorough and a defined route will help achieve this.
- 7 After carrying out the audit all parties involved should meet to give general feedback and thoughts.
- 8 Prepare a report which details and summarises the findings, and drawings/photographs may be helpful.

Relevant Documents and Legislation

- Save Our Streets – Street Clutter Audit, English Heritage, <http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/saveourstreets>
- Manual for Streets, Chapter 3 The design process – from policy to implementation, DfT 2007
- Living Streets DIY Community Street Audit Pack. London: Living Streets. 2003
- Highways Agency, HD42 Non- Motorised User Audits – Volume 5 Sections 2 Part 5. Design Manual for Roads and Bridges. London: TSO. 2005
- Highways Agency HD19 Road Safety Audit – Volume 5 Section 2 Part 2. Design Manual for Roads and Bridges. London: TSO. 2003
- Design Manual for Roads and Bridges Volume 11 Section 3 Part 5 Landscape Effects, Highways Agency www.standardsforhighways.co.uk/dmrb/index.htm
- Placecheck, Urban Design Alliance UDAL www.placecheck.info
- Institution of Highways and Transportation (IHT) (1998) Cycle Audit and Cycle Review. London: IHT.
- Department for Transport (2002) Inclusive Mobility A Guide to Best Practice on Access to Pedestrian and Transport Infrastructure. London: Department for Transport.
- PERS (Pedestrian Environment Review System), TRL www.trlsoftware.co.uk
- Well maintained Highways, Code of Practice for Highway Maintenance Management, UK Roads Board, 2005, TSO
- 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.

Supporting Case Study

Melksham, Wiltshire

Melksham is a small historic market town located in West Wiltshire and has many historic buildings, the majority in the centre are listed. The main objective for the scheme was to improve facilities for pedestrians, cyclists and public transport. A street scene audit was undertaken alongside an access audit in the Market Place, High Street, Bank Street, Canons Square and Church Street in April 2005. It covered subjects including: buildings, pedestrian environment, traffic, street furniture, and public spaces. Under each section, 10 questions were asked regarding the street environment and its quality. The audit was intended to be non technical for residents and stakeholders within the area to provide feedback on their perspective of the condition of the streetscape. An extract of the audit on 'Street Furniture' included the following questions;

- Is there a unified style of street furniture?
- What condition is the street furniture in?
- Does the street furniture obstruct any footways or detract from any building frontages? If yes, please describe.
- Is the style of the street furniture in keeping with the surroundings?
- Are the signs directing pedestrians around the area suitably located?

- Are there any redundant signs or sign posts? If yes please describe.
- Is there any public art or a monument within the street? Please describe.
- Is there an opportunity for any? If yes please describe.
- Are the public transport facilities appropriately located?
- What is the condition and design of any shelters?
- Is there any seating for pedestrians? Is the street furniture in keeping with the surroundings?

Following the audit a report including photos was prepared covering each of the streets individually and providing a summary of each subject heading. In addition a database of information with supporting drawings could have been created detailing all of the street furniture; material locations; providing an overview of their condition and historical importance to the street scene. The information could then be used at a later date to establish what elements within the streetscape hold importance and should be retained or reused. The street audit could also include questions covering the following: adaptability of the street to different uses; shop front/frontage presentation; and street surfaces.

It is important to note that the street audit was limited by scope of the project and the success of the street audit is difficult to measure. However, observations show significant citizen and stakeholder participation with many comments recorded and filtered into the scheme process.



01 An example of poorly maintained pedestrian signage within Melksham which has a direct effect on the quality of street environment

02 An example of pedestrian signing within Melksham which adds to the character of the town

03 The buildings and public realm combine to provide an attractive character to the town

01



01 Street audits undertaken with local stakeholders can be a valuable part of the design process

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