

SHROPSHIRE COUNCIL TOURISM

SIGNING POLICY

1 Introduction

- 1.1 Circular Roads 3/95, published by the Department of Transport on 12 December 1995, came into effect on 5 January 1996. This document amended previous legislation relating to white on brown tourist signs, allowing a wider range of tourist attractions, amenities and facilities to apply for signs. The circular makes it clear that eligibility for signing does not mean automatic entitlement to signs, but that this depends upon a decision by the local traffic authority. This document is intended to set out the policy that will be applied by Shropshire Council in considering applications in its area.
- 1.2 Special circumstances apply to requests for signs on motorways and trunk roads, and to any attractions that lie on trunk roads. These will be subject to consideration by the Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions (DTLR).
- 1.3 Any promoter making an application for signs will be required to complete a comprehensive questionnaire, supply supporting information as requested and pay a non-returnable fee of £75 for the application to be considered. This fee is retained whether the application is successful or not, in order to cover administration costs.
- 1.4 On receipt of the completed application, Council officers will assess eligibility. This often involves interviewing promoters by prior appointment at the attraction or facility concerned. Promoters will be required to show that a significant proportion of their visitors/patrons originate from outside the local area. Inspection of visitors' books will be requested, if available. Please refer to the following sections on general and specific requirements for eligibility.
- 1.5 If, following a site visit, officers consider that an attraction or facility warrants signing under the terms of the policy, then a survey of the various locations at which signs have been requested will be undertaken to determine the most appropriate and economic way of providing the new signs.
- 1.6 The survey information will be passed to our Term Contractor, for provision of an estimate for the proposed signing scheme. The estimate will be passed by the Council to the promoter for consideration.

If the promoter approves this estimate, then on payment of the fee balance, we will place a Works Order with our Term Contractor to undertake the work.

- 1.7 If large-scale signing schemes are requested and approved, the Council will find it necessary to employ the services of its sign design consultancy. The cost of such scheme design work will be passed on to the promoter, who will be provided with an estimate of design costs for consideration before any design work is undertaken.
- 1.8 Erected signs will remain in the ownership of the Council, but in the event of them being stolen or destroyed in an accident where costs cannot be reclaimed through insurance, the promoter will be expected to pay the cost of subsequent repair or replacement.
- 1.9 When the signs require replacement through age, the promoter will be required to pay the cost of replacement.
- 1.10 If the attraction closes down, ceases to trade or no longer meets the required standards as set out in this document, then the promoter will pay the full costs incurred by the Council in removing the signs.
- 1.11 The Council retains the right to remove the signs if they are to be incorporated in an overall or combined signing scheme if this occurs in the area, or to remove signs to an attraction that no longer meets the criteria required at the time the application was approved.

2 General requirements for eligibility of Attractions

2.1 This group incorporates in the main those establishments that are open to the public offering recreation, education or historical interest. Establishments which provide additional services and facilities to the public are detailed in section 3 and are subject to additional criteria.

2.2 The tourist attraction must be a permanent, established destination or facility that attracts or is used by visitors to an area, and which is open to the public without prior booking during its normal opening hours.

- (a) Permanently established means it has planning permission or is an established use.
- (b) The attraction must give evidence of promotion to the tourist market. Where printed material is provided, this should give clear travel directions along the route to be signed, including a map where this would be helpful.
- (c) The attraction must provide an adequate level of customer facilities appropriate to the size, location and character of the operation such as car and coach parking, toilets, refreshments, interpretation, etc.
- (d) The whole attraction must be open to people making casual visits within normal opening hours, and not just to those who have made prior bookings.
- (e) The attraction is expected to be open at least four hours per day for at least 150 days per year.
- (f) There must be a significant proportion of people visiting from outside the locality who would be likely to need signs to find their way to the attraction.
- (g) There should not be any private advertisement signs relating to the attraction at or near the location of any proposed tourism traffic sign, or on any public roads.

2.3 These are for attractions such as:

- Theme parks
- Historic properties and castles
- Historic churches, abbeys and cathedrals
- Ancient monuments and museums
- Parks and gardens
- Nature reserves, zoos and safari parks, country parks, commons
- National attractions, eg geographical areas of special interest to visitors
- Beaches, viewpoints, rivers and canals
- Leisure complexes
- Sports and visitor facilities

3 Specific requirements for eligibility of facilities

3.1 The following are regarded as visitor facilities:

- Hotels, guest houses, farmhouse accommodation, bed and breakfast and other forms of serviced accommodation
- Self-catering and holiday centres
- Camping sites, caravan sites and camping barns
- Youth hostels
- Tourist information centres and points
- Restaurants, cafes and pubs
- Sports venues
- Cinemas, theatres and concert venues
- Retail establishments
- Picnic sites
- Tours, leisure drives, leisure cycle routes and walking routes/trails

3.2 In order to retain tourists' confidence in the signs system, it is important that a minimum level of quality is maintained. In addition to the general requirements set out in 2.1, the facilities should satisfy the following criteria:

(a) *Hotels and other forms of serviced accommodation:*

Establishments should be members of a national quality assurance scheme which requires independent inspection of all members' premises, eg ETB national classification grading scheme; AA scheme; RAC scheme.

(b) *Self-catering accommodation and holiday centres:*

Establishments should be members of a national quality assurance scheme such as the ETB key scheme or British Graded Holiday Parks Scheme ('Q' Scheme).

(c) *Camping and caravan sites:*

Only those sites with at least 20 pitches for casual overnight use by touring caravans or tents will be eligible. Each site must also be licensed under the Caravan Sites and Control of Development Act 1960 and/or Public Health Act 1936. The site should be registered under a nationally accredited classification scheme such as the British Graded Holiday Parks Scheme ('Q' Scheme).

(d) *Youth hostels:*

Youth hostels must be managed by YHA to be eligible for the Youth Hostel symbol.

(e) *Tourist Information Centres (TICs) and Tourist Information Points (TIPs):*

Only TICs recognised and networked by the Tourist Boards may be signed with the international 'i' symbol – the word 'centre' being added where sign size and traffic conditions permit. Unmanned or remote TIPs may be signed with the international 'i' symbol if they meet the appropriate standards and are recognised by the Regional Tourist Board.

(f) *Restaurants and cafes:*

In addition to the general requirements, restaurants and cafes should normally be open for at least six hours per day, six days per week, for at least six months of the year, and have a minimum of 25 covers. They should comply with the Food Safety (General Food Hygiene) Regulations 1995 and the Food Safety Act 1990, be registered under the Food Safety Act 1990, and be able to show that they are recognised under an acceptable national quality assurance scheme such as Egon Ronay or the Michelin Guide.

(g) *Public houses:*

Meals, not just bar snacks, should be served both at lunch times and in the evenings.

Facilities should be provided inside the pub to allow children to accompany their parents, or the pub should hold a children's certificate. Inns with overnight accommodation should be members of a national quality assurance scheme such as ETB, AA or RAC.

(h) *Recreational facilities and sports venues:*

These should meet the general requirements.

(i) *Cinemas, theatres and concert venues:*

These should meet the general requirements.

(j) *Retail establishments located in shopping areas or town centres:*

These will not normally be signed. Isolated small centres or individual units should only be considered for brown tourism signs where they are not covered by any other form of signing, such as retail park or superstore direction signs, do not front the main 'A' or 'B' class roads, and incorporate adequate parking.

(k) *Picnic sites:*

Only places conducive to eating in the open air, available to the general public with their own food and set aside primarily for that purpose with seating and tables available, will be considered.

(l) *Tours, leisure drives and cycle routes:*

Where these are located on public highways, they must be promoted in association with the highway authority (ie the Council) who will coordinate the appropriate signing scheme.

4 Consideration of appropriate signing scheme

4.1 Having considered an application in terms of eligibility, it is necessary to consider whether a signing scheme is:

- Necessary;
- Appropriate;
- Safe;
- Environmentally acceptable;
- Relevant to an urban or rural situation;
- More appropriately signed as part of a 'generic scheme'; and/or
- Likely to conflict with, or should be associated with, other local facilities.

4.2 This stage of the assessment will be carried out by the Council in consultation with the sign designers and other departments or bodies as it considers appropriate. The decision rests with the Council, and a promoter will be advised of the reasoning behind any decision. There is no ground of appeal other than against any error of fact which may have occurred.

4.3 The number of signs necessary for an attraction will depend on its location and the expected annual number of visitors. The Council will have the final decision on the number of signs to be provided.

Tourist attractions with direct access to an 'A' or 'B' class road may not need signing if the entrance is visible and identifiable from a distance. In other cases, on roads with a speed limit of 50mph or above, an advance direction sign from each direction, and a flag sign may be needed to guide traffic safely to the attraction. Where the facility receives more than 150,000 visitors per year, signing over a wider area will be considered.

Tourist attractions not located adjacent to an 'A' or 'B' class road can be signed from the nearest 'A' or 'B' class road if appropriate with a flag sign (or signs) at the appropriate junction or junctions leading to the site. Signing will not normally begin from a point more than five miles from the attraction. If the attraction lies between two main roads it may be appropriate to sign from both via different routes on minor roads, or send tourists to the most appropriate point of access on the minor road network.

On leaving the 'A' or 'B' class roads, finger post signs (possibly showing just a symbol) will be required as appropriate at junctions. There is unlikely to be any need for signs where the route continues straight on.

- 4.4 Where a tourist attraction is associated with a particular village or town, tourists will be expected to follow the normal direction signs to that village or town, and direction signs may be necessary once the town has been entered.

Signs may include commercial names and consideration can be given to adding a symbol to the town facilities signs on approach where this is appropriate. There is, however, no appropriate symbol for retail establishments.

- 4.5 Circular 3/95 from the Department of Transport advises that the provision of tourist signs should be consistent with road safety and environmental considerations. Decisions on individual applications will continue to depend on the extent to which additional tourist signs can be provided without reducing the effectiveness of existing signs or detracting from or damaging the quality of the environment.

With regard to trunk roads, the advice is that in general six tourist destinations shall be regarded as the maximum that drivers can absorb at a single junction, or four on all purpose dual carriageway roads with speeds in excess of 50mph. This policy will also apply to County roads.

In addition, it will be necessary to consider the effects on visibility at junctions of any new signs, and where adequate visibility cannot be satisfactorily maintained the numbers of tourist signs will be restricted accordingly.

- 4.6 The environmental effects of signs, and the problem of sign clutter, are matters of personal opinion. The continued addition of individual signs can create a messy situation which can often be overcome by replacement with one purpose designed sign, unfortunately at considerable cost.

Where the Council considers that signing to an additional destination would create unacceptable clutter or environmental damage, the views of appropriate authorities, such as Parish Councils, English Heritage and the Countryside Commission, will be sought. If the promoter is prepared to pay the full cost of a totally new signing scheme to overcome the problem of sign clutter, his or her application will be considered favourably.

Particular consideration of this problem will occur in conservation areas, adjacent to listed buildings, and in AONB and tourist 'honeypot' locations.

- 4.7 Generic signing schemes to groups of attractions or facilities such as hotels, or the use of signs showing symbols only, will be considered where the total number of individual signs is likely to be unacceptable on safety or environmental grounds.

Similarly, on approaches to towns, a historic towns sign will be considered more appropriate than individual establishment signing. These signs will

incorporate appropriate symbols to be followed within the town. There will need to be a lead applicant with respect to such signs, who will need to co-ordinate funds and be responsible for issuing a cheque to the Council.

4.8 *Signing within urban areas*

An urban area can be defined as any city, town or village subject to a 30 or 40mph speed limit, although its boundary may not be contiguous with the start of the speed limit.

The signing of tourist attractions and facilities in these areas will be subject to stringent control.

There will be a general presumption against white on brown signs to tourist facilities that a visitor would normally expect to find within an urban area, in particular shops, cinemas, serviced accommodation, restaurants, cafes, etc, unless the applicant can demonstrate an exceptional case for the signing of their establishment.

It will be a general principle to provide visitor information either in the form of strategic tourist information points or historic town signs on the main approach roads into the urban areas, or local tourist information points at the main points of visitor arrival to link up with systems of pedestrian signing.

This combination of visitor information and sign posting is generally considered to be more appropriate to the urban environment, both as a means of helping the visitor with their orientation within the town and in certain circumstances to promote the location of individual attractions or facilities.

Whenever possible, symbols will be used to sign to the nearest car park, from where pedestrian signs can be provided in liaison with the appropriate district council.

Where facilities lie on the outskirts of an urban area, and not in the centre, provided car parking is available locally and all other general requirements are met, then signing will be considered subject to the agreement of the district council and the town or parish council.

- 4.9 Adjacent to county borders, liaison will take place with the relevant adjacent authority to ensure continuity with their policy, and in the case of cross border signing to achieve appropriate arrangements for signs to be erected in another county.
- 4.10 Responsibility for signing lies with the highway authority for the area in which the facility is located. Separate agreements may need to be entered into with adjacent highway authorities where some signs are to be erected across boundaries.