

This month, **Colin Davies** looks at how design can restore dignity and character to the streets.

Design notes

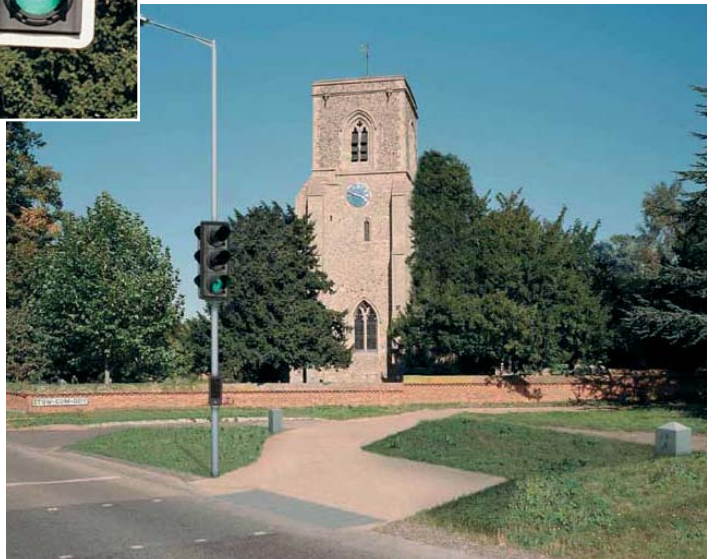
Imagine returning after some time to a favourite rural village. Turning a corner, expecting the familiar view of the parish church, you see instead some recent improvements – a new signalled crossing. Times change, but you cannot help thinking that it could, perhaps, have been just a little more elegant.

This particular picture (*right*) was published last year by English Heritage as part of its 'Save our streets' campaign. Its aim was to restore dignity and character to historic streets, largely by removing unnecessary signs, pole and barriers.

Taking up this challenge, session delegates at a nationwide CABE/Institution of Highways and Transportation programme – designed to raise the awareness of urban design in the minds of highway and traffic engineers – were asked to come up with some suggestions.

Here are a dozen to think about:

1. Is the ugly, cranked, drainpipe-style signal post necessary? There seems plenty of room to set the post back from the road to prevent it being hit by a vehicle.
 2. Are the secondary signals and second pedestrian push button necessary?
 3. Can the pedestrian signals be replaced with near-side 'Puffin' signals? In which case, the unsightly scrap-iron-style signal bracket is not needed.
 4. Do the white lines around the signals really serve a purpose? They are not required by the Traffic Signs Regulations and General Directions (TSRGD), and are not, therefore, mandatory.
 5. Could the simplified signals be fixed to a suitably relocated and modified lamp column? Then a separate signal post would not be needed.
 6. Are the two rows of different guardrails required? There is plenty of room for alternative landscape or grass verges.
 7. Does the cycle-direction sign need to be so big and on a post? It could be closer to the ground.
 8. Is it necessary to have a sign saying that the path is no longer a shared cycleway and footway?
 9. Does the tactile paving need the stem extension across the footway? The grass verges guide people with visual impairment to the push button. Could the tactile paving be a similar colour to the rest of the path? In conservation areas or near listed buildings, official advice permits a relaxation of the colour differentiation.
 10. Could the crossing be wider than the minimum 2.4m? A more comfortable width would be 6m, and acceptable within the crossing regulations.
 11. Could the skid-resistant road surface be the same colour as the rest of the carriageway? Arbitrary unintended colours are ugly and confusing, as they reduce the impact of statutory road markings.
 12. Finally, could the name sign be fixed more neatly on the wall?
- Just a few ideas but, at each programme session, many of the



Before and after. English Heritage used the top illustration as part of its 'Save our streets' campaign. The same view revised by applying urban design principles. *Inset* signal bracket detail

same points were raised, so it can be done. Perhaps we need more leading politicians, and their chief executives, to put in place systems that will deliver public realms of quality as well as safety.

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