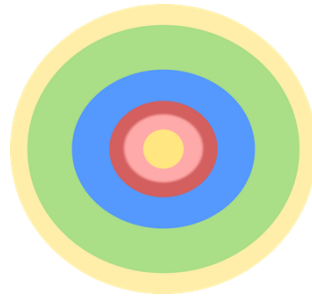








# Slough Borough Council - Public Realm Strategy



-  Commuter zone
-  Residential zone
-  Commercial zone
-  Zone of transition
-  Transport zone
-  Heart of Slough

## ***Improving the Quality of Life and the Well-being of Slough; its People and Spaces***

*“The measure of any great civilisation is its cities and a measure of a city’s greatness is to be found in the quality of its public spaces, its parks and squares.” (John Ruskin)*

How we think about the places we live and work in is influenced as much by the quality of our public realm as anything else. This might not always be a result of conscious thought but be simply a question about how it makes us **‘feel’**.

### ***What is this public realm?***

Whether roadside, river, park, woodland or green space, if it forms part of our public space we look at it as public realm. It is “everywhere between where we live and work”; it defines the quality of our town, builds our feelings of citizenship and engenders civic pride. It affects the quality of all our lives, how we feel about where we live, where we work and where we and our children play. It is our ‘blue’, ‘green’ and ‘grey’ infrastructure; our rivers, our open spaces, streets. Far from being incidental, these spaces have functions critical to Slough being a vibrant and successful town.

Public realm is often under the stewardship of a variety of differing management functions/ownerships. It is influenced by many agencies with vested interests in the land. Each of these has its own objectives for the space and their own priorities for its management. These differing interests often compete and rarely will the objectives of all interests coincide.

Residents however, never see the ‘different colours on the map’ and this should not be an impediment to delivery. Achieving safer, cleaner and greener public realm in Slough requires all concerned with its design, management and maintenance to collaborate and jointly commit to achieving standards that reflect what people need and want. If we are to enable public realm to meet its many integrated functions for high quality of townscape, drainage, transport, biodiversity, cleanliness or as routes for our complex array of overhead/underground utilities, it is essential we have an integrated and collaborative approach to how it is managed and maintained.

***The ‘charter’ is our first step towards building a clear and coherent approach to the public realm in Slough. It will apply inclusive urban design and sustainability principles, provide guidance for new provision and for managers, and set achievable standards for the design, management and maintenance of all our public spaces.***

This has to start within the council. The complex pattern of departmental ownership of public space in Slough can lead to inevitable confusion about who is responsible for different places and to variations in the standards applied to the maintenance of each. Variation can legitimately be determined by departmental priorities, informed by individual skill sets and respective funding priorities. In order to achieve a more consistent and coherent approach, and one which recognises the significance of public realm in its own right, we have taken the step to unify street cleaning, highways land and road maintenance (cleaning) and green estate into a single key public realm management and maintenance function.

In Slough, we are committed to achieving a more streamlined approach to the maintenance and management of public realm by bringing responsibility for its overall management under a single umbrella. We believe this will enable us to achieve more consistent standards, champion better design and enable public spaces to better meet their potential to deliver the sorts of social, environmental and economic benefits we want for the Borough. It will also enable more succinct response through a 'one stop' solution to manage maintenance and cleansing of all council land, with a more responsive interface for customers.

## Management:

Management of our public realm will be vested in a unified single council function built around an integrated public realm maintenance contract. It will provide a one stop shop to the community through which management interventions will be co-ordinated. This will start with My Council, our existing one stop shop customer contact centre.

Our contract governance, council systems and procedures will be designed to provide a responsive customer service aimed at ensuring that our public realm services are delivered to high standards and in a timely way.

We will implement improved governance systems within our contract client functions to ensure all contractual works are well scheduled, with outputs set against stringent budgets and challenging performance requirements so we get the right outcomes. We will set standards for work completions on time and on budget, and at demonstrably competitive prices, but also to appropriate quality standards.

We will work to a strategic programme of delivery and plan improvements alongside maintenance, to achieve progressive improvement of public space assets, working with our partners and with the direction of the council's elected members, aligning priorities for action with the council's Five Year Plan.

### **Vandalism, Anti-social Behaviour and Other Crime**

The Safer Slough Partnership consists of senior leaders from across the statutory and voluntary sector. They come together to address crime and disorder issues through a single strategy and action plan. This statutory group has oversight of the public realm and works to make slough safer and can be a useful when identifying and addressing issues that require a multi-agency response.

Significant damage is caused to public space by mis-use, littering, vandalism and inappropriate use. If not corrected quickly and problems are left to persist, spaces typically start to attract habitual anti-social behaviour and mistreatment leading to spiralling decline. Worse still, failure to correct damage can be seen as tolerance of the behaviour. Resultant problems are costly to address. We need to work harder and smarter to address these criminal behaviours at the time they happen, not tolerate it, and work to apply deterrent actions to reduce their frequency. We have the statutory powers to deal with these issues, but are we using them fully enough and effectively?

Good design is key to reducing crime and anti-social behaviour. We will apply best practice to design out crime, working with the police and other agencies, drawing on best practice guidance provided through the Thames Valley Police Design Compendium and through the emerging design led approach to the delivery and management of our town's public space assets.

## Maintenance:

### **Trees**

Trees are under acute pressure for space within our streets due to the demands for things like underground services and space to park cars. Because they can affect surfaces and give rise to substantial leaf drop they place pressure on maintenance budgets. On the other hand these trees are key elements of the landscape of the town. They help remove pollutants from the air, reduce noise, can help to reduce traffic speed and overall, they improve our quality of life and sense of wellbeing. Trees frequently suffer abuse, sometimes through vandalism, but also through a disregard for their importance to the quality of the townscape.

We will continue our commitment to retaining and planting trees, striking appropriate balances between having a healthy and extensive population of trees within the town alongside meeting our other commitments to address parking and public utility requirements. This will drive our cyclical maintenance and inspection routines.

## **Fly Tipping**

The quality of our town is frequently degraded by tipping of domestic, commercial and industrial waste. We will review approaches to fly tipping as part of our strategy with a view to reducing the amount we spend on its removal while improving our ability to take direct action against those who commit tipping offences. Streamlining the reporting methods in a dedicated contract management programme and to ease the customer journey in terms of reporting and responding to flytipping are also priorities. There will be a one stop shop for removal of flytipping across all council land and watercourses with a single budget to deliver this.

## **Verges**

Streets once designed to incorporate environmental standards are going through a process of change with a pattern of decline in their green appearance, noticeably through disappearance of managed grass verges and conversion of residential gardens to hardened driveways. This migration is having an impact of surface saturation and run off from rainwater and the quality of the town's landscape and urban form.

While the continuing need to increase traffic-carrying capacity of roads is undoubtedly one cause of this loss of greening, inconsiderate parking is also a culprit.

We will work to strike appropriate balances between space for parking and the appearance of our streets through the application of holistic design-led and green estate maintenance solutions. Linked to this we shall ensure in emerging contract specifications that green space can be cleaned effectively in areas where on- street parking has reduced the efficiency/effectiveness of traditional mechanical cleaning.

Reinstatement of green verges which are currently mud and the conservation and protection of green verge will be delivered through the public realm.

## **Primary & Secondary shopping centres**

It is important we support viable local economies like our local shopping centres. These provide local and accessible services for residents and help to create local community identities. They are also important because they maintain local access to services and facilities, reducing people's need to travel far to shop. Many of these centres are important public spaces where communities gather and go about their daily lives.

These areas are especially prone to a lack of ownership where responsibilities for management and maintenance can be confused and consequently reception of these services can fall short of the importance they have to local people. Our integrated approach to public realm management will embrace these spaces as key centres for community life and seek to raise standards through a more cohesive approach to their cleaning, management and maintenance, and as and when opportunities arise, through informed redesign .

This includes our on-going deeper cleansing of shopping centres including the central business district and transport hub of 'The Heart of Slough' and suburban tertiary residential commercial areas such rows of local shops.

## **Landscape**

Our public spaces are essential elements of the townscape and our local environment and influence how people view our town.. Whilst well designed and managed spaces enable us to take pride in our town, neglected or dilapidated spaces tend to despoil the town, raise people's fear of crime and lead to further abuses of the space, notably by attracting graffiti, litter and fly-tipping. We will invest in our spaces and especially our landscape plantings so they add value to our green spaces and to the quality of the town's landscape.

## **Furniture**

Neglected, derelict and moribund features in public space are symptoms of degeneration and can breed anti-social behaviour and fear of crime. They serve little if any beneficial purpose for the people they are intended to benefit from them. They can also be a risk to people's health and safety.

There will be a pro-active and reactive response to repairing and cleansing street furniture. Street furniture has traditionally been ignored through street cleaning but the public realm charter shall incorporate standards to consider the wider environment beyond just the streets and pavement. Sticker bombs on lamp-posts, oxidation of ash-trays, flyposting on furniture are all examples of what can be dealt with through the public realm contractor.

There is a significant amount of street furniture some of which contributes to a reduction in the quality of public space because it is in poor condition. The holistic public realm approach shall include the cleaning and repair of street furniture and challenging its purpose with a view to ensuring that responsibility for maintenance is clear and that the Council knows what it has, where it is and what condition it is in. From there we can start to challenge if furniture is necessary and if it is continuing to meet the need it was intended to deliver.

Dilapidated or moribund furniture will be replaced and where not serving a beneficial purpose or is not needed, it will be removed.

## **Shrubberies**

We expect our shrubberies to contribute visibly to the quality of our environment. We will implement an on-going programme of improvement of currently poor quality shrub beds through our contract for the management of public realm so they add value rather than detract from the quality of the town. Where their removal will not have a significant adverse impact on the quality of our public space because they no longer add value, we will remove them and re-invest funds into those to be retained, and so raise standards. This rationalisation will enable reducing funding to be targeted at achieving overall better standards whilst reversing historic decline

## **Litter**

Local authorities have stringent requirements placed upon them to remove litter from public spaces. Slough Borough Council spends about over £2 million every year cleaning litter from its public spaces.

Often litter is caused by people not disposing of their rubbish in the right way. The perception of our public spaces is that they are clean but is this because littering is low or because cleaning standards are high? We cannot continue to rely on reactive cleaning as our main weapon against littering and need to engage more actively in initiatives that address the problem at source – those who litter our town and the industries, shops and merchants that fuel the litter chain; targeting fast food outlets and licenced off-sales premises in particular, following the 'polluter pays' principle.

Toward this end we will continue to utilise our existing powers of enforcement to combat littering and reduce costs associated with reactive litter clearances.

The Council will have a universal standard across all land for cleaning with prevalence being placed on commercial and business areas. These standards will be reported through the contract management framework with environmental performance reported accordingly.

## **Essential and non-essential Services**

Utility companies rely heavily on public space for routing their infrastructure, much of which are essential to maintaining industrial and domestic supplies. Pavement damage is often evident but they also cause less obvious environmental harm. Trenching frequently causes damage to existing trees, and utility corridors also sterilise space that could otherwise be made available for planting trees that create green corridors and green lungs for the town.

Maintenance of their equipment often degrades our spaces, notably where restoration of surfaces is poor. Is enough done to balance the needs of these essential services with the desire to maintain high quality public space? Are utility providers tasking easy options at the expense of the quality of public realm?

As part of our strategy for improving public realm we will require utility companies to restore ALL public realm to the highest standards, and to replace like with like as a minimum wherever they carry out works on council land. Reporting by the contractor will support this where poor reinstatement has impeded their ability to maintain and clean the public realm to the agreed standard. We will seek to maximise the value of payments for wayleaves and easements across council land where they are required to offset their environmental harm by enabling full appropriate mitigation.

## Design

Good design is a pre-requisite for good public realm. It is not just a question of aesthetics but the whole process by which we develop our understanding of needs, integrate uses, considers aesthetic standards and balance needs for maintenance with affordability.

We will employ appropriate design expertise in the creation of public spaces and when considering significant changes to existing spaces to;

- Enhance the quality of the public realm
- Achieve affordable 'maintainability'
- Promote a co-ordinated streetscape and public realm and work to design out crime.
- Improve townscape/public realm legibility
- Achieve attractive and welcoming town centre and community gateways
- Retain and enhance the character and local distinctiveness of our public spaces
- Minimise barriers to movement to ensure accessibility for all
- Create spaces of value to our communities for community activities and community life

### **Design and Construction –**

Poor design, absence of design and bad construction conspire to create poor quality places and spaces that are hard to manage/maintain, or more costly to manage than they need to be. Inadequate design can lead to degeneration, raise levels of crime and fear of crime and generally degrade our public space. To ignore design also misses opportunities to achieve added value, and to plan ahead.

Conversely, well designed and built spaces raise standards and bring about regeneration. It improves aesthetic but as a process it inspires opportunities to bring about improvement ; it gives us time to THINK about what we are doing and lets us evaluate purpose, function and maintenance needs.

**Improvement Opportunities** - There are opportunities to use public space to better advantage by raising visual qualities or redesigning them to give them better purpose. Many spaces could be used to improve public realm simply by accommodating tree planting, public art or planting. Public space offers countless opportunities to advance our wider objectives in respect of sustainability, quality, community and commerce, and achieve our Five Year Plan objectives. Every change brings opportunity.

**Functional Spaces** – The fabric of material used for current and proposed developments that require cleaning, management and maintenance must ensure that the materials can be cleaned through standardised detergents and conditioners.

The Public Realm team will act to support planning, building control, asset management, property services and Neighbourhood Services / Housing team in ensuring that where decisions are made regarding design that if the Council is expected to maintain them as part of the public realm that this dedicated team can ensure that the decisions are made using the best available technique not entailing excessive costs for cleaning, management and maintenance.

## Public Realm Charter:

Public spaces will be managed and maintained through one council department, funded through a centralised budget, all by one team, with decisions made sharply and consistently across all council public space.

We will have clear policies for guiding decisions and have clear standards we strive to achieve to deal with management and maintenance in a timely way and to champion consistent standards in design, management and maintenance and will respect the need to accommodate/defray, competing pressures.

We will work ever more closely with partner agencies to work collaboratively and share resources efficiently to achieve the improvements we want to see in the management/maintenance of our public realm.

We will require new spaces and changes to existing spaces to be designed with purpose and with care, to standards we set to conserve the quality of the town whilst wherever possible, accommodating the needs of users.

Design will always look to improve the quality of the town and with its maintenance in mind, to balance maintenance costs with the desire to achieve high quality, so that standards of initial design can be sustained over time.

We will negotiate the best terms we can from third party interests whether through financial arrangements and/or design so they contribute to making our spaces better so they contribute positively to the quality of our town.

Where space is redundant we will look to find its best use so all land currently held as public space contributes to meeting the town's needs in a positive way.

We will ensure we manage and maintain the town's parks with the same care as our forebears, to ensure we pass them on to future generations to the same high standards as when they were given to us, with design led management and maintenance having regard to their social and environmental functions.

We will maintain a proactive programme of townscape enhancement by continuing to plant a minimum of 150 trees each year.

We will raise the game for enforcement against anti-social behaviour and environmental crime – dealing decisively with them where we can when they arise, and deter these behaviours through the use of enforcement and other deterrents.

We will use our enforcement powers rigorously to deal with those who despoil our spaces, notably enforcement against fly tipping, anti-social behaviour and littering/dog fouling .

We will set rigorous standards in our own policies and the performance we require of our contractors to deal with degradation promptly.

Our contractors will be set robust performance measures that require them to demonstrate proactive contribution to raising and maintaining the standards within our public spaces through their own proactive maintenance.

### **Space to be Proud of**

Our contractors will be required to sign up as a key delivery partner to our charter for public realm and demonstrate a proactive commitment to it through provision of intelligent data backed up with programmes of action to invest contract finances to achievement of its goals.

We will make better use of surveillance tools and information/data to target action against those who despoil public spaces.

## **Systems and procedures**

We will install up to date IT and related systems that will enable us to monitor costs and where money is spent, and use these systems to implement targeted initiatives to reduce costs long term

We will invest in what we have, not just the new, to reduce dilapidations and raise standards of our existing assets.

We will continue to address the competition between the need for parking and utility space and the desire to maintain the townscape, looking to apply high standards of design to their integration.

## **The Contractor's Commitments**

Our contractors will sign up to partnering the council in its efforts to continually improve the town through proactive, self motivated actions, and publish their own contributions to improvement as part of the contract delivery process.

The contractor will plan and forecast when and where areas need to be cleaned to ensure that outcome that 'Public Space & gateways to the town are green, clean and well maintained'.

There will be a logical and logistical approach to the contractors approach to maintaining the public realm. Grass will not be cut until the litter has been picked. Areas where litter continues to be prevalent shall lead to a request for a litter bin but in areas where litters are not required then these shall be removed – all linked through a dedicated software mapping of public realm infrastructure.

The contractor will have a series of outcomes, key performance and operational performance indicators and these will be transposable to political, strategic and operational levels within the Council for maximum transparency and accountability of service.

## **The Citizens' Commitments**

We encourage all resident to help us to deal with issues in our public spaces.

The Council will work to support community groups and Neighbourhood Action Groups in reporting any public realm issues and ensuring that community clear ups are deliverable with support of provision of the correct receptacles from the Council with collection of recycling and waste by the contractor.

To report problems and defect, so we can respond in an effective and timely way, to help us to achieve the standards in our town most residents want to see.

To take personal responsibility for keeping our town clean and tidy, by not dropping litter,

***Public Realm is the logistical and logical progression of urban town management – and the next evolutionary step for Slough and its Environmental Services to instil civic pride, ensure the town is attractive to maintaining and retaining business and is critical to the delivery of the Five Year Plan and for Slough to being a successful, clean, green and vibrant town for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.***