

Environment, Development and Transport Committee

Report title:	Brown Tourist Information Signs Policy
Date of meeting:	8 March 2019
Responsible Chief Officer:	Tom McCabe - Executive Director, Community and Environmental Services
Strategic impact Brown tourism signs can help road users arrive at their destination safely, assist with traffic management on our network and help provide support to the local tourist economy. Maintaining a safe highways network and supporting the local economy aligns with the County Council visions to 'Build communities we can be proud of' and 'Making the most of our heritage, culture and environment.'	

Executive summary

<p>The Brown Signs Policy has been in effect for many years. During this time there have been a variety of reviews that have taken place to determine the criteria which is used today. To ensure that the policy remains up to date and reflects the objectives of the Council, the Chair and Vice Chair of the Environment, Development and Transport Committee have agreed that a review should take place.</p> <p>The following report summarises the outcome of the review along with the associated recommendations outlined in part 1.</p> <p>Recommendations: To approve the updated policy document attached to this report which includes scope for signs to retail destinations.</p>

1. Proposals

- 1.1. To update the policy to include scope for standard black and white signs to retail destinations.
- 1.2. We understand that brown signs have a recognised benefit for the local tourism economy and wish to support this as much as possible. However, it is recognised that this needs to be a balanced against the potential safety and environmental impacts that can result from too much signage. This approach is reflected in national guidance like the Department for Transport report 'Signing the Way' that recommends signage is kept to a minimum to reduce impact on the environment and avoid information overload for drivers. This is the approach taken by many other local authorities.
- 1.3. Where officers find that signage to a retail establishment would have a safety or traffic management benefit and not adversely impact the environment they would look to propose a black and white sign if they are not a recognised tourist venue. This will align with the policy used nationally on trunk roads (see 2.4.6), provide a solution to businesses who cannot provide recognised tourist accreditation and ensure that brown tourism signs continue to be recognised as tourist

destinations for road users.

- 1.4. As part of these proposals we propose to update the procedure used by officers so that assessment of any applications considered to be retail outlets should undergo further scrutiny before refusal, specifically looking if there are any potential traffic safety issues using recorded accident data and known traffic volumes.
- 1.5. Recent feedback suggested that clearer definition should be applied on what qualifies as a tourist destination. Therefore, we also propose to stipulate in the policy additional criteria where retail establishments may qualify as a tourist destination and ask the applicant to provide necessary evidence to support it as a tourist facility.
- 1.6. To avoid road 'clutter' we propose that we also add to the policy that where signage is approved, we would require any illegal/unauthorised signage to be removed.
- 1.7. As is common with the policies used by most local authorities, eligibility does not equate with a right to have a sign and Norfolk County Council may refuse a sign if there are safety or environmental concerns.

2. Evidence

2.1. Current policy

Norfolk County Council's current brown signs policy is based on advice from the Department for Transport. It recognises how brown signs can help support the local tourist economy.

Eligible venues are classified as being a tourist attraction or a tourist facility.

The policy states that the main purpose of brown signs should be to direct traffic safely and effectively to tourist destinations, primarily in the latter stages of the journey. It also states that these signs should not be used for advertising purposes and this should only be a secondary effect.

Currently, retail outlets, shops or shopping centres, garden centres and exhibition centres are considered ineligible for brown tourism signs as per the national guidance.

2.2. Applications and Feedback received

- 2.2.1. Since April 2016 we have assessed 26 applications for brown tourism signs. Some of these were to request changes to existing signage.

16-17	13 applications
17-18	6 applications
18-19	7 applications

Of these brown sign applications, one business was turned down because as a retail outlet they do not meet the current criteria for brown signs; a public house application was turned down as they were already situated on an A road; and a B&B/restaurant was turned down as it was located in a town centre which is

already signed.

- 2.2.2. In November 2018 Norfolk County Council received a request to review the brown signs policy after a business was refused a brown sign on the basis that they were a retail outlet. The owners felt that the retail outlet was an attraction for tourists and sited safety concerns for visitors who miss the turning off the main A-road. The issue was raised by Members and prompted this review to ensure that we take into account the potential benefits to the Norfolk economy.

2.3. **Previous Reviews**

The current policy was first endorsed by Members in 2000 with subsequent reviews taking place in 2010 and 2016. In 2010 the main change was to reduce the associated fee to £150 as it remains today. In 2016 the main changes were relating to simplifying and improving the process. In both cases, the policy relating to assessment criteria remained the same and Norfolk policy continued to apply the guidance outlined by the Department for Transport.

2.4. **Industry guidelines**

2.4.1. *Department for Transport (DfT) review of signs policy*

Following a major review of traffic signs policy, the DfT published the policy paper 'Signing the Way' in October 2011. This policy recommended that authorities should seek to reduce sign clutter. The reasoning for such an approach was described in the DfT Traffic Advisory Leaflet (January 2013) that 'Over-provision of signs can have a detrimental impact on the environment and can dilute more important messages if they result in information overload for drivers.'

- 2.4.2. 'Signing the way' also referenced a working group that was established to 'simplify and streamline the decision-making process for delivering brown tourist signs to ensure the strategic needs of the tourism industry are considered.' The working group programme started in 2011 with a view to 'help reduce sign clutter by providing a clear definition of what constitutes a tourist destination to guide local decision-making on the need for signing'.

- 2.4.3. The Traffic Signs and General Directions 2016 now defines a tourist destination to assist authorities in determining eligibility for a brown sign. They state that because VisitEngland did not recognise establishments that qualify for brown signs in the same way as VisitScotland and VisitWales that this exposed 'English traffic authorities to pressure from private enterprises, such as retail parks, to represent their business as tourist destinations on traffic signs. This inevitably contributed to sign clutter.'

- 2.4.4. The Traffic Signs and General Directions 2016 definition of "tourist destination" reads:

- (a) a Tourist Information Centre or Point;
- (b) a permanently established attraction or facility (other than a leisure facility) which:
 - i. attracts or is used by visitors to an area;
 - ii. is open to the public without prior booking during its normal opening hours; and
 - iii. (iii) is recognised as a tourist attraction or facility by the appropriate

national promoter of tourism;

(c) a village, town or city that is of particular interest to tourists;

(d) a route that is of particular interest to tourists.

2.4.5. The signing review also led to an update to TD52 (TD 52/17) in the Design Manual for Roads and Bridges which covers 'Traffic Signs to Tourist Destinations and Leisure Facilities in England'. The guidance, used by Highways England, explains that the main purpose of tourist signing is to guide visitors to their intended tourist destinations in the latter stage of their journey and that this is mainly for traffic management reasons. They give priority to tourist destinations with the greatest traffic management or safety needs. They advise retail outlets are not eligible for brown tourist signs and are instead covered by policy in 'TD 53/05' (see below).

2.4.6. TD 53/05 Traffic Signs to Retail Destinations and Exhibition Centres in England and Wales specifies that "Retail destinations and exhibition centres shall only be considered for signing where there are clear traffic management or safety reasons. In such cases only standard directional signing as prescribed by the TSRGD shall be used for new or replacement signs"

"They should not be used to circumvent planning control of advertisements, nor as a substitute for good marketing material." It continues, "As a general principle the owner is expected to advertise the retail destination or exhibition centre, the opening times, the location, accessibility by road and public transport, in newspapers and leaflets and on web sites."

"Provision shall be conditional on the removal of any advertisement signs adjacent to the highway, together with any unauthorised advertising materials"

2.5. **Benchmarking**

2.5.1. An exercise was carried out to determine the approach taken by other local authorities towards brown tourism signs. For this review the policies of ten authorities, with similar socio-economic characteristics as Norfolk, were reviewed.

2.5.2. All of the authorities we looked at offered the provision to apply for brown tourism signs and all of them required an initial assessment or application fee to review and assess the application. The costs of this fee vary from £75 to £400. The average over the ten authorities reviewed is £150.60.

2.5.3. Multiple authorities use the definition in the Design Manual for Roads and bridges which defines a tourist destination as being 'a permanently established destination or facility that attracts or is used by visitors to an area and is opened to the public without prior booking during normal opening hours.' Most refer to national guidance in how they shaped their policy.

2.5.4. Another common theme amongst the authorities was listing the types of 'attraction' or 'facility' which would be eligible to apply. 9 out of 10 authorities specified qualifying criteria for each type of tourist attraction and facility, with most requiring evidence from the applicant to support that they meet the defined criteria. This includes evidence of publicity, adequate parking and on-site facilities.

2.5.5. All ten authorities specify that eligibility does not mean entitlement. This is

consistent with the national guidance where onus is put on safety, traffic management and the environment.

- 2.5.6. Nine out of ten authorities make clear in their guidance that the purpose of brown tourism signs is to direct business and leisure travellers to the location of a tourist attraction or tourist facility and not to advertise it.
- 2.5.7. All ten authorities specify that certain retail outlets would not normally be signed. Many reference the guidance referenced in 2.4.5 which states 'Retail parks, shopping centres and exhibition centres should not in future be considered for signing using white on brown signs.'
- 2.5.8. Some authorities add the provision that some retail outlets, such as garden centres, could be classified as a tourist destination if they are of particular interest to the tourism market and have facilities and features that are specifically aimed at tourists; have adequate toilet facilities and be able to offer light refreshments where appropriate and should offer either tours/demonstrations or interpretive displays for tourists. They go on to specify evidence would be required and final decision would be down to the authority.
- 2.5.9. Other authorities have taken a similar approach to that specified for trunk roads in the Design Manual for Roads and Bridges. In this case, the authorities have specified that if there are safety or traffic management concerns they would look at normal directional signing as an alternative solution.

3. Financial Implications

- 3.1. All new applications and any resulting works to design, install or alter tourist or leisure signs on motorways and all-purpose trunks roads shall be funded by the applicants pursuant to section 278 of the Highways Act 1980.
- 3.2. The proposal to extend the scope of eligible venues for signage could result in an increased volume of applications and therefore resources required to deal with these. However, it is unclear the exact impact of the changes that will be applied and the recommendation is to review costs again once the policy has been applied in the live environment.
- 3.3. It is recommended that we do not change the assessment fee of £150. This fee was found to be around average of those authorities reviewed. However, this fee will be reviewed annually to ensure that the County Council's costs are covered.

4. Issues, risks and innovation

- 4.1. Any assessment should always consider the safety and traffic management in the given area. If there are concerns around the impact of additional signage the highway authority should decline the application or find suitable alternatives.
- 4.2. We should be conscious of the findings in reviews like 'signing the way' to ensure we create a good balance between promoting our tourist industry and keeping the impact on the environment and driver confusion to a minimum.
- 4.3. There could be an increased volume of applications and work load as a result of expanding the eligibility criteria. It is unclear on expected volumes but should be monitored for subsequent future review.

5. Background

- 5.1. [Traffic Signs Policy Paper: Signing the Way](#)
- 5.2. [Dft Traffic Advisory Leaflet 'Reducing Sign Clutter'](#)
- 5.3. [Traffic Signs and General Directions 2016](#)
- 5.4. [Design Manual for Roads and Bridges TD 52/17 – Traffic Signs to Tourist Destinations and Leisure Facilities in England](#)
- 5.5. [Design Manual for Roads and Bridges TD 53/05 – Traffic Signs to Retail Destinations and Exhibition Centres in England and Wales – Trunk Roads](#)
- 5.6. [Section 278 of the Highways Act 1980](#)

Officer Contact

If you have any questions about matters contained in this paper or want to see copies of any assessments, eg equality impact assessment, please get in touch with:

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