

# MADE

## Ludlow public realm

location: Shropshire

Ludlow, the largest town in South Shropshire is perhaps best known for its heritage buildings and medieval street layout, but in recent years, the town's economic success has been very much based upon its growing reputation for good food, and is now well established as the gastronomic centre of Shropshire. The town won its first Michelin star in 1995.

The public realm improvements that were carried out in the town have complimented a range of other measures that have been instigated by a partnership between Shropshire County Council, South Shropshire Borough Council (now merged into the unitary Shropshire Council) and Ludlow Town Council. All these endeavours have been aimed at balancing the demands of old and new, and to maximise Ludlow's economic potential based on its reputation for good food and a very attractive townscape.

### Introduction

Despite being in an enviable position in respect to the quality of its heritage townscape, its strong identity as a gastronomic centre and its tradition of hosting various other cultural festivals, Ludlow suffers a number of problems that are common to many similar towns across the country. It has an historic street plan, and suffers from traffic congestion with the attendant problems of air pollution, noise and inevitable conflict between pedestrians and other road users. It has also faced specific challenges of integrating new development within its historic fabric as evidenced by the well-



documented opening of the Tesco store in the town.

This case study shows how a small community can create its own niche through maximising the potential for tourism, whilst striving to create an attractive streetscape for visitors and locals to enjoy.

### Design process

Funding for the project was assembled from a variety of sources, including the Town and District Councils, the Heritage Lottery Fund and County Council. Atkins were employed to undertake a study of the town and created a site specific strategy of improvements that has guided the subsequent improvement works to the public realm. Though the initial concept proposals carried wide approval within the development partnership, they had to be revisited after a costing exercise in order to bring costs within the £1m budget.

There was a general recognition between the project partners that some of the most important elements would be maintenance, management and design. Simplicity, good workmanship, high quality materials local to the area, and attention to detail are essential. Thus the guiding principle for the design ethos was 'simplicity of form and layout, retention of the varied palette of historic surface materials where they survived, and the use of high quality natural materials on the pavements'.



The transport plan for Ludlow dealt with the neglect of the Market Square, which had suffered from informally parked cars, and buses and coaches parked with engines running.

There were three phases of town centre improvements:

Phase 1 was in Castle Square, Mill Street, Broad Street and the High Street and included:

- The removal of parking which was controversial but went ahead with small compromises.
- The use of a limited pallet of materials used to achieve a simple scheme with a great deal of attention paid to the geometric designs – curves and simple lines.

The buses and coaches were moved out, and a residents parking scheme introduced. The council managed to stick to its guns, despite public opposition to the loss of parking.

It proved a long process to achieve the subtle but effective results which offer an improved setting for the surrounding buildings.

Phase 2 was made up of three smaller projects, the Castle entrance, Market Square and Quality Square.

Phase 3 was in Old Street, Corve Street and the Bull ring. Proposals for improvements to paving and crossings were controversial.

Narrowing of gateways, 20mph speed limits and pedestrian dominance together with decriminalisation of parking are some of the measures being introduced.

The pavements have been made as wide as possible, with informal crossing points. The aim of the project was to reduce the impact of the traffic in the town centre whilst maintaining access, viability and vitality and respecting and enhancing the historic character.

## **Evaluation**

Despite public frustration at disruption associated with the public realm improvements, the schemes have generally been well received and they have acted as a catalyst for investment in other conservation projects in the area.

In towns like Ludlow, (where there is a valuable historic urban fabric), there are inevitable conflicts between traffic management improvements and the heritage quality of the place. The seeming choice between indiscriminate parking or obtrusive signs and lines is a hard one to balance. This scheme does demonstrate how a sensitive and open approach between officers and designers can result in a scheme that is relatively successful in regard to improved traffic management while respecting and reinforcing the heritage quality of the built environment.

This project has also helped to develop strong working partnerships between officers and members of all authorities and their consultants, and sets a template for future working relationships.

It has been reported by a number of sources that officers and local residents are very pleased with the final outcome of the improvements and in particular with the fact that the work is almost unnoticeable as it blends with the existing so well. There remain some unresolved parking problems but overall the projects, funded through the Local Transport Plan and English Heritage grants, have been successful.

### **Key design features to look out for**

- The almost seamless interface between newly paved areas and existing pavements and streets.
- The selection of materials that reinforce and enhance the heritage character of the town.
- The way the design balances the requirements of highways management (with its attendant liking for signs and lines), and the design ethos of remaining as simple as possible and not detracting from the valuable heritage quality of the existing built environment.

### **Link and downloads**

RUDI - case study  
<http://www.rudi.net/books/18465>

Ludlow Conference May 2004 - minutes explaining public realm improvements  
[http://83.170.75.16/file.php?file=/1/htf\\_documents/conference\\_reports/2004\\_Local\\_Identity\\_Ludlow.pdf](http://83.170.75.16/file.php?file=/1/htf_documents/conference_reports/2004_Local_Identity_Ludlow.pdf)

RUDI - Transport innovation in historic towns (write up of conference March 2007).  
<http://www.rudi.net/node/18469>

RUDI - Focus on local identity, Ludlow Conference May 2004.  
<http://www.rudi.net/node/18468>

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