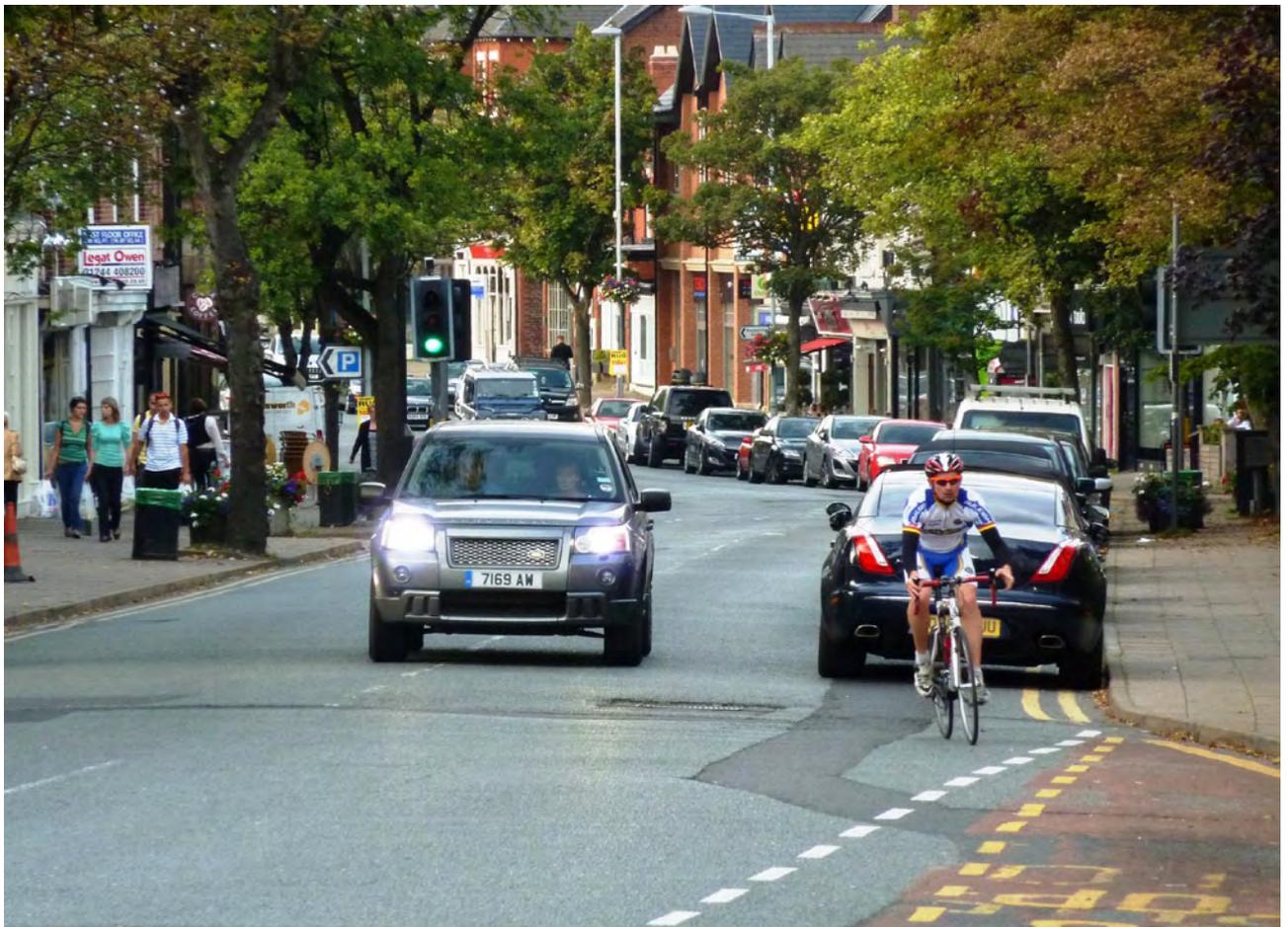

ALDERLEY EDGE, CHESHIRE

Restoring streetscape quality and vitality

January 2012



Revision 2

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For Cheshire East Council and Alderley Edge Parish Council



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Introduction

Streets make up the majority of a community's public space. Most urban streets serve a multitude of purposes. In addition to serving as spaces for movement and traffic, they provide the forum for the everyday activities of shopping and trade, restaurants and cafes, and all the opportunities for the minor encounters, exchanges and interaction that define social life.

Our priorities and policies for streets are going through a period of rapid change. The rise of out-of-town shopping and internet trade are putting pressure on high streets and local centres. The need to attract activity and retain pedestrian presence is becoming more urgent. Local centres will only succeed if they can retain distinctive qualities that are not available elsewhere.

Approaches to street design and the management of urban traffic is also changing. The publication of *The Manual for Streets 2* in 2010 signalled a fundamental shift away from the segregation of traffic and pedestrians towards closer integration of movement with other social activities. In mainland Europe and in the UK, new examples

of street design based on low-speed, continuous flow traffic movement with greater emphasis on pedestrian activity are opening up new opportunities for rethinking key streetscapes. The concept of shared space is now established as an appropriate set of principles for complex, mixed use streets.

This report explores potential improvements for the busy length of London Road that forms the heart of Alderley Edge. It explores opportunities for reconciling the need for traffic movement, parking and circulation whilst making better use of the spaces and activities that give this special area a strong sense of place. The study builds on the changed circumstances following the completion of the by-pass and the consequent need to adapt the existing highway to support regeneration and economic vitality. It is intended to help achieve a broad consensus on an appropriate long-term way forward for Cheshire East, for the Parish Council, for the local residents and traders, and for all those with an interest in the economy and well-being of Alderley Edge.



Context

Alderley Edge is large village of around 4,500 inhabitants. The coming of the railways in the 1840's allowed its enviable position beneath the sandstone ridge to be developed as a desirable alternative to urban Manchester. Its architectural coherence and quality as a Victorian settlement has helped it retain its reputation and desirability as a place to live and work. Its high street, London Road, provides an unusually rich mixture of national and independent retailers. Whilst access from the east is relatively easy, the church, recreation ground and schools are limited by the railway line to two road bridges.

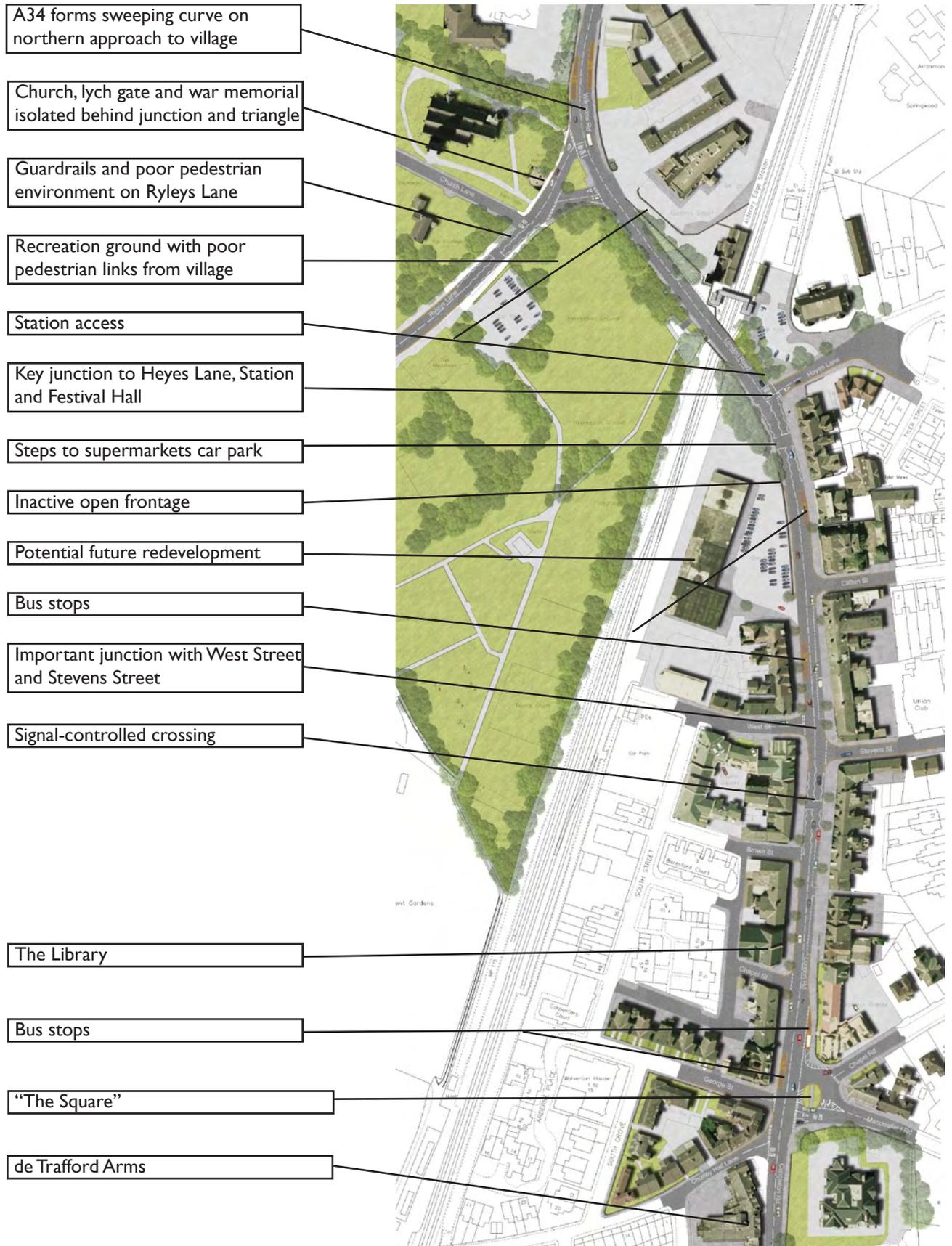
This separation is especially evident from the parish church of St. Phillip with its fine lych gate and war memorial. These are cut off behind the triangular junction with Ryleys Lane and concealed from the main road behind an assortment of road signs and utilities equipment. The recreation ground is likewise disconnected from the natural pedestrian routes, and the width of carriageway and minimal single footway on the railway bridge adds to the separation.

Like many busy high streets, the need to accommodate high volumes of through traffic has eroded much of the former quality and coherence of London Road. The centre line markings, the wide expanses of carriageway and years of accumulated highway clutter all contribute to unnecessarily high speeds and uncomfortable relationship with moving traffic. The speeds generate some congestion at key junctions, and severely limit opportunities for informal crossings and connections between the two sides of the street. The opening of the bypass now presents opportunities for a number of these shortcomings to be addressed.

This study focuses on London Road, and its entry points from north and south. This includes the junction with, and connections across, Ryleys Lane to the north, the railway bridge and station entrances, together with London Road from the junction with Heyes Lane down to the wide space that connects with Macclesfield Road, Chapel Road and Chorley Hall Lane. This key stretch of streetscape provides the basis for establishing a set of design principles appropriate to the changing context of Alderley Edge.



The study area



Observations

Despite the opening of the by-pass for the A34, traffic and parked vehicles remain a dominant element in the centre of the village. Speeds continue to be slightly too high to allow for free-flowing movement at junctions, and create barriers to pedestrians moving between the two sides of London Road. The established trees provide a strong counter-balance to the highway elements, but are not sufficient to give consistency to the whole street. Whilst generous in places, the poor paving and haphazard clutter are at odds with the lively retail environment.

Observations of pedestrian activity on Ryleys Lane confirm that the existing signalled crossing does not align with preferred pedestrian routes. Many crossings are made against the lights, and away from the line of the crossing. Lower speeds combined with narrower widths and informal crossings could improve comfort and safety for links to schools, the church and the recreation ground.

Similarly, the existing crossings on London Road appear to add to congestion and speeds (with some drivers racing to get through the lights). Informal pedestrian crossings follow typical diagonal patterns along the length of the street, and especially around intersections, bus stops and the busier cafes and establishments.

The junction with Heyes Close is particularly unsatisfactory, with traffic entering fast over the railway bridge, and poor pedestrian connections between the station approach and the bridge. The railings overlooking the car park and lack of active frontage along the west side erode the quality and containment of the street south of the railway bridge.

The broad open square that forms the junction of six streets at the southern end of London Road presents a forlorn and uninviting space given over to signs, road markings and an isolated island of worn-out landscaping bisected by a little used path. This large area forms the potential entry point and public space for the village centre. At present the layout, geometry and widths do little to slow traffic entering Alderley Edge, and reduce the trading potential of the surrounding businesses such as the de Trafford Arms.



Traffic speeds and street clutter



Informal crossings on Ryleys Lane



Hayes Close and station footpath



The six-way junction marks southern end of London Road

Objectives

Following discussions with the Parish Council and Cheshire East, this study is aimed at developing a set of long-term streetscape measures to improve traffic movement and the public realm, and to enhance the safety, attractiveness and civility of Alderley Edge village centre. In particular, the outline proposals aim to:

- Reduce the dominance of through traffic and the emphasis on highway elements
- Create a self-enforcing low speed environment to minimise delays and congestion and allow smooth flows
- Retain and rationalise space for short-term on-street parking
- Improve the connectivity between the two sides of the High Street by maximising opportunities for informal crossing at key locations
- Improve the pedestrian and trading environment for Alderley Edge, and the connections with surrounding streets and routes
- Reinforce the critical entry points along London Road to support the creation of a low-speed environment and to extend the quality of public space
- To introduce a streetscape that can be extended and adapted over time to support investment and maintenance by Cheshire East to create a distinctive public realm for Alderley Edge appropriate to its context, history, and long-term potential



Precedents

Every town or village is unique. Successful streets and public spaces exhibit distinctive characteristics drawn from their specific context and circumstances. Design proposals can thus only partially draw from established precedents. However, several examples have helped inform and inspire initial proposals for Alderley Edge.

In mainland Europe, streets such as the Hennef High Street near Bonn in Germany demonstrates the potential for creating low speed, permeable space in high traffic volumes through the use of a simple central median, visual narrowing and a clear logic to on-street parking. In Haren in The Netherlands, a narrowed two-way carriageway set between broad footways achieves a similar easy balance between traffic, parking and footfall.

The by-pass demonstration town of Petersfield in Hampshire illustrates the potential advantage of visually narrowed carriageways interrupted by courtesy crossings, integrated with defined parking bays. The lack of formal priorities at intersections helps maintain low speeds.

Other small towns in the UK have deployed narrowed two-way carriageways and strong gateway features to re-balance the need for traffic movement and pedestrian safety. Stonehouse in Gloucestershire is one example, deploying a simple language of kerbs and surface treatments.

More locally, Park Lane in Poynton has developed a streetscape based on a median strip, courtesy crossings and well-defined gateways to reduce speeds and respond to informal pedestrian movements across the shopping street. We intend to draw on these and other examples to create a distinctive streetscape for Alderley Edge.



Haren, The Netherlands



Petersfield, Hampshire



Stonehouse, Gloucestershire



Frankfurterstrasse, Hennef, Germany



Park Lane, Poynton, Cheshire

Design principles

Our design recommendations seek to establish a distinctive and recognizable language for Alderley Edge that can be adapted to a variety of circumstances. The approach seeks to build on the particular characteristics and assets of the village and to respond to specific circumstances.

Reductions in traffic speed, and an increase in driver awareness of context underpin the approach. The proposals seek to establish a clear contrast at the entry points, and to reduce the linear characteristics of the street. A sequence of informal crossings reflect key crossing points and key intersections, integrated with short blocks of parallel parking.

The most important design principles include:

- The removal of road markings and especially centre lines
- Creating clear transition spaces to mark either end of the scheme
- Reduced visual carriageway widths based on 6 metres kerb-to-kerb spacing allowing uninterrupted low-speed two-way flows
- Maintaining a clear pattern for parallel short-term parking and delivery spaces set between frequent crossing points
- Emphasizing key buildings and intersections through a clear language of kerbs and paving
- Maximising pedestrian space wherever possible and enhancing key links and continuity across junctions

The proposals are intended to be capable of adaption to uncertain capital budgets and timescales. The approach lends itself to phasing and gradual implementation over time as resources permit. Although illustrating the core study area, the principles allow adaptation and extension to other streets and spaces in Alderley Edge.

Overall the approach seeks to avoid standardised linear and anonymous highway characteristics to create a legible and distinctive streetscape that informs drivers and pedestrians whilst creating a memorable, attractive streetscape.



Exhibition Road, Kensington



Lyngby High Street, Copenhagen



Lyngby, Copenhagen

Place making - Ryleys Lane junction

The transition from Wilmslow Road to London Road at the junction with Ryleys Lane represents an opportunity to slow traffic entering the village centre over the railway bridge, and to resolve the complex pedestrian movement patterns serving the schools, the church, the recreation ground. At present the unbroken sweep of the A34, and the layout of the triangle of grass create barriers to crossing movements, isolating the church and war memorial from the station entrance and restaurant on the east side of the junction.

A compact “continental” roundabout, combined with courtesy crossings positioned to enhance preferred crossing points at the junction would resolve many of the safety problems identified in the recent accident history. It would also create more generous public space outside the church and war memorial. We would recommend removal of guard-rails and formal signal-controlled crossing on Ryleys Lane to exploit the lower approach speeds and locate informal crossings to reflect the entrance to the recreation ground and car park. Separating the approach and exit lanes to the roundabout

with short pedestrian refuges or median strips establishes crossing connections to the station entrance. Between the roundabout and the railway bridge, road markings would be removed and the carriageway narrowed to 6 metres to allow a footway on the eastern side connecting to Hayes Lane. Taken together, such measures would establish a sense of place and change of scale at this critical transition point on the approach to the village centre.



Northern entrance gateway



Place making - Heyes Lane junction

The important junction with Heyes Lane and the turning to Trafford Road and The Festival Hall marks the northern end of the commercial High Street. At present it presents an awkward intersection with limited visibility for traffic approaching over the railway bridge. The signal-controlled crossing and steep ramp up from Heyes Lane generate congestion, whilst limiting pedestrian access to the station.

The junction provides an opportunity to introduce a distinctive street pattern to serve London Road, whilst creating an informal square to highlight the intersection. Two colours or surface finishes outlined with broad kerbs laid to emphasize typical pedestrian cross-movements help to reduce the linear nature of the carriageway and create a sequence of spaces interspersed with courtesy crossings.

The one-sided nature of the northern end of London Road would benefit from the inclusion of an informal central median strip to help slow traffic and ease pedestrian crossing, whilst highlighting the junction with Heyes Lane.

Vehicles joining London Road to position themselves slightly further forward of the existing stop line. Significantly more generous public space can be created around the station entrance and the corner bank building.

Building-mounted lighting and a repositioned CCTV pole could, subject to ground conditions, allow for an additional tree to define the public space, guide vehicle movements and link this area more closely with the rest of London Road.



Transition to High Street

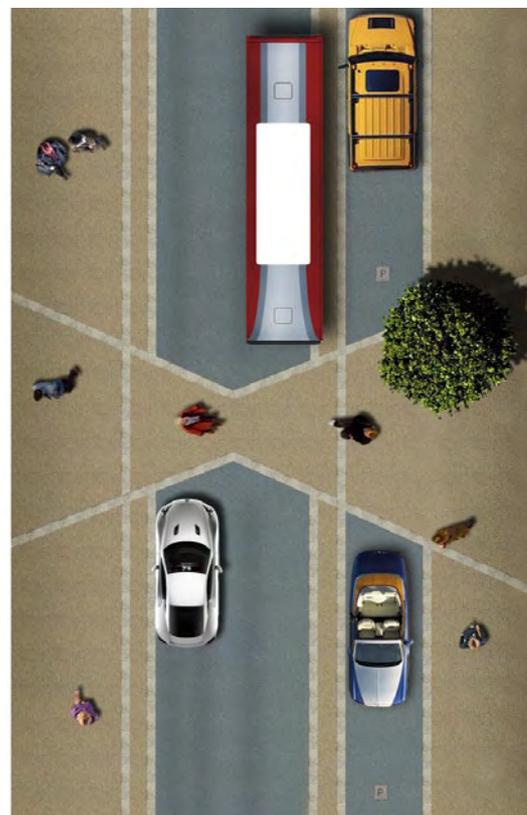


Place making - London Road High Street

London Road at present cuts a broad swathe through Alderley Edge, with carriageway widths and traffic speeds that undermine the richness and variety of the surrounding built environment. The place value of side-street intersections has been eroded, and existing pedestrian crossings are not catered for by the disruptive pelican crossings. Establishing a future layout to create a low-speed, continuous flow movement pattern capable of highlighting key buildings and institutions could rebalance the streetscape to build on the special characteristics of Alderley Edge.

For the main length of London Road, the realignment of kerb-lines and reduction in carriageway width to 6 metres would greatly increase the connectivity between the businesses on both sides of the street. Space for bus stops, deliveries and short-term parking can be integrated into a sequence of lengths to retain, or slightly increase, existing provision (c. 27 spaces to 32). Shorter crossing distances for pedestrians, and courtesy crossings that reflects the typical diagonal movement patterns, would allow greater integration of retail activity with movement.

The clearer definition of on-street parking bays, broken into blocks of 15-25 metres in length, would lend itself to the introduction of a “controlled parking zone” for the village centre (allowing parking only in marked bays). This would remove the need for intrusive yellow lining and markings. Whilst the line of the carriageway would remain clear, with low kerbs defining footways, the location of indicative crossing points have been suggested to reflect key buildings and businesses. Sides streets such as West Street, Stevens Street and Clifton Street are emphasised to maximise the spatial qualities of these important corners and cross-roads.



Sample street plan and section with courtesy crossing



Creating a low-speed streetscape



Place making - de Trafford Square (?)

Few spaces have suffered from highway erosion as badly as the broad space that links six streets and forms the southern end of London Road. Flower beds isolated amidst multiple lanes and acres of unbroken asphalt characterize this potentially important entry point to the village. The reduction in traffic volume and the potential creation of a low-speed environment would allow a redefinition of this civic space.

Whilst some directional signing will remain, much of the signage, markings and roadside clutter could be removed. A significant area of pedestrian and civic space could be redefined without impeding traffic movements at this point.

We would suggest a slight change in the alignment and width of Congleton Road where it passes the de Trafford Arms. This would allow for some additional parking, as well as linking the pedestrian and outdoor space of the pub with the square. Allowing the footway material to extend across and around the space would allow for the creation of a simple square, marked by an appropriate landmark sculpture.

Whilst few of the adjoining buildings currently address the space, a change in the character of this southern end of London Road would encourage businesses to take advantage of increased pedestrian activity and movement generated by stronger continuity of footways and crossings.

A clear transition from the square into London Road could be marked by a pair of trees and a crossing point, helping to define bus stops and the change in scale and character of the High Street.



Southern entrance gateway



Conclusions and next steps

High streets and town centres are undergoing a period of rapid change. Their economic and social role is shifting away from basic retail activity and the functional needs for supply of goods and services. Instead, towns are increasingly reliant on attracting footfall and activity through developing a distinctive civic identity that meets broader social needs as places for interaction and spending time.

The need to strengthen a unique identity is especially important for Alderley Edge with its particular history and circumstances. The village centre faces the challenge of transforming the former highway environment into a place with a strong identity capable of underpinning its existing assets.

These initial outline suggestions serve to suggest an approach to this change. They are intended to provide a starting point for wider debate and the development of a consensus for future investment, management and maintenance of the public realm in ways that strengthen and underpin the economic and social vitality of the village.

The design approach combines a set of general principles to create low-speed traffic movement, with the creation of clearly defined entry points and identifiable spaces at key locations. They are intended to overcome some of the barriers that limit access in and around the village, while continuing to allow traffic movement to coexist with a lively and interconnected public realm.

The approach lends itself to gradual implementation and phasing over time as resources allow and opportunities present. The language could be adapted to suit a range of materials as the constraints of existing services and ground conditions become clearer.

Rebuilding a strong identity for the public realm of Alderley Edge will be a long and difficult process. This report provides a starting point for a wider exploration by the Parish Council and Cheshire East Council for a clearer vision for the future of the village, one that builds on existing qualities to reconcile continuing traffic movement with the qualities of safety, connectivity and civility essential to a successful community.



Summary overview

Revised junction arrangement to create clear transition at northern entry to village, focused on church and memorial, with strengthened connections between station, recreation ground, schools and adjoining businesses.

Reduced widths and traffic speeds on Ryleys Lane to allow clear, direct connections to church lych gate, recreation ground and car park.

Steps and connection to park highlighted on approach to bridge.

New junction layout and place-making at Heyes Close

Courtesy crossing and steps down to car park and supermarkets

Central median strip between Heyes Lane and Clifton Street where street is one-sided

Clear connections to main side streets combined with place-making and informal crossing points.

London Road served by reduced carriageway width interspersed with courtesy crossings. Existing parallel parking rationalised into short bays.

Gateway to mark southern end of London Road and entry to square.

Revised arrangement to existing junction to create compact civic square, additional car-parking, and central feature. Forms key space at southern entry point into village.

