

# REPORT OF A SURVEY CARRIED OUT BY THE CIVIC SOCIETY ON STREET CLUTTER IN PONTELAND

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The organisation *Civic Voice* was formed in April 2010 to replace the former *Civic Trust* which went into administration the previous year. One of its first acts was to launch its “Street Pride Campaign” whereby Civic Societies were invited to survey their areas for Street Clutter, defined as “bollards, signs, guard rails and posts.” The purpose was to apply pressure at both local and National level in order to reduce clutter as thus defined. A series of Training exercises was planned, with the subsequent completion of survey forms and accompanying sketch maps according to a prescribed procedure.

The Ponteland Civic Society viewed the requirement for a centralised study of this nature as being overly bureaucratic and thought it more productive to operate at a local level to see what change (if any) might be desirable. Accordingly, the Ponteland Town Council was approached and it was agreed that The Society would gather comments from Members (and others) and formulate a Report. Rather than adhere rigidly to the given definitions of “clutter” it was thought better to leave it to those responding to comment about what they thought could be regarded as clutter in our environment.

## **2. TERMS OF REFERENCE**

The request for contributions circulated to all Members of The Society is shown in Appendix 1. This follows responses obtained earlier at the *Party in the Park* held on Sunday the 13<sup>th</sup> of June, 2010. By implication the area to be considered was that roughly within the 30mph speed limits for Ponteland and Darras Hall and, in accordance with the proposals by *Civic Voice*, was not confined simply to the Ponteland Conservation Area.

## **3. RESPONSES to the SURVEY**

### **3.1. Bollards, Railings, etc.**



**Fig.1.** Two respondents commented: “Let us stop decorating our streets with planters attached to the top of ugly railings. Plants are most beautiful when in the ground.” But another said: “I would definitely not support the comment on planters attached to railings; I think the comment ‘the ‘plants are most beautiful when in the ground’ could lead to us being classified as archaic purists. Others said that: “window boxes, hanging baskets & planters attached to railings, lamp posts, etc., have all played a significant part in making our towns and cities more attractive. The more, the better.”

### 3.2. A-boards & Signs for Restaurants, etc.



**Fig. 2.** A number of complaints were received concerning A-boards located outside eating establishments of all kinds including takeaways. In the case of the *Diamond* they have chosen to erect railings, both to provide somewhere for people to drink outside and, incidentally, to also delineate the limits of their property. This has left them with few places to place advertising material other than the public pavement. The location of such A-boards obstructs the pavement and is much too close to the pedestrian crossing for safety.



**Fig. 3.** Whilst, on occasions, only one A-board is used the landlord appears to have as many as three available and two are now quite regularly to be seen. Several boards of this kind may be a distraction to traffic and thus a safety hazard.



**Fig. 4.** Prior to its extension, the Rialto Restaurant placed an A-board on the pavement close to the steps on the right of the photograph. It is now placed adjacent to the new entrance. Although not obviously causing much of an obstruction, it may technically still be on the public pavement.



**Fig. 5.** The adjacent photograph was taken early in 2010 and shows three A-boards outside the Fratelli/Sainsbury building. Two belong to Fratelli's and one to Sainsbury's. All appear to be within the curtilage of the building but are nevertheless capable of providing a distraction to motorists.



**Fig. 6.** This photograph was taken in July 2010 and shows four of up to six A-boards which are often to be found here, mostly belonging to Sainsbury's. Some do not appear to be advertising the store as such and could more appropriately be located inside. A Lottery advertisement has also appeared recently. Both goods vehicles and taxis sometimes pull up at this point, often on to the pavement; the presence of these signs at such times may be a safety hazard.



**Fig. 7.** An A-board is regularly to be seen on the grass verge where Meadowfield joins the A696. It is advertising food & drink available at a refreshment van usually parked on the public car-park 100 yards away. It is not known to whom the grass verge belongs.

This photograph was taken early in 2010 and the JEWSON sign placed on the road nameplate has since been removed



**Fig. 8.** This large A-board advertises Sunday Lunches at The Badger pub/restaurant at Streethouses. It is located on the public pavement outside the premises and, although it may be argued that few people actually walk that route and it is unlikely therefore to constitute an obstruction, such a sign nevertheless may constitute a distraction to passing motorists. On some days it is laid flat on the ground where it could form a hidden obstruction for pedestrians.



**Fig. 9.** This A-board is located on a pedestrian-precinct outside the new "SAMMS" coffee-shop in the Ponteland shopping centre. It does not present any real obstruction nor is it likely that it would distract motorists. (See below)



**Fig. 10.** The Hardware shop next to SAMMS has goods on display outside the shop and on the pedestrian area. The only comment made about this was that this kind of display provided more of a "market" feeling and thereby actually *improved* the atmosphere of the shopping centre. Comments of this kind should perhaps be remembered when considering the Regeneration proposals.

### 3.3. Other A-boards and Advertisements.



**Fig.11.** A Member commented that the Estate Agents *Rook Matthews Sayer* already had their name adequately represented on their shop front, and it was surely superfluous to place an additional A-board on the public pavement where it could cause an obstruction.



**Fig. 12.** The same might well be said of the A-boards advertising the adjacent services of a solicitor and a veterinary surgeon.



**Fig. 13.** A solicitor and Estate Agent on the West Road also advertises similarly.



**Fig. 14.** Adjacent to the above, a related management company also has an A-board. Whilst this area might not have very many pedestrians and therefore such boards might not constitute a serious obstruction, such advertisements could prove a distraction for drivers.



**Fig. 15.** Adjacent to the Smithy restaurant on Bell Villas, and looking East, can be found an A-board for another Estate Agent and yet another for a barber shop. Technically, these signs may be within the curtilage of the Bell Villas properties in which the businesses operate. The A-board in the background is serving the former *Wine Rack* store, which has ceased to trade since this photograph was taken earlier in the year.



**Fig. 16.** This A-board advertises a hairdresser a little further east from those shown in Fig. 15 above. It is normally placed partly on the pavement. Like those above, and those outside the Diamond, it is in the Ponteland Conservation Area.



**Fig. 17.** One respondent complained that he nearly fell over it this particular A-board which was placed on the pavement outside an optician's on Broadway, Darras Hall. It might seem a little superfluous for an optician to advertise "sight tests available."



**Fig. 18.** Respondents have referred to advertising signs on roundabouts as being a serious traffic hazard. This vinyl canvas sign supported on a temporary framework was photographed outside the Dobbies roundabout on the A696 in July 2010. It is very similar to a proposed sign outside the Klrkley Hall entrance which was refused planning permission on the 9<sup>th</sup> January 2009.



**Fig. 19.** The presence of this small van placed to provide an advertisement on the A696 has been commented on over at least the last year. Due to the piles of soil since placed over the field entrances it is now frequently to be found in field entrances on Rotary Way.

### 3.4. Untidy Areas



**Fig. 20.** This shows an area of discarded packing material behind the Sainsbury/Fratelli building, and which is visible from the A696. It is not known which business is responsible.



**Fig. 21.** The presence of a rusting waste-bin and empty goods trolleys between the Meadowfield newsagent and the SAMMS coffee shop brings a down-at-heel impression to this area.



**Fig. 22.** This former industrial building in the Conservation Area at 45 Bell Villas has been vacant for some time. It has been much modified from its original housing purpose and a satisfactory alternative use for the site has not yet been proposed. Such a use is much needed, as it is not an asset in its present form. By coincidence, the long-term accumulation of weeds shown here was completely cleared some two days after this photograph was taken.

### **3.5. Banner Advertisements in the Conservation Area**



**Fig. 23.** This garish vinyl sign appeared for a limited period on the railings opposite the new Ponteland Park entrance and adjacent to the pedestrian-controlled crossing.



**Fig. 24.** A vinyl sign similar in size to the above was photographed in July 2010 placed on the fence bordering the Smithy Bistro at the Western end of Bell Villas. The Bistro also frequently has other advertisements visible above the hedge, as well as signs on the fence, as shown.

### **3.6. Obscured Sightlines and Signs**



**Fig. 25.** Several respondents have referred to this Telecom cabinet which severely obscures the sight-line for traffic coming out of Eastern Way on to Darras Road. Others have also complained of obscured sight-lines on a number of Darras Hall road junctions, sometimes due to, or made worse by, overgrown hedges. One quoted in particular is at the junction of Woodside and Edge Hill.



**Fig. 26.** The planters may be attractive, but when they block part of the Welcome Sign it appears untidy. This may be seen on the A696 near the Dobbies roundabout.



**Fig. 27.** This road sign opposite the entrance to the Ponteland Sports Centre is almost entirely obscured by an un-trimmed hedge.



**Fig. 28.** This road sign going East just before the Dobbies roundabout is partially obscured.

### 3.7. Duplicated Road Signs



**Fig. 29.** The stretch of the A696 between the Dinnington roundabout and Main Street in Ponteland has a relatively large number of road direction signs within a very short distance. Possibly most of them may be considered necessary for motorists unfamiliar with the area, but some modest reductions could surely be made. This photograph, and those which follow, show the sequence going West.



**Fig. 30.** This sign, seen in the background on Fig. 29, is partially obscured and gives alternative information. Note the two smaller signs in the background, *both* of which indicate Darras Hall to the left, and Ponteland straight on. Notice the small van (as Fig. 19) which in a position where it may cause distraction to drivers.



**Fig. 31.** This sign on the Dobbies roundabout repeats information given in the four immediately previous signs.



**Fig. 32.** This sign just before the traffic lights in Ponteland gives additional information but also includes the fourth indication for Darras Hall within less than a mile.

A further sign may be seen in the background ( Fig. 33, see below).



**Fig. 33.** This is a fifth sign for Darras Hall, which is followed after 400 yards by a sixth located opposite the entrance to Darras Road (not shown).

This cluster of five separate signs (including one for traffic going East, not visible) on a single lamp-post is confusing and definitely qualifies as “clutter.”

### **3.8. Being Visitor-Friendly**



**Fig. 34.** If we are to make Ponteland attractive to visitors then we should pay attention to aspects which are not overtly on show, but which are important in defining the tone of the place. This photograph taken inside the Gentlemen’s Public Toilet shows a wash-basin which has been out of service for many months, Ivy coming through the windows and (not discernable on this picture) water-marked walls. The quality of construction and general state of decoration is distinctly below that of Public Toilets in neighbouring towns. Our Toilets are mournful places to which people are not proud to refer visitors when asked.

#### **4. COMMENTS ON THE FINDINGS**

The responses to this Survey have been relatively sparse. Nevertheless, significant concern is revealed about the large number of A-boards and advertisements in general, particularly any which are left in place after the advertised event has passed. The question of un-approved signage or advertisements on Listed Buildings such as The Blackbird and The Smithy have also been raised. The question of the small van used for advertising has been a source of concern for some time.

Whilst it is appreciated that businesses do require to advertise, it is undeniable that the number of A-boards and banner advertisements in Ponteland – particularly along the A696 – has increased out of all proportion in the last two years. A general reduction in numbers would be welcome and those on public footpaths and/or which may cause a traffic hazard should be banned.

There is dissatisfaction with rubbish which has not been disposed of and overgrown areas or weeds which have not been cleared. This particularly applies where hedges or planters have been allowed to obscure sightlines or traffic direction signs. The spread of weeds and foliage on both Broadway and Merton Way has also been mentioned, as has the infrequent grass-cutting on the bed outside the Library. The question of duplicated road signs is a matter for the County Council.

Only a few people have indicated a dislike of the guard rails on Main Street and, surprisingly, no objections at all were received about poles, posts or bollards. It is, perhaps, generally realised that if it were not for bollards on Main Street, cars would frequently be parked on the pavements since there is very little enforcement of traffic regulations.

Comments have been made on other occasions about the design of the information board in front of the Pele Tower, but the only comment received in relation to this Survey was that the respondent “liked historical information boards such as this; we have a proud history and we should help people share it; there is no point in quibbling about the precise design of the boards...” (The view of the Society, however, is that it would have been preferable if the design of this board had been the same as the others.)

On an optimistic note, one respondent ended by saying that “on the whole... we who live in Ponteland are very fortunate that we have so little to complain about.” There are no doubt other manifestations of Clutter in Ponteland which have not been brought to the attention of this Survey but the overall picture seems to be one which, although by no means perfect, satisfies many people.

#### **5. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 1.** The Town Council should appoint a Sub-Committee to oversee Questions of **Heritage and Townscape**. Although it would be expected that this Sub-Committee would consult with the Society, the PCP, the FOPP and any other representative bodies, responsibility for implementing and/or enforcing any decisions should rest with the Town Council or the County Council (as appropriate) i.e., the Elected Representatives of the people. This should not affect the ability of the DHEC to apply its own bye-laws as at present.
- 2.** The Sub-Committee should begin by determining what National, County Council or Town Bye-laws or Policies may apply to Street Clutter and what action can be taken by it to enforce any it decisions it may take within its field of competence.
- 3.** Where such Policies or Byelaws are non-existent or inadequate, the Town Council should be prepared to make its own Policies or Bye-laws and/or seek devolved powers from the County Council if necessary in order to do so.
- 4.** In forming such Policies or Byelaws the Town Council should seek to incorporate some formal measure of discretion such that it could, for example, remove A-boards which are on the public pavement adjacent to the A696 but permit (if thought fit) those which are in a pedestrian area and might be thought to add to the amenity of the place.
- 5.** The Town Council should write to all businesses and other bodies which may be affected by any future decisions which the Sub-Committee may make in order to make its intentions and expectations clear, and should publicise them in the local Press, PN&V, etc.

## APPENDIX 1



# **STREET CLUTTER in PONTELAND**

The new organisation for Civic Societies – *Civic Voice* – has started a campaign to reduce the amount of clutter in the streets of Britain.

Thinking about the best way to approach this, The Ponteland Civic Society has spoken to the Town Council to seek their views. It has been agreed that we will look at the situation over the summer and give the PTC a report about it.

Street Clutter might be: unnecessary or duplicated road signs, bollards, railings, advertising boards and hoardings or other obstructions to the road or pavements. Suggestions received at the Party in the Park included:

*“The green telephone junction box at the junction of Eastern Way and Darras Road, which blocks the sight-line for cars and could thus be a traffic-hazard.”*

*“The ‘decoration’ of our streets with planters attached to the top of ugly railings. Plants are most beautiful when in the ground!”*

*“A-boards on the public pavements advertising local shops.”*

If you have any thoughts about what you see as clutter – or just a plain eyesore – please let us know.

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