

This month, **Colin Davis** considers road surfaces and their visual contribution to the landscape of the street.

# Design notes

The picture of Lavenham, Suffolk (*top right*), shows a quite outstanding country village. Look more closely and you see the colour and texture of the bound gravel road surface reflects the colour and materials of the lime-washed buildings. Traffic signs and lines have been eliminated or reduced to the minimum. Road markings have been effectively avoided.

This whole scene has a sense of completeness and unity. It harks back to the time when it was sensible to build roads with material from local quarries. The roads had an appearance that was the direct result of the local geology. The same can be said for the appearance of the buildings. At Lavenham, they built in timber and render, rather than brick or stone.

Remarkably-wide variations in the geology of Britain, together with the difficulties of transportation, automatically created the very marked differences in the buildings as well as the landscape which characterise each part of the country. It was almost impossible to construct roads and buildings that did not contribute to the local distinctiveness. It has given Britain its charm.

Today, with the whole world from which to draw materials, there is a wide range available to create the exact effect desired. But these materials need to be selected with restraint.

Whereas a bound gravel surface for the carriageway, and even a matching footway, is appropriate for a village in rural Suffolk, something more metropolitan would be appropriate for a city centre. The road surface could have a controlled, neat and tidy, almost formal appearance – more business suit than country casuals.

There is a temptation to apply a vast range of coloured surfaces, ostensibly to indicate prohibition on bus lanes, or warnings at dangerous spots, or places to give way to cyclists. However, it is easy to over-embellish these roads so that the addition of a simple skid-resistant surface adds to an array of arbitrary, oddly-shaped and frankly, confusing, coloured road surfaces. How is a driver intended to react to a patch of buff-coloured road? Is it a message or a warning? Is it an attempt at beautification, or is it merely the only colour that was available to reduce skidding?

Fortunately, a sense of formal unity in urban streets can be achieved in practice. None of the coloured surfaces are actually needed in order to enforce a traffic order, and so can be lawfully removed.

Even skid-resistant surfaces can be of a colour which is similar to that of the surrounding road. Several companies produce satisfactory products. For example, by using Guyana bauxite, a dark grey material, it is possible to meet a skid resistance of 70 PSV (polished stone value) considered satisfactory by the Highways Agency for 'demanding' locations and, at the same time, have a surface that is a similar colour to a normal carriageway.

The texture and colour of road surfaces can be completely compatible with, and enhance, the particular character of a street, be it in town or country.

• **Colin J Davis** @: colinjavis@aol.com ☎: www.StreetDesign.Info

Two companies which supply Guyana bauxite are Ringway Special Treatment (☎: www.ringway.co.uk) and Sight Grip (☎: www.sightgrip.com).



Coloured judgement: Engineers now have a range of surface materials, but what works in a Suffolk village (*top*) may be inappropriate in an urban setting (*middle*), a consideration that should extend to anti-skid surfaces (*bottom*)