

HUDDERSFIELD TOWN CENTRE AUDIT 2002

FACT SHEET 6: ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY

Introduction

This document, produced by Kirklees MC's Planning Service, is designed to provide supplementary information on environmental quality to accompany the 2002 Town Centre Audit for Huddersfield (in A1 folded form). This is one of a series of Fact Sheets that contain detailed analysis of the indicators of town centre performance presented in the main publication.

Environmental quality: methodology

The town centre audit for Huddersfield has involved a general assessment of its environmental strengths and weaknesses. The survey work was undertaken during December 2001, and covered 10 indicators of environmental quality. The exercise is based on a technique developed by URBED (the Urban and Economic Development Group). It updates the street by street environmental assessment undertaken as part of the 1998 Audit, reflecting in particular the changes that have taken place during the last 4 years.

28 streets in the town centre were assessed using the following indicators of environmental quality:

First impressions	Traffic intrusion
Cleanliness	Lighting/security
Building condition	Street furniture
Street condition	Signage/shop fronts
Townscape	Planting

Each street was credited with a score ranging from 5 for good through to 1 for poor, using a pro-forma for each of the 10 indicators. These were then totalled to give scores for each indicator, and for each street. The results have been categorised according to the percentage of the total score for each indicator (75%+ becomes +1, 45%-75% becomes 0 and 45% or less becomes -1). The full results are presented overleaf (Figure 2). The scores enable the town's environmental strengths to be identified, whilst also illustrating where problems exist. This is shown in the main audit publication.

When considering the overall environmental quality of the town it is important to recognise that some indicators are more important than others. To reflect this, the indicators were weighted, ranging from 3.0 for a street's overall appearance to 1.0 for planting. Weighted totals have been produced, along with weighted averages, because in some situations it is not possible to score all of the indicators for every street. The relative performance of individual streets in the town centre is illustrated in the main audit publication.

The assessment of environmental quality is a subjective exercise and for this reason the results of the survey should be treated with caution. Nevertheless, it does provide a means of comparing the town centres performance over time to determine whether individual roads improve their score, or whether the town generally, can improve its rating on those indicators that are weak. This however, can only be done if the same indicators and the same weightings are used for subsequent environmental assessments.

Indicators of environmental quality

Over the last 4 years there has been significant improvements in the perceived environmental quality of Huddersfield town centre. This is as a result of on-going town centre improvements including streetscape works such as those on King Street as well as other pedestrian access improvements and the integration of CCTV into the town centre.

First Impressions: This score relates to the general impression of the street to the visitor or shopper and reflects a broad combination of environmental indicators ranging from building condition and townscape through to colour and activity. It is an important indicator and is accordingly given high weighting.

11 of the streets scored positively on this indicator, 3 more than in the 1998 audit. Many of the streets gaining positive scores for overall appearance make up the town's principal retail axis (New Street north, King Street west, the Packhorse Centre, Victoria Lane and the Piazza). Each exhibits a pedestrian friendly environment, quality streetscape and a constantly high level of pedestrian activity. Outside the shopping core, John William Street and St Georges Square gained positive scores mostly due to extensive streetscape works, landscaping and the architectural quality of the area which includes the listed train station.

The only street to receive a negative score for first impressions was King Street (east) although at the time of the survey extensive building work was taking place to complete the Kingsgate Centre. Following completion of building works, the environmental quality of King Street (east) will be greatly enhanced.



Cleanliness: The survey examined street cleaning, evidence of vandalism, cleanliness of buildings and litter in landscaped areas. The time and day of the week are important factors in assessing cleanliness, as scores are likely to be influenced by how busy the town is and the programme of street cleaning.

All of the streets surveyed (28) achieved either a "good" or "average" rating compared with 24 streets in the 1998 audit. Of these, 12 were rated as "good". The main shopping streets are generally kept free from litter as shown by the fact that all prime pitch areas with the exception of New Street (south) have "good" scores for this indicator. The main problem sites for

those streets with an “average” score tend to be places where litter could settle such as basement entrances, car parks and the edge of landscaped areas.

Building condition: This indicator relates to the level of building maintenance and upkeep. Generally speaking, Huddersfield performed well on this indicator, with only 2 streets, King Street (east) and High Street, receiving a negative rating. 19 streets secured positive scores including the entire primary shopping area. In 1998 only 15 streets had positive scores and therefore it would appear that significant improvements have been made with regard to this indicator. The remaining streets (7) were attributed an average score for property condition, reflecting the fact that many street frontages still have buildings that are poorly maintained, although these are scattered and do not form any grouping or concentration to warrant a negative score. Notwithstanding the above, vacancy in secondary and peripheral shopping streets will need to be carefully monitored to ensure that property neglect does not become a major issue.

Street condition: This indicator relates to the quality and condition of street surfaces. In all, 14 streets achieved positive scores for street condition compared to 13 in 1998. Only 2 streets had a negative rating – King Street (east) and John William Street (north). The town has seen considerable improvements undertaken over the last 6 years, and further works are programmed.

Townscape: This indicates the contribution made to the street scene by the quality of the built environment. Huddersfield continues to record a very high score for townscape quality. In the 1998 Audit exercises, the fine architectural heritage in some areas of the town resulted in 12 streets being attributed positive scores. There has been a slight decline in this indicator (11 streets are now recorded as “good”) but this is only due to the improvement/refurbishment works that were taking place at John William Court at the time of the assessment. A large part of the street frontage was screened from view by scaffolding and tarpaulin sheets.

The town has a fine architectural heritage, particularly in the area around John William Street and St Georges Square. In this location there are a number of fine buildings including the Grade I listed railway station, the George Hotel, the Yorkshire Bank and Lion Chambers. There are a substantial number of listed buildings within this northern area of the town and the



The George Hotel, St Georges Square

Conservation area designation includes virtually all of the 19th century buildings within the ring road.

In High Street, the pattern of development (which comprises the Civic Centre I and III), is unrelated to the street scene, and causes the townscape to appear incoherent. Macauley Street is particularly blighted by modern development of a scale and quality that contributes very little to the area. Notwithstanding the above, the townscape quality of Huddersfield as a whole is good.

There are few areas of green open space within the town centre and therefore those that do exist have an increased value, both in amenity and environmental terms. These areas include the Piazza, St Peters Church gardens and St Georges Square.

Traffic intrusion: This indicator relates to the levels of pedestrian/vehicular conflict evident on each of the 28 streets, along with the physical and visual intrusion that occurs through vehicle movement, noise and car parking. This element of the environmental assessment generated particular concern in the 1998 Audit, with 14 of the 28 streets scoring a “poor” rating. This improved in the 2001 assessment although there are still 9 streets which have a negative score. 12 streets scored positively, compared to just 8 in 1998. The primary shopping area scored well as New Street, King Street, The Shambles, Packhorse Centre, Victoria Lane and the Piazza are all pedestrianised areas. Access is provided to some of these areas for deliveries although such access is strictly limited.



Many parts of Huddersfield town centre suffer from traffic intrusion to a greater or lesser extent. Problems are particularly evident on John William Street, Westgate, Cloth Hall Street and Byram Street, as well as the access roads serving the rail and bus stations (Railway Street, St George’s Square and Upperhead Row).

The existence of public car parks within the ring road inevitably creates negative scores for those streets which provide access to these facilities. Furthermore, on street car parking particularly within the northern part of the town has unfortunately reduced the environmental quality of a number of streets. However, it is generally accepted that cars have to be accommodated if towns are to compete with other retail and leisure facilities. Accessible, available and convenient car parking is a key weapon in attracting shoppers.

Whilst traffic intrusion has been identified as an environmental problem in both this assessment and in the previous Audit, the maintenance of an accessible town centre remains an important issue in economic terms.

Lighting/Security: This indicator assesses features that contribute to the feeling of safety and security within Huddersfield town centre. However, it is important not to consider this in isolation from other environmental indicators (for example, the general appearance of a street in terms of its life and vitality, or the conditions of buildings and shop premises in terms of the level of vacancy, neglect and vandalism). All of these contribute to the perception of safety and security.

The quality of lighting in many parts of the town has improved significantly since the 1998 Audit. A number of street lighting improvements were undertaken as part of wider streetscape initiatives. In 1998, 8 streets had negative scores. By 2001, there were just 3. Importantly, 18 locations gained a positive score for lighting and security whereas in 1998 this number was much lower (6).

A contributory factor to the improvement of this environmental indicator is the expansion of CCTV coverage. However, as

commented in the 1998 Audit, the presence of cameras in a number of prominent and visible locations within the town centre, does not always allay the feeling of insecurity and intimidation that certain streets create, particularly during the evening.

Street furniture: This relates to the quality, availability and appropriateness of street furniture. Huddersfield's score improved between 1998 and 2001, with 9 streets securing a positive score compared to 7 in 1998. However, 'street furniture' remains one of the poorer performing environmental indicators. 11 streets had a negative rating due in the majority of cases, to the complete absence of street furniture. Previous Audits have recognised that the dense, compact layout of the urban form, particularly to the north of Kirkgate and Westgate, limits the opportunity to provide street furniture. Nevertheless, a number of streets could benefit from the introduction of smaller furniture items (litter bins, planters), without creating obstructions on footways.

A number of the streets which had a negative score will be the subject of streetscape improvements in the short to medium term (for example, John William Street, Macaulay Street, King Street and Byram Street). Through these initiatives, quality street furniture can be secured.

Signage/Shop fronts: This includes the quality, appearance and obtrusiveness of signs, shop fronts, and advertising hoardings. The 2001 assessment reveals a significant improvement in terms of signage/shopfronts. 16 streets secured a positive score (compared to 8 in 1998). Furthermore, only King Street (east) recorded a negative result, compared to 4 locations in 1998. However, redevelopment / refurbishment works are currently taking place in King Street (east) which when complete will improve the indicator score for this street.

The improvements secured within the town centre are in part attributable to the use of planning enforcement action and (up until 31st March 2002) the availability of shop front improvement grants through Huddersfield Pride.



Planting: This relates to the quality of planting, its location and its appropriateness. There has been a slight improvement in the environmental performance of Huddersfield in terms of planting as the number of areas securing a positive score has increased from 3 in 1998 to 4 in 2001. However, this still represents a poor score as 11 streets were awarded a negative rating. The low rating achieved was due to the lack of planting rather than the quality of existing planting, although there is evidence of poor maintenance and damage to planting areas in certain streets. It is nevertheless recognised that, similar to street furniture, the dense, compact layout of the town centre limits opportunities for landscaping and planting.

Whilst Huddersfield participates in 'Britain in Bloom', the floral hanging baskets and planters that are introduced during the

summer months as part of this initiative are seasonal. It is the general quality of planting throughout the year that has influenced the street scores for this environmental indicator.

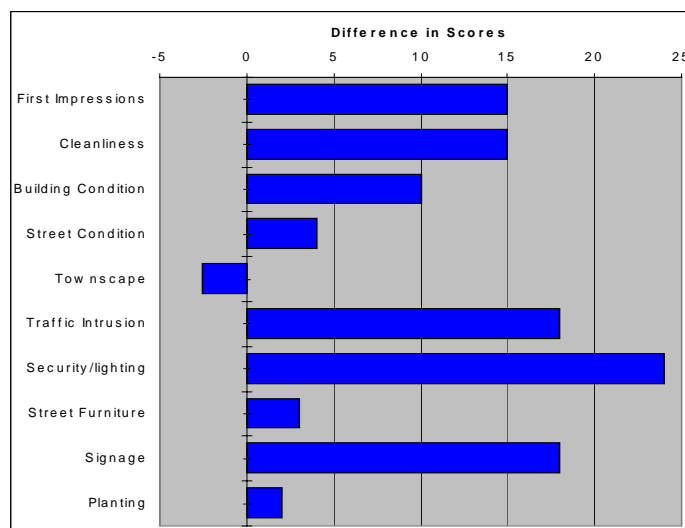
Changes in environmental quality

As a whole, the town centre has performed significantly better in the 2001 assessment compared to that of 1998. 4 years ago, the town suffered negative scores in 4 different environmental quality indicators (traffic intrusion, street furniture, planting and security/lighting). The 2001 exercise reveals a negative score on only 2 areas – street furniture and planting. Continued investment and integration of CCTV coverage in the town, alongside numerous improvements to pedestrian access and movement, have contributed to this enhanced performance.

The environmental quality of the town on a street by street basis paints a similar picture in that fewer streets score negatively in 2001 compared to 1998. 22 of the 28 streets assessed received a higher score in 2001. King Street (east) scored worst in 2001 due to the effects of construction works at both Kingsgate and the Yards, which were still underway at the time of the survey. A re-assessment of this street after development is complete would reveal a marked improvement of its environmental score.

Figure 1 shows the general changes in the scores achieved for each environmental indicator between the 1998 and 2001 assessments.

Figure 1: Changes in indicator scores 1998-2001



Of the 10 indicators of environmental quality, only townscape has failed to show an improvement. However, this was largely to do with improvement works at John William Court. This frontage was screened by scaffolding and tarpaulin at the time of the assessment. All other indicators have improved, with some showing significant improvement since the previous assessment, such as lighting/security.

12 of the 28 streets assessed are pedestrianised or constitute covered shopping arcades. With the exception of Market Walk and the southern end of New Street, all of these streets scored well. Since 1998, significant streetscape works have been undertaken to pedestrianise Victoria Lane and the western end of King Street. These schemes have resulted in much higher overall scores for this area of the town centre compared with the previous assessment.

Completion of the Kingsgate shopping centre, the King Street yards refurbishment and John William Court will see improvements to the environmental quality of King Street east and John William Street north. Further 'public realm' and highway improvements are proposed for the town centre through the Local Transport Plan and the 'Northern Quarters' and 'Renaissance Towns' initiatives.

Figure 2: Environmental assessment full results

Street name	First impressions	Cleanliness	Building condition	Street condition	Townscape	Traffic Intrusion	Security/lighting	Street furniture	Signage	Planting	2001 Weighted Score	1998 Weighted Score	Change
Weighting	3.0	2.5	2.0	2.0	2.5	2.0	1.5	1.5	2.0	1.0	-	-	-
Railway Street											8	-3	+11
St. George's Sq											16	15	+1
John William St (S)											2.5	0	+2.5
John William St (N)											-8	-15	+7
Byram Arcade											16	17.5	-1.5
Byram Street											8.5	5.5	+3
Market Street											0	3.5	-3.5
Imperial Arcade											15.5	9.5	+6
New Street (S)											3	-2.5	+5.5
New Street (N)											16.5	14	+2.5
King Street (W)											16.5	-2.5	+19
King Street (E)											-15.5	-13.5	-2
Queen Street											7	0.5	+6.5
Cross Church St											-2.5	-11	+8.5
Packhorse Centre											12.5	10.5	+2
The Shambles											9.5	6.5	+3
Market Avenue											16.5	19	-2.5
Market Place											14	11.5	+2.5
Market Walk											0	-2	+2
Victoria Lane											12.5	-3.5	+16
The Piazza											17.5	13.5	+4
Northumberland St											11	1.5	+9.5
Kirkgate											1.5	-4	+5.5
Ramsden St											9	6.5	+2.5
High Street											-4.5	3	-7.5
Macaulay St											0	-6	+6
Westgate											4	2	+2
Cloth Hall St											-3	2	-5
Indicator score	30	30	34	24	17.5	6	22.5	-3.0	30	-7	-	-	-
Total Score											183	76.5	106.5

Key:

+1		Good
0		Average
-1		Poor

John William Street S = From St George's Square south to Market Place
 John William Street N = From St George's Square north to the ring road
 New Street S = From junction with High Street south to ring road
 New Street N = From junction with High Street north to Market Place
 King Street W = From junction of Queen Street uphill to the junction with New Street
 King Street E = From junction with Queen Street downhill to ring road (subject to Kingsgate building works at time of survey)

Although every care and effort has been taken to ensure the accuracy of the data and statements contained in this publication, Planning Services does not accept responsibility for any errors or inaccuracies which may have occurred therein.

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