

PUBLIC REALM STRATEGY

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CONTENTS

Introduction.....	1
Definition.....	2
Roles	3
Strategic Principles.....	4
Accessible and well connected public realm	5
Clean and tidy environment	6
Local identity preserved and developed	7
A safe environment	8
Policy Context.....	9
Implementation and Monitoring	11

INTRODUCTION

A person's perception of the public realm is significantly influenced by the quality of the environment as they walk, cycle, or drive through it. The people's perception of the public realm in Denbighshire was recently understood from a significant amount of research, analysis, consultation, and engagement work undertaken to support the development of the Corporate Plan. The output from these research activities was the identification of the corporate priority "Clean and Tidy Streets" and "Developing the Local Economy".

The Clean and Tidy Streets corporate priority is focused on the cleanliness aspect of the public realm, which is expanded in this strategy to account for the wider public realm, addressing how the council can contribute to its improvement.

The Developing the Local Economy corporate priority is expressed in our Local Economic Ambition Strategy, which outlines our expectation for local economic growth, addressing the factors that can help to sustain vibrant towns and communities.

A wide range of council functions contribute to the quality of the public realm in Denbighshire, for example maintenance, street cleaning, regeneration, tourism, planning, traffic and parking management, and marketing. This places significant importance on the ability of the council to coordinate those functions, including partnerships with other organisations or groups, to create a high quality public realm.

The purpose of this Public Realm Strategy is to help support the coordination of local authority work in the public realm and create improvements that relate to people's everyday experiences. This document is primarily concerned with the city, town, village, and countryside environments in Denbighshire.

This document will present:

- A definition of the public realm
- The strategic principles for the public realm, and
- The services that should be considered to support of the strategic principles

The challenge for Denbighshire County Council services is to come together and determine how they can best contribute to improvements in the public realm by drawing up and aligning plans:

- To coordinate works (including external contractors or utilities) in the public realm to create an environment that is perceived positively by those who use it,
- To deliver on our corporate priority, to produce an attractive environment for residents and visitors alike,
- To encourage and support owners of private land to adhere to the same principles and guidelines of the council,
- To explore opportunities where the council can create an incentive for good behaviour, like community payback schemes within local communities, to tackle problem areas and enhance the environment, and
- To manage all this activity in a cost effective way

DEFINITION

The "**Public Realm**" is ... "**all exterior areas in Denbighshire that are physically or visually open to the public regardless of ownership**".

This definition has a wide scope and has two primary considerations: **control and influence**.

Control

- There are those functions where the council has a clear responsibility, often dictated by legislation, which are regarded as within the direct control of the council. This is because the council has the power to act to control what is done in the public realm.

Influence

- There are also those functions where the council does not have a clear responsibility, but as they are important to our communities, they are regarded as within influential control of the council. This is because the council has the power to act in an influential role as a community leader with the support of their communities.

Key Public Realm functions controlled by the Local Authority

- Planning Permission
- Waste Management
- Community Safety Enforcement
- Maintenance
- Street Cleaning
- Traffic and Parking Management and Enforcement

Public Realm functions influenced by the Local Authority

- Collaboration with key partner organisations
- Community involvement, support and participation
- Community leadership
- Education and promotion of behavioural change
- Community activities and campaigns

Partnerships in the Public Realm

Working in partnership with other bodies will be crucial to the success of this strategy. These include:

- Natural Resources Wales on large environmental concerns like flooding and wind farms
- City, Town & Community Councils on local environmental concerns and community initiatives
- Voluntary Organisations on community schemes and participation
- North Wales Police on the wider scope of community safety¹

¹ The wider scope of community safety rests with the Police and is not within the scope of this strategy, although we do recognise the role that a high quality public realm in creating environments in which people feel safe and that can actually help to reduce crime rates and the fear of crime. The consideration of safety in this strategy predominantly relates to health and safety within the controlled environment, and the contribution we can make to safety through creating a high quality public realm.

Lead Member for Public Realm

- Political representation of the public realm at Cabinet level
- Set and review the Public Realm Strategy
- Promote continuous improvement in Denbighshire's public realm
- Available to respond to interested parties public realm concerns including the Council's Scrutiny functions

Corporate Director: Communities

- Implement and maintain the council's Public Realm Strategy
- Strategic coordination of services and partnerships to respond to public realm improvements
- Represent the public realm on the Senior Management Team
- Responsible to ensure resources are available for the efficient operation of the Public Realm Strategy

Heads of Service

- Overall responsibility for the public realm in their relevant areas
- Authority to provide sufficient financial and staff resources to deliver the strategic principles
- Strategic cooperation of the services they provide in the public realm

Scrutiny

- Examine a range of topics that affect Denbighshire's residents and visitors
- Support the council to realise its ambitions
- Opportunity to review decisions by Cabinet and make recommendations to ensure accountability

Member Area Group

- Local debate on public realm
- Available to work in partnership to deliver services in the public realm
- Open communication to address local issues and concerns in the public realm

STRATEGIC PRINCIPLES

The council has identified four strategic principles to guide the improvements to the public realm. To accompany the strategic principles are supporting guidelines. The principles and guidelines offer strategic support to the decision-making process when drafting plans to do works in the public realm, and to ensure that development addresses the challenges faced by the council.

As mentioned earlier, the challenge for Denbighshire council services is to come together and with partners to determine how best they can contribute to improvements in the public realm by drawing up and aligning plans:

- To coordinate works (including external contractors or utilities) in the public realm to create an environment that is perceived positively by those who use it,
- To deliver on our corporate priority, to produce an attractive environment for residents and visitors alike,
- To encourage and support owners of private land to adhere to the same principles and guidelines of the council,
- To explore opportunities where the council can create an incentive for good behaviour, like community payback schemes within local communities, to tackle problem areas and enhance the environment, and
- To manage all this activity in a cost effective way

The Strategic Principles are:

- **Accessible and a well-connected public realm**
- **Clean and tidy environment**
- **Local identity preserved and developed**
- **A safe environment**

ACCESSIBLE AND WELL CONNECTED PUBLIC REALM

A very important challenge for the council is to create a balance between the requirements of pedestrian activity and vehicular movement. The focus for layout and design decisions should primarily be based on pedestrian movement to ensure every member of the public can access and move with relative ease and safety, through the public realm. Pedestrian movement, particularly in town and village centres, is important to contributor to economic activity and independent living.

Considerations of pedestrian movements are:

- The navigation challenges for people with a pram, use wheelchairs, have diminished vision, cannot hear well or who move more slowly
- The availability of space to avoid overcrowding, overspill and the unsafe use of footways
- The frequency of obstructions (street clutter) or damage to pavements and uneven surfaces
- The length of time pedestrians have to wait to cross a road, especially at junctions
- Inadequate or a lack of pedestrian crossings
- Provision of footpaths

Considerations of vehicle movements are:

- The responsibility and awareness of the driver
- Managing the speed and smooth flow of traffic
- Parking provision and arrangements
- Provision of cycleways and bridleways
- The safe passage of very large vehicles

Cycling Network

Some of the best cycling opportunities found anywhere in the UK can be found in Denbighshire. It is an ideal way of getting about towns and seeing the countryside. It helps congestion and is good for the environment and an excellent way of keeping fit. Denbighshire has many cycling jewels, the Clwydian Range and Hiraethog have some of the best bridleway cycle route networks in the country that pass through a landscape of outstanding beauty. Details of family, easy, moderate, and hard routes can be found at ridenorthwales.co.uk together with links to local events and bike facilities.

GUIDELINES FOR AN ACCESSIBLE AND CONNECTED PUBLIC REALM

- When we carry out design or re-design works in the public realm we will work to create an environment that improves pedestrian movement
- We will improve pedestrian movement in the public realm by eliminating unsightly street furniture and signage clutter to keep streets clear of obstructions
- We will work to effectively connect public places with their surroundings in a safe and appropriate manner
- We will ensure appropriate separation between footpaths, cycleways, and roads, prioritising continuity for each mode of transport

CLEAN AND TIDY ENVIRONMENT

A significant concern identified in the Corporate Plan for Denbighshire is the cleanliness of the local environment. The focus for a clean and tidy environment is to keep council controlled roads and land free from litter and other debris and to use statutory notice powers to tackle litter and other debris in the wider environment. The types of environmental crime considered important to keep the public realm clean and tidy are:

- Littering
- Fly-tipping
- Fly-posting and graffiti
- Abandoned shopping trolleys
- Abandoned vehicles
- Dog fouling
- Eyesore sites

GUIDELINES FOR A CLEAN AND TIDY PUBLIC REALM

- We will maintain our public realm areas in a neat and tidy condition, and take enforcement action against people who damage, deface or spoil it
- We will take appropriate enforcement action in cases where the condition of private land is adversely affecting visual amenity
- We will channel as much resources as is reasonably possible to maintain our public realm in a clean and tidy condition

Dog Fouling Campaign

A dog fouling campaign was launched in February 2013 with the key message that dog fouling is not acceptable in our community. The council campaigns to try to change the behaviour of dog owners to respect the environment through a mix of education, community involvement, raise awareness, the provision of tools for disposal, and enforcement.

The campaign has only been running for a short period but there is evidence taken from monitoring arrangements to suggest that public awareness is increasing and instances of dog fouling and wider environmental crime is reducing.

LOCAL IDENTITY PRESERVED AND DEVELOPED

The challenge for Denbighshire is to find the balance between developments in the public realm and the retention of cultural expression from its city, historic market towns, villages, and natural landscape. This balance extends to the coordination of universal improvements across the public realm and the opportunity for the expression of individual identity in each town and village. The unique qualities of individual towns (and parts of towns) will inform the selection and design of materials and street furniture.

Consideration for the unique qualities of individual towns and villages:

- The use of materials naturally found in North Wales
- Materials should be selected based on their durability versus cost
- The complexity of the installation process
- Welsh language signage
- The "restrictive" (preventing behaviour) or "enabling" (encouraging behaviour) use of street furniture

GUIDELINES FOR LOCAL IDENTITY TO THE PUBLIC REALM

- We will work with our local communities when we engage in efforts to improve their local public realm
- We will acknowledge that there is scope for choice in each town and village but each must also meet the overall expectation to improve the public realm in accordance with this strategy
- We will ensure the use of material and street furniture items are co-ordinated and in character with the expression of identity each town and village in Denbighshire
- We will work to preserve and enhance significant historical, cultural and natural resources in the public realm as well as practically possible
- We will co-ordinate street furniture and signage so as not to create unsightly or obstructed areas and maintain clear transmission of information
- The clear transmission of information will account for the bilingual nature of Wales giving appropriate bearing to Welsh language signage
- We will only introduce essential street furniture into the public realm, particularly where "restrictive" street furniture is concerned

Participatory Budgeting

Following the closure of the paddling pool in the Cae Ddol Parc, the local community would decide on a new amenity using Participatory Budgeting.

Project proposals were and a decision on the new amenity would be taken at a public meeting where votes were cast to decide on the winners.

The decision was made by the public and the new play amenities were later installed and have been a fantastic addition to Cae Ddol Parc.

Also, a newly formed "Friends" group successfully renovated the lake with support from Ruthin Town Council and the Environment Agency.

A SAFE ENVIRONMENT

The public realm makes an important contribution to the health, wellbeing, and safety of the population. There are many sources of evidence that show poor quality environments and a lack of (or poorly maintained) green space as important contributors to ill health, social isolation, and an increased fear of crime.

The evidence also shows that a disproportionate burden is borne by poorer people living in poor quality environments, often where the built environment and green spaces show signs of decline, such as graffiti, littering, or dog fouling. In addition, these environments are less likely to encourage positive behaviours.

The council has a role to play to ensure the appearance and upkeep of the built environment and green spaces is of high quality. This extends to the creation of community involvement within their environment, where residents and visitors feel safe and encouraged to make use of it.

Considerations for a safe public realm:

- The maintenance and upkeep of the built environment and green spaces
- Enforcement and removal for graffiti, litter, dog fouling, and other contributing signs of decline
- A high quality public realm environment can help to reduce crime rates and the fear of crime
- Safety at the interface between different transport nodes
- Issues for residential environments and densely populated urban areas due to greater concentrations of people
- The requirement for heightened safety considerations in closer proximity to schools and educational establishments
- Areas of deprivation and the likelihood of poor quality living environments
- Private land and dangerous structures

Play Area Inspections

The council is responsible for over 80 play areas in Denbighshire with the aim to keep those areas and all of our play equipment safe and in excellent condition. The council has a frequent and rigorous (internal and external) inspection regime of play areas; synchronised with litter clearance activities.

When faults are found, they are recorded and action is taken to rectify them. The aim is to rectify the most urgent faults before the next external inspection. Typically, this means a more rapid resolution during spring and summer when the weather is better, the days are long, and the play areas are more likely to be in use for longer.

GUIDELINES FOR A SAFE PUBLIC REALM

- We will work to provide safe and well maintained public realm spaces
- We will prioritise pedestrian safety by the best use of traffic and speed management
- We will ensure visibility is maintained throughout play areas so adults can supervise children
- We will minimise secluded spaces, creating sight lines into parks, and use appropriate street lighting
- We recognise that exposure to risk can be an essential component in the creation of good public spaces

- [Environmental Protection Act 1990](#)

The Environmental Protection Act 1990 makes provision for the improved control of pollution to provide the necessary powers to prevent pollution of the environment, and to act as an enforcing authority in relation to releases of polluting substances into the environment.

The particular context for this strategy is that the Act amends the law relating to litter and makes further provision imposing or conferring powers to impose duties to keep public places clear of litter and clean.
- [Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005](#)

The Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005 brought together a range of concerns under the broad heading of local environment quality. It makes provision for enforcement action against a wide range of statutory nuisance style activities, within communities, where there is interaction with the environment and is the key policy document in local environment quality regulations.

Local authority enforcement officers are able to issue fixed penalty notices to anyone not adhering to the regulations set out in the Act.
- [Code of Practice on Litter and Refuse 2006](#)

The Department for Environment, Food, and Rural Affairs (Defra) outlines, in this code of practice, guidelines to encourage duty bodies to maintain their land within acceptable cleanliness standards with emphasis is on the consistent and appropriate management of an area to keep it clean.
- [Technical Advice Note 12: Design 2009](#)

Planning Policy Wales sets out the Assembly Government's land use planning policy in respect of "Promoting sustainability through good design", which includes the role of local planning authorities in delivering good design.
- [Local Transport Note 01/08: Traffic Management and Streetscape](#)

The intention of this Local Transport Note (LTN) is to help all those involved in the design of traffic management measures to prepare schemes that consider and care for the streetscape. Specifically, it aims to enhance streetscape appearance by encouraging design teams to minimise the various traffic signs, road markings, and street furniture associated with traffic management schemes.
- [Traffic Signs Regulations and General Directions 2002](#)

The Traffic Signs Regulations and General Directions sets out the provision for the appropriate use and application of all forms of road traffic signs.
- [Town and Community Council Charter 2011](#)

The Town and Community Council Charter formalises ten key principles of interaction between the Council and its employees and Town and Community Councils. The Charter details the Powers and Duties Town and Community Councils can enact, a significant number of which relate to the Public Realm.

- [Town and Country Planning Act 1990](#)
The primary concept from this Act is the definition of what amounts to development. Development means the carrying out of building, engineering, mining, or other operations in, on, over, or under land, or the making of any material change in the use of any building or land.
- [Building Act 1984](#)
The Building Act 1984 is the primary legislation under which the Building Regulations and other secondary legislation are made. The many powers of the Building Act 1984 include those for dangerous structures, enforcement of Building Regulations, and many more.
- [Planning Act 2008](#)
In the context of this strategy, this Act makes provision relating to any blight caused by structure plans, local plans and unitary development plans.
- [Local Development Plan](#)
The Local Development Plan provides guidelines as to what can be built and where throughout the County over a 15-year period. The Local Development Plan determines where new development will take place, and includes policies that aim to protect existing public open spaces and require new open space as part of new housing development together with financial contributions towards their future maintenance.
- [Technical Advice Note 16: Sport, Recreation, and Open Space 2009](#)
The Note discusses development management issues about the design of facilities and spaces, and noise and accessibility. It also considers how planning agreements can help the provision and maintenance of facilities.
- [Regional Transport Plan](#)
The North Wales Regional Transport Plan (RTP) is a strategy for identifying and delivering improvements to our transport system in North Wales over the next 25 years. The RTP is set in the context of not only national policies but also the economic and social aspirations and development plans of the six North Wales local authorities.
- [Manual for Streets](#)
The Manual for Streets focuses on lightly trafficked residential streets, but many of its key principles may be applicable to other types of street, for example high streets and lightly trafficked lanes in rural areas.

The Council

The principal factor that will determine if the public realm is perceived positively will be the opinion of Denbighshire's residents. In order to understand the opinion the council will ask the residents of Denbighshire in the Resident's Survey. The Resident's Survey will take place once every two years and provide a decent insight into public opinion on a selection of key questions.

Information to support the perception of our residents will come from the council's formal monitoring of the Corporate Plan. The council will produce a report on the delivery of the Corporate Plan, which will include corporate priority "Clean and Tidy Streets" and "Developing the Local Economy". These priorities contain a range of indicators and performance measures that are analysed to determine what the general picture in Denbighshire is, and who successful are the council's contributions. A full evaluation of the Corporate Plan is performed every year in the Annual Performance Review, which is externally reviewed by the Wales Audit Office.

The implementation of this strategy and the information we receive from residents and from performance management data will require more joint working between key services. This will include the integration of Environment Services and Highways functions, and enhanced linkages with Planning and Public Protection on enforcement activity and with Housing, especially in terms of the management of housing estates. Marketing this strategy and initiatives that stem from it will also be necessary in a similar way to the approach adopted with the Anti-Fouling Strategy.

A Corporate Director will be responsible for ensuring that services work together for the common aim of implementing this strategy.

The Public

The council has one approach to customer service, "The Denbighshire Way" approach, which includes several initiatives allowing any member of the public to contact the council, in their preferred method, and express their views and concerns. The details of "The Denbighshire Way" document establish the behaviours and protocols services should follow to ensure a high standard of customer service is delivered. There is an expectation that the public will provide the Council with valuable information on a regular basis and that the Council should proactively seek such information and potentially respond to such complaints and requests for services.