Foreword

This is an ad-hoc research and issues paper to inform Working Paper 4.

It was prepared as part of Westminster Street Furniture Manual Review and provides background information on clutter reduction issues, which have informed the production of The Westminster Way: A Public Realm Manual for Westminster.

This is Issue Paper 4a and is part of a suite of working papers as outlined below:

Working Paper 2: Current Practice Review
Working Paper 4: Urban Analysis

Issue Paper 4a: Clutter Reduction Assessment for WP 4 Urban Design Review
Issue Paper 4b: Listed Street Furniture WP4 Urban Design Review

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POLICY DES 15 - Street furniture

(A) The City Council will seek to ensure that necessary street furniture is of good unobtrusive design, harmonises with the street scene, and is sited so as to minimise visual clutter, and allows clear and safe passage for people with sensory and mobility difficulties.

The key to successful clutter reduction is the coordination and cooperation of the many officers and agencies that control and maintain the public realm. Without the coming together of these custodians clutter cannot be reduced therefore a concerted effort is required by all parties.

Street furniture is an essential part of the public realm but its proliferation, poor siting and poor design results in clutter.

Clutter manifests itself in two ways, either through a visual intrusion or a physical obstruction or quite frequently both. Well-placed and well designed street furniture blends into the background whilst performing its function. It does not disappear.

Reducing street furniture clutter not only improves the appearance of an area, it is also a vital step in helping to make existing streets accessible for all users. Reducing clutter contributes to the creation of a socially inclusive environment. It compliments initiatives such as the ‘clear zone’ policy within which street furniture, including tables and chairs, are prohibited from within a central corridor so removing barriers and obstructions that present obstacles, particularly for people with impaired mobility.

It is also important to note that there is a strong relationship between the ‘problem’ of clutter and pedestrian activity. Even a street which has minimal and well placed furniture may be perceived as cluttered because of the number of pedestrians using it. This understanding may affect the width of an appropriate ‘clear zone’ and prioritisation of clutter reduction exercise, it should not however affect the principle.

This document is concerned with the physicality of clutter and not the perception.

Clutter can fall into one of four categories:

1. Redundant items
2. Poorly located essential items
3. Poorly designed essential items
4. Temporary items: components that can be moved

1. Redundant items
These are components that are no longer needed and include for example, traffic sign posts that no longer support signs (or are more than is necessary to support a sign), telephone kiosks that are no longer connected, street lighting columns that have a replacement but have not been removed, broken street
furniture, etc. This can also include poles and signs that could be integrated with other street furniture. These items should be removed.

2. **Poorly located essential items**

Poorly located components that physically block or restrict pedestrian movements can be any item that has been placed thoughtlessly or that can be placed more advantageously. These include street lighting columns or bollards (preventing pavement parking) on narrow pavements. Over exuberance in rigidly applying the statutory rules and regulations for traffic sign design. In these circumstances, an holistic approach to design and alternatives such as wall mounted street lights, strengthening footways and minimal approach to statutory signage should be considered.

3. **Poorly designed essential items**

Some items are simply badly designed and can be improved to avoid an overt impact. This is particularly true of statutory signage and functional equipment. Vehicular direction, informatory and regulatory signs can be designed in a number of ways but the design emphasis is often on the obvious to enforce regulation and avoid misunderstanding. As with poorly located mandatory street furniture, an experimental “what is the bare minimum” approach would be beneficial. The design of other items such as power bollards and utility boxes may be improved, by sinking them into the ground or depressing them into the building and boundary lines or at the back of footway, where appropriate or feasible.

Poor design also refers to poor coordination of street furniture. A coordinated range applied with consistency will reduce the visual jarring and clutter that is apparent with an uncoordinated range.

4. **Temporary items: components that can be moved**

Generally, advertising A-boards, roadwork signs and barriers and should be treated in the same manner as permanent street furniture.

**Methodology**

There is a six-stage approach to reducing the amount of clutter in the public realm.

1. **Identifying the problem**
2. **Audit**
3. **Street Furniture Assessment (Component & Holistic)**
4. **Implementation**
5. **Maintenance & Monitoring**
6. **Pilot Programme**

1. **Identifying the problem**

Although street furniture clutter in some streets is strikingly obvious, in other areas it is not so. Street clutter is brought to the attention of officers through the experience of individuals, and correspondence from the public, amenity groups and Council members.

In this respect prioritisation in any clutter reduction programme would normally place first the most public streets. A rolling programme should
continue, and identification of the less public streets should follow. An audit and desktop assessment, using the four categories set out above, should ask ‘Is the item of street furniture:

- redundant
- poorly located
- poorly designed
- a temporary obstruction

2. Audit

The assessment begins with an understanding of what is there. The understanding comes from an audit of all street furniture, surfaces and townscape. An audit should ideally identify:

- street furniture type;
- location (GIS referenced);
- condition;
- photograph;

And with respect to townscape provide an assessment of:

- character;
- conservation status;
- the disposition of listed buildings;

The results of such an audit will provide a detailed contextual framework of the existing situation, and photographs for reference should supplement it. The audit will quickly provide a preliminary understanding of the generic form of the clutter – both visual and physical.

3. Street Furniture Assessment

Component Assessment

An assessment of the principle of each component will highlight its functionality, fitness for purpose and opportunity for improvement. The assessment will build upon the audit by analysing the individual elements that make up street furniture and provide an understanding as to why it is there, what it’s function and relationship to other street furniture items is and the character of the street.

The component assessment will identify if street furniture is redundant or causes an obstruction or if items can be moved, co-located or re-designed to reduce clutter. It includes an assessment against the criteria set out above for identifying clutter; function, location and visual impact. In the older parts of the City an additional check is required, on items that may appear redundant in case they are of historic significance.

The following list gives an indication of the assessment criteria a clutter reduction methodology should include:

- Barriers: To effect a time restricted closure of a road to vehicular traffic.
• Benches: For use as pedestrian seating. They should be located at points of known demand although problems of antisocial behaviour and rough sleeping should be considered in determining location.

• Bollards: The role of the bollard is to protect the public, to protect vulnerable parts of buildings and the entrances to alleyways. They should only be located appropriate to its role and not used to prevent footway parking or damage occurring to footways.

• CCTV Cameras: To provide security surveillance, open automatic gates, raise/ lower automatic bollards. They should if possible be co-located with traffic lights, traffic regulation signs or street light columns or located on buildings.

• Cycle Parking: For parking bicycles. They should be only located at points of known or forecast demand and must be located at the front of footway, outside of the clear pedestrian zone.

• Eurobins: Collection and storage of bulk waste and rubbish. They should be located, where possible, within the curtilage of a building. If located on the street it must be anchored at the back of footway in a discrete manner. Its location should allow for ease of servicing by refuse collection vehicles.

• Directional Signage: To allow pedestrians to move between destinations along the most appropriate routes.

• Guard Railing: Should only be used in response to accident statistics and not to be used to prevent footway parking or damage occurring to footways.

• Hanging Baskets: To introduce a green element into Westminster. Only comprehensive treatment of whole streets should be considered to avoid a patchy effect. Hanging baskets are not appropriate for more ornate and listed lamp columns.

• Lighting Columns: To provide a safe level of illumination of streets and public spaces for pedestrians and vehicles. They should be located at the front of the footway, outside of the clear pedestrian zone or wall mounted if in a series and owner permissions obtained.

• Litter Bins: For the disposal of rubbish and litter. Bins have a street cleansing requirement and should not be used in place of bollards.

• Parking Meters/ Machines: To allow payment for parking vehicles in designated parking bays. They should be located at the front of footway, outside of the clear pedestrian zone. Within a street or public space all meters should be a consistent height and contain all the necessary information.

• Public Art: To add to the interest, richness, beauty and vitality of the public realm. All aspects of the urban environment from street
furniture to the overall design of a building, materials used and associated decorative elements can be enhanced by the creative integration of art.

- Recycling Facilities: To facilitate recycling by the public, and to collect and contain recyclable waste. They should be located either within the building line or at the front of footway outside of the clear pedestrian zone. The positioning of the unit should be relative to the unit’s size and design.

- Street Orderlies: The containment of street sweepings, street cleaner’s equipment or grit. Street orderlies should be restricted in their use and with better management could be removed from the street. Where they are necessary and unavoidable they should be located within the building line or at the front of footway outside of the clear pedestrian zone.

- Street Cabinets: To house necessary services access points and meters. Where possible these must be recessed below ground. If this is not possible they should be incorporated within the building line. As a last resort these should be located at the front of footway, outside of the clear pedestrian zone. Co-location of different services within a street cabinet is strongly encouraged.

- Street Trees: To enhance and provide spatial definition to the streetscape. Street trees are not appropriate for all areas of Westminster, their use should, in the main, be restricted to garden squares and other public spaces, in residential areas where there is historic precedent and appropriate scale and space.

- Telephone Kiosks: To provide a public telephone service, including internet and e-mail. They should be sited sensitively in relation to the surrounding area and maintain the clear pedestrian zone.

- Traffic Signs: To direct, inform, and regulate drivers. Their proliferation is one of the biggest contributors to street clutter. Signs should be as small as possible in facia area, co-located as much as possible, and placed outside of the clear zone.

**Holistic Assessment**

The component assessment provides an approach to inform changes to individual elements within the street and should be followed by a second, holistic assessment, to understand the broader relationship between individual street furniture elements and their relationship to the street.

The holistic assessment provides an evaluation of whether the street can benefit from wider initiatives to reduce clutter through such programmes as an environmental improvement scheme, a pavement widening scheme, re-signing programme or traffic management strategy.

Some change can occur gradually through continuous management of existing equipment, but at some point a programme will cease to be informed management and maintenance and become a ‘scheme’. At this point a brief
needs to be established to guide the outputs, and consideration should be
given to whether the project is of particular significance, in terms of the
changes proposed and the area for the project focus’ that it requires specific
input and approval from the authority via a specialist focus group, for example
SIRG.

4. Implementation

The changes made through the clutter reduction assessment should be drawn
to scale and the details checked on site. The implementation of a clutter
reduction initiative is critical because it is not always possible to place street
furniture where it is located on plan. These reasons include:

   i) Statutory utilities – street furniture that needs to be fixed using
      foundations will be influenced by the location of underground
      services.

   ii) Outdated OS plans – plans may not be up to date and pavement
       widths or other details may be incorrect.

5. Maintenance & Monitoring

The public realm is ever changing and without a coordinated approach even
the best ‘reduced clutter schemes’ can become cluttered once more. The public
realm must be monitored to prevent the proliferation of street furniture
reoccurring due to poor management, bad design or by stealth.

6. Pilot Programme

An area or street should be identified which suffers from excessive street
furniture, and with the agreement of City of Westminster officers, should be
subjected to a clutter reduction assessment.

Two pilot exercises were carried out in May 2003 and the mechanisms for
removal of unnecessary, old or badly designed equipment identified, together
with costs at the time this paper was finalised.