

Post and pole use

Poles in the highway and public spaces are used for a great variety of items. They can be used for supporting:

- ☛ CCTV and surveillance cameras
- ☛ Direction signs/ traffic signs/ parking signs/ information signs
- ☛ Wayfinding/ fingerposts
- ☛ Lighting columns
- ☛ Information panels
- ☛ Traffic signals and transmitters
- ☛ Speed and Automatic Number Plate cameras
- ☛ Mobile phone transmitter poles
- ☛ Telecommunications equipment
- ☛ Seasonal decoration supports
- ☛ Bus detectors
- ☛ Tram cable supports

Whilst all these produce street clutter, visual intrusion and obstruction of varying degrees of significance, the most difficult and contentious tend to be mobile masts, CCTV masts and traffic sign poles.

The lower the surrounding building height and more set back buildings are from the road the more likely that poles become visually intrusive as they are then seen against larger amounts of skyline. At the same time they can carry necessary equipment and they need siting away from positions where they might be easily struck by vehicles and vehicle wing mirrors.

Multiple poles or pole clusters come from thoughtless or uncoordinated design and installation. A combination of poles can contribute to significant street clutter, and be an obstruction to movement that spoils the enjoyment of a townscape, particularly when they are mounted in close proximity to one another, and most particularly in historic areas. Where this occurs it is usually due to different agencies or programmes being involved without sufficient co-ordination between them.

Occasionally, dual poles are used for a sign where really one would do and redundant ones are found where poor auditing or management occurs.



Figure 1 Poles of all sorts disfigure our streets



Figure 2 The daytime impact of Christmas light poles should also be considered

Large lighting, CCTV or mobile phone transmitter poles may look out of scale and incongruous in narrow or historic urban streets or suburban residential roads. CCTV poles require wide splays of line of sight for viewing risk areas, so are often very prominent and intrusive.

Telecom or other antenna masts of 10 - 15m have been used more and more in streets where rooftop or other masts have not been able to be sited. These can be higher than adjoining street lamps and buildings, so being very intrusive in the townscape.



Figure 3 CCTV poles should be discrete, not celebrated street furniture

Policy framework and regulations

Highway poles are covered by a range of policies and regulations depending on their purpose and there is multiple responsibility for highway posts and poles. Not all poles are owned by the highway authority, although they will generally need to licence them and some, like mobile phone mast equipment, may need planning permission for erection.

Poles may be part of statutorily regulated highway equipment like traffic signs or they may be non statutory amenity equipment like Christmas lights or fingerposts, perhaps owned by the district or parish council, or utility equipment owned by a statutory undertaker. These are all used, owned and regulated in slightly different ways. It is important to understand who is responsible for the equipment before addressing how to question its location or necessity.

Highway authorities may (but do not have to) erect traffic signs with poles as they see fit under the Highways Act 1980.

Traffic signs and signals are regulated by the Traffic Signs Regulations and General Directions (TSRGD) 2002. Guidance on their use is set out in the Traffic Signs Manual¹ though this tends to assume the sign is wanted. This is discussed further in Street Pride Briefing 2 *Signs*.

District, town and parish councils have powers to erect certain types of posts for amenity furniture under various Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Acts.² Planning permission is not required to erect CCTV in the street (even on a lamp post), though it is on non-highway land e.g. a car park. Powers for local authorities to erect these are provided under the Section 163 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 and Local Government Rating Act 1997 for parish councils.



Figure 4 Antenna masts below 15m can be installed with permitted rights

Phone or antenna masts are often used in streets and roads. The Government has given licensed telecommunications operators permitted development rights to carry out such smaller scale telecommunications development even in Conservation Areas. Masts lower than 15m are subject to an application for prior approval of the siting and appearance proposed. Prior approval applications have to be determined within 56 days or they are automatically allowed by the local planning authority. A council should consult local people.

Note though that PPS 5 (Planning and the Historic Environment) on conserving the historic character states that “the effect of an application on the significance of such a heritage asset or its setting is a material consideration in determining the application.” And for designated sites like Conservation Areas “there should be a presumption in favour of the conservation of designated heritage assets”.

Statutory undertakers (electricity, water, gas, bridge or transport authorities) have powers under the New Roads and Streetworks Act and subsequent regulations to erect equipment.³

Should they stay or should they go?

Retaining or removing posts and poles in the street has to be a joint decision with the agencies involved. There is increasing knowledge that the assumptions on which much of our street clutter is based are not evidence based and installation has come from well-meaning intent or an assumption that the sign, lamp, bollard, camera etc will reduce accidents, save money or assist crime reduction.

Some traffic signs and street lights in narrow streets (e.g. No Parking) may be wall mounted. Lighting and CCTV fixed to buildings needs legal agreement with the property owner where local byelaws do not exist.⁴ Listed building consent is required if fixing to listed buildings.

CCTV cameras are a fact of the recent desire for surveillance among some in UK society though recent reports suggested they only have a modest impact on crime overall, being most effective in cutting vehicle crime in car parks. Their intrusive positioning is part of their effectiveness initially, though this soon wears off. CCTV will be most effective when offenders think there is an increased chance of them being caught, and need to be part of wider crime prevention activities.⁵ CCTV may require higher levels of street lighting.

The alternatives

The TSRGD allows for some flexibility in whether to erect a sign at all in many circumstances. The responsibility should be that the driver should take the road as they see it⁶. [See Street Pride Briefing 2 *Signs*]. Traffic sign poles may be painted black which make poles less intrusive, particularly if any fixings and sign back are also painted black. Coloured poles will fade differently on different street furniture.

Traffic signals may be installed on combined lamp posts if the lighting design can be adjusted to suit the location. Some authorities are reluctant to do this due to contractual segregation arrangements under PFI or electrical isolation issues. The latter is easily soluble.

Maintaining tall poles at or below the eaves height of buildings, and close to walls, reduces their impact.

As in all technological areas CCTV is getting smaller and phone masts are getting more discrete. Wall mounting should be considered first and if that is not feasible, small cameras on disguised poles can work better too.



Figure 5 CCTV camera disguised as an historic wall lamp



Figure 6 Combined traffic signal with lamp post

Innovation in phone mast and antenna design means there are alternatives to crude phone 'dustbin on a pole' masts. The 'Code of Best Practice on Mobile Phone Network Development'⁷ shows a number of antenna types including combined CCTV/ phone antennae, wall mounted antenna, lamp posts, extremely slim-lined monopoles and masts disguised as sculptures. Technological advances mean poles will be able to be increasingly camouflaged in future.

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This Briefing is part of Civic Voice's Street Pride campaign. Further information is available from www.civicvoice.org.uk/campaigns/street-pride, including other briefings on signs, bollards and guard rails and copies of the Street Pride campaign pack.

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Civic Voice is grateful to English Heritage for supporting the Street Pride campaign

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