Figure 10: Town Centre Character Areas

The Public Realm Strategy

1 Local Identity and Character

'Reinforcing local identity through the public realm'.

As part of the site appraisal process a number of different character areas within the town centre have been identified. The broad extent of these and brief summaries of the different areas are given below and identified on figure 10. As part of the public realm strategy it is proposed that the dominant characteristics of these character areas be enhanced whenever opportunities arise as a result of either maintenance work or emergent development opportunities. The strategy requires that the scale and massing of the built form be respected and the prevailing palette of building materials also be acknowledged. The objective should be to tease out the key characteristics of the areas in any new built form. Crucially, the hard landscape (and furniture) will then act as the mat that links together the different areas so that there is an underlying unity in the public realm but a unity that also allows the expression of different elements within the different quarters.

Local identity and character is thus an attribute to be built upon and is to be integral to, and underpin, the public realm strategy that follows. This is set out under a number of subject area headings with the key public realm strategy being the Spatial Strategy indicated in figure 11.
A. The Historic Heart

‘The Historic Heart of the town is characterised by an organic network of streets, distinguished buildings and attractive views to the east’.

The Historic Heart character area is located in the very centre of the town and includes the Market Place, St Michaels and All Angels Church, the Town Hall and Churchside. It is considered to be the heart of the town centre and its character derives both from the dense, organic clustering of built form as well as its geographic location overlooking the River Bollin. The steep, east-facing slope of the historic heart is a dominant feature and is responsible for the attractive historic town views that are available in views of the town centre from the east. Mature trees are also a key feature of this area and harmonise well with the buildings, visually softening them and contributing significantly to the character of the views back in towards the historic heart of the town.

Enhancing the area: The various design strategies put forward within this document will contribute to strengthening the identity of this area through, for example, emphasising the priority of pedestrians within the area, delivering an enhanced park that embraces its distinctive landform, retaining the visually important drifts of existing trees and delivering a co-ordinated palette of street furniture that is consistent with the area’s character. The lighting strategy will similarly tease out the main landmark buildings that contribute to its character.

B. The Retail Core

‘The retail core is the vibrant heart of the town centre with a generally intimate and small scale quality derived from the mix of architectural styles’.

The Retail Core character area embraces the two main retail streets of Mill Street and Chestergate. It is predominately pedestrianised and the main focus of the area is upon the streets of small unit shops and boutiques of 2-3 storeys in height. The area has a rich vibrancy to it and a generally intimate and small-scale quality arising from the character and size of the retail outlets and the variety of architectural form. The retail core is the busy heart of the town.

The area retains its historical layout (refer to figure 3) and includes some of the oldest buildings within Macclesfield. It is a confined area of a dense building pattern and channelled vistas. Mill Street is the main north-south thoroughfare that links the higher ground of the historic heart with the lower ground to the south.

Enhancing the area: The various proposed strategies will help to reinforce the qualities of this area through, for example, delivering a more appropriate and building sensitive floorscape of high quality natural materials that would not detract from the rich architectural heritage. The lighting and street furniture strategies would also help to unify this area and integrate it with adjoining areas.

C. Christchurch

‘Christchurch comprises a small area of tightly clustered, predominantly residential scaled buildings that are associated with the former church that dominates the area’.

This character area embraces Christchurch and the surrounding terraced streets. It is characterised by grids of two storey terraced houses and architecturally more ornate houses that front onto the wider streets adjacent to the church. The area is characteristically small scale and ‘quiet’ in feel due primarily to the residential nature of the streets. Residential metalwork (railings, gates and porches) adds an additional layer of richness to the underlying unity of the area.

Enhancing the area: Strategies such as those proposed for furniture, lighting and paving materials will all assist in strengthening the sense of unity in the area. The church dominates the area due to its scale.
D. Park Green / Bollin Mills

‘Park Green / Bollin Mills is an architecturally diverse but degraded area unified by the remnant mill buildings and focused upon the key space that is Park Green.’

The Park Green / Bollin Mills character area is located in the south east corner of the town centre study area. The area is focused upon the key public space of Park Green and the old mill buildings that surround the space, principally to the south and the east towards the River Bollin. The historic grain of the town remains as do many of the old, tall mill buildings that once dominated this area. Old redundant or converted silk mills and their associated works still occur along such streets as Park Green, Park Lane, Sunderland Street, Pickford Street and Brook Street. The former mills are interspersed with other mixed building styles that reveal the changes that the area has undergone over the decades. Other building usage includes mixed use with civic buildings, industrial units, offices, leisure units, small shops and ‘fast food’ outlets. The scale and height of the mill buildings/works channel the eye at street level and define the underlying industrial character of the area. This is reinforced through the rhythm of the fenestration of the mill buildings.

Unfortunately the scale and density of the built form mean that the River Bollin is all but lost to the public although, in isolated pockets, the river is able to contribute to the character of the area, such as at Brookside Mill. The busy vehicular routes of Park Green and Sunderland Street dominate the streetscene. Park Green includes a mix of distinguished and ordinary buildings that reflects the mix of building ages and styles within the area.

Enhancing the area: The Park Green / Bollin Mills area is presently tired and fragmented and in need of reinvestment of an appropriate type. It is a very disjointed area of mixed use development of varying scale and size. The area would benefit from public realm proposals that will help unify the area and relate it better to the town centre. The River Bollin Walkway should be improved and provision made for improved public access. Park Green should be reorganised to deliver a meaningful area of green / hard public space and the various different strategies for lighting, furniture, landscape and circulation will all contribute to a general enhancement of the character area.

E. Retail Backlands

‘The Retail ‘backlands’ is a degraded area of limited character that is dominated by generally undistinguished buildings, and vehicles. With the exception of the Silk Museum it is in clear need of redevelopment of an appropriate character.’

The Retail ‘backlands’ are located immediately to the west of Mill Street within the central / southern portion of the study area. The character area embraces Castle Street, Churchill Way and Roe Street. This area, as the name suggests, is located to the rear of the retail and industrial quarter. It is an area of poor quality and identity that is presently dominated by the backs of retail units and large ‘voids’ within the built fabric that have been handed over to car parking. The area has an underlying temporary and unkempt character that contributes little of merit to the identity of Macclesfield, the exception being the remnant row of residential houses along Roe Street and the listed Silk Museum and Heritage Centre building. Much of the area is given over to relatively modern development which includes office units and associated car parking. The area is dominated by vehicular traffic along Churchill Way and the large expanses of unattractive car parks.

Significantly this area is wholly embraced within the major development opportunity that is subject to discussion between Wilson Bowden and Macclesfield Borough Council. The character area is in strong need of regeneration and environmental improvements and the intended new development of much of the area will assist in achieving this. It will be very important to ensure that the scale and type of development proposed for this area fits comfortably within the overall public realm strategy for the town centre.

Enhancing the area: This character area also needs a central focus to aid regeneration and the establishment of a stronger identity. A new area of public space of an appropriate scale centred around the Silk Museum provides an exciting opportunity
for making a real change to this character area. The delivery of all of the different public realm proposals contained within this document will contribute to the enhancement of the area. Improved and co-ordinated lighting, street furniture, landscape structure, signage etc will all collectively help to integrate this area back into the townscape.

F. Mixed Use

“The Mixed Use character area is wedged between the retail core of the town and the northern inner ring road. It is characteristically small-scale and intimate with some attractive buildings but a degraded margin along its northern perimeter.”

This character area is located on the northern edge of the study area and is centred around King Edward Street and Cumberland Street. The area has a relatively small-scale and intimate quality and includes a number of buildings of merit as well as other attractive rows of terraced housing. The area is of mixed use in character, with dentists, vets and chiropractors slotted in amongst residential dwellings.

The cohesiveness of the area has been partially scarred by Hibel Road and the broadened Churchill Way junction. Both Cumberland Street and Brock Street have been insensitively truncated by Hibel road which, in turn, severs the edge of the town centre from the historic areas to the north. The character area thus has a slightly ‘isolated’ quality being wedged between Hibel Road and the main retail core of the town immediately to the south. Traffic noise from Hibel Road and the Churchill Way junction is an ever-present.

Enhancing the area: The mixed use character area would benefit from enlivening and reintegration with the town centre. Spatially there is little that can be changed, at least in the short to medium term, but enhancements to the streetscape through the consistent use of materials, lighting, furniture and signage will all collectively help to refresh the area and draw it back into the town’s fabric.

G. Transport Core

“The Transport Core is Macclesfield’s ‘shop window’. It is potentially an attractive area of strong identity focused upon Waters Green but is presently dominated by car parks, vehicles and awkward levels.’

The Transport Core character area is located beneath, and to the east of, the Historic Heart of Macclesfield. It is the central arrival area to those arriving in Macclesfield by public transport and includes the main railway station and new bus station. The character area is focused upon the historic space that is Waters Green and includes Boden Street and the northern end of Sunderland Street. Whilst this area is the main ‘gateway’ to the town centre it is confused, fractured and disjointed due to the variety of buildings, awkward and tight level changes and, most significantly, the dominance of cars within Waters Green and alongside the railway line that defines its easternmost boundary.

The area consists of buildings of differing ages ranging from the more historic listed buildings found in Macclesfield to the recently completed bus station. The architecturally rich northern perimeter of the character area embraces the steep well-treed and vegetated slopes beneath St Michael and All Angels Church which defines one edge of Waters Green. Unfortunately the quality and definition of Waters Green is severely compromised along the eastern perimeter which is wholly given over to car parking. The contrasting building styles in the southern portion of the area are at odds with the essentially attractive views towards the historic heart of the town. The relative openness of the area around Waters Green means that views both into and out of this area are an important attribute that should be retained.

Enhancing the area: Not only Waters Green but Macclesfield itself would substantially benefit from a reappraisal of this important central space. In the longer term the area should be spatially re-organised so that the car is less dominant. With an appropriate design Waters Green could be a stunning ‘shop window’ for the town centre but this will require a radical reappraisal of the
usage of the space so that the emphasis is on achieving a rich pedestrian-friendly space that reveals immediately the town’s strong character and identity. This would be re-inforced through the various public realm strategies regarding consistent use of materials, furniture, lighting, signage etc.

H Public Services

“The Public Services area is an isolated zone dominated by the Post Office depot and is essentially removed from the public realm. It sits uncomfortably with the architectural richness of the town centre and is generally unattractive and utilitarian in its appearance.”

The Public Services character area is a small zone located in the north eastern corner of the study area. It is dominated by utilitarian buildings, service yards and car parking and includes the Post Office Depot and Police Station. The large, angular late 20th century buildings of generally 2-3 storeys are unattractive and sit uncomfortably with the rich architectural heritage that dominates within the historic heart of the town. These buildings and associated compounds are surrounded by unattractive, unfriendly security fencing and tall brick walls that do not relate to the historic context of Macclesfield. It is also unexpected to have such utilitarian and functional land uses so close to the historic heart of a town and their presence in this location requires large vehicles to approach the very centre of the town bringing a corresponding effect upon the public realm.

The eastern fringe of the character area is partially softened by deciduous trees, which beneficially mask severe levels changes and help to filter out views of the buildings from the surrounding areas when in leaf. This character area acts as a “buffer” and affords distant views across to neighbouring hillsides in the east.

Enhancing the area: With the exception of the generally attractive town buildings that define its western edge this area will require improving if it is to be brought into the fold of the town centre. At present it remains a back area tucked in behind Jordangate and much of it effectively remains closed to the general public. In the short/medium term the best approach would be to minimise impacts upon the centre of Macclesfield through appropriate screening and boundary treatments whilst, in the longer term, should the site ever become available, appropriate redevelopment would enable this area to be retrieved for the town.

I Transport Corridor

“The Transport Corridor is dominated by distinct level changes and rail and vehicular traffic. It is the boundary that both encloses and severs Macclesfield’s town centre from its surrounding areas.”

The majority of the Transport Corridor character area is located immediately adjoining the study area boundary. It has, however, been identified as part of the public realm study as it strongly influences the character of the town centre by severing and isolating the town from adjoining areas to the north and east, including destinations such as West Park, Victoria Park, the River Bollin walkway and cycleway and pedestrian routes along the canal and to the surrounding countryside. The character area includes Hibel Road, The Silk Road, the River Bollin and the main line railway to the east of the study area. The area is wholly dominated by transport and acts as a strong boundary to the town centre. The level changes associated with the area reinforce the “severing” effect. Whilst fulfilling necessary town centre circulation requirements it contributes nothing to the character and identity of the town.

With severe and visually prominent retaining walls that have been required in order to shoehorn in the circulatory roads the character area clearly defines the boundary to the town centre. The addition of the ring road and the railway has completely masked the River Bollin and effectively concealed it from the public realm.

Enhancing the area: Opportunities for enhancing the area are limited to delivering a more cohesive treatment and to “greening up” the routes to try and visually soften them and visually reduce the impact of vehicles. For this to be meaningful a commitment needs to be made to a fundamental difference of approach whereby such routes are transformed to become attractive tree-lined routes that contribute to, rather than detract from, the public realm. The introduction of appropriately scaled public art into this area would help impart some identity and sense of “gateway”.
2 Spatial Strategy: A series of ‘Threads and Beads’

‘The delivery of an integrated pedestrian-friendly public realm.’

Macclesfield has a generally compact town centre with a tight network of streets and few spaces within which people can meet and relax. Much of the town centre retains the historic morphology of the town with the result that areas of open space are generally limited and there is no obvious central park within the town.

The core strategy for the delivery of a new public realm for Macclesfield is the creation of a network of ‘threads and beads’ within the town centre (refer to figure 11). The germ for this idea originates from Macclesfield’s connection with the silk industry. It arose out of a recognition of the lack of public spaces within the town centre and the desire to deliver a network of inter-connected spaces that would serve both the local character areas and also collectively contribute to defining the centre of the town.

The ‘beads’, a series of new and upgraded areas of public space, will be easily linked through a network of ‘threads’, a series of pedestrian-friendly and well-defined routes. This approach will assist in drawing together the different character areas within the town centre. Whilst ‘the beads’ (the spaces) will have their own identity, the ‘threads’ will exhibit a consistency of treatment, materials and detailing as described later within this document. The various materials, street furniture, signage and lighting will deliver a unified treatment within the town centre.
The principal ‘hard’ spaces (beads) are identified as:

1. **Waters Green**: This existing space should be enhanced through a reduction in the dominance of vehicles, the delivery of a pedestrian-friendly environment and the introduction of specimen trees/planting to help define the space, filter out less attractive elements and provide a ‘greener’ environment and improved links with the town.

2. **Market Place**: The existing quality of the town’s Market Square can be broadly retained but should be refreshed through the introduction of Public art and new items of street furniture and lighting. The existing natural stone works well with the buildings. Ultimately the elements within the square should be reviewed and a new focus (feature) delivered at the southern end.

3. **Park Green**: This existing space needs to be reorganised and retrieved from the motor car. It offers one of the few opportunities within the town centre to deliver a new significant space. Re-configuring the space will deliver an enhanced pedestrian-friendly public realm, provide an attractive setting for the distinguished buildings, deliver a new focus on the southern edge of the town centre and provide an attractive gateway to the town centre. New trees and greenery should be integral to the new space. The delivery of this space could be facilitated through possible new development off Parsonage Street.

4. **Great King Street**: The study has identified the opportunity to deliver a new space at an important location that will enable the new development to better integrate with the town. This will also assist in bridging the severing effect of Churchill Way. Again, tree planting should be integral to the design of the new space.

The principal ‘soft’ spaces (beads) are identified as:

1. **Brocklehurst Park**: The existing area around Churchside and behind the Town Hall should be re-configured to deliver a distinctive, new green space that makes best use of the superb views towards the Peak District fringe. This is a unique area that needs to be opened up to the public rather than the town turning its back on it. It has the potential to be a new key space within the heart of the town.

2. **Town Square**: The new development opportunity beneficially releases an area of land for the delivery of a new Town Square. This is appropriately located adjoining the Silk Museum and will further help to bridge the dissecting effect of Churchill Way. This has the potential to be a new, animated public space of significance and to deliver a new green ‘bead’ that helps to link the new development into the existing townscape.

3. **King Edward Green**: Subject to negotiation there is the potential to deliver a meaningful, well designed green space to mark the main vehicular arrival into the town centre from the north. If re-configured this will deliver a new green space that will bridge Hibel Road and relate to the open space/playing fields associated with King’s School. This could include a small pocket park.

4. **Christchurch Park**: With the exception of Churchside, this is the only significant area of existing open ‘green’ space within the town centre at present. Christchurch acts as the focus for the local area and is one of the key visual landmark buildings within the town centre. The existing park should be enriched to deliver a new space around the church that enhances its setting and serves the local community.

5. **Park Green**: This existing space has the ability to fulfil a number of roles. If reconfigured so that Park Green (the road) follows its historic alignment a new animated hub could be delivered in this area. This would be the third of the main animated ‘squares’ within Macclesfield and would help to impart a new, stronger identity to the area. New trees and plantings will be an integral feature of this new space.

6. **War Memorial Gardens**: This existing space should be restored and enhanced to impart a higher visual profile to it. This could be easily delivered in advance of the developments at Park Green.
3 Town Centre Circulation

‘Establish a clearly defined street hierarchy that gives clarity to the public realm’.

Both traffic and pedestrian circulation have a significant influence upon the appearance of the public realm and the way in which streets and spaces can be used and designed. The circulation strategy for the town centre, whilst necessarily substantially based upon the existing circulation patterns within the town, will need to be discussed in detail with the highway and transportation engineers to establish the extent to which it might be realisable. Figure 7 identifies the existing circulation patterns for the town centre.

In the interim a strategy has been proposed that identifies the proposed priority usage of the town centre streets (refer to figure 12). The strategy acknowledges the existing gyratory system around the heart of the town and the additional vehicular traffic that utilises Sunderland Street. The key circular routes include The Silk Road, Hibel Road, Churchill Way and Park Street. Waters Green and Queen Victoria Street (servicing the new bus station), along with the northernmost section of Jordangate have also been identified as car priority streets. The detailing of these roads (rather than streets) should reflect this emphasis, except where junctions are formed with other local roads of pedestrian priority emphasis, in which case more sympathetic and localised treatments will need to take greater cognisance of the pedestrian. These car priority routes broadly follow a north-south alignment and embrace much of the historic heart of the town.

Connecting with these roads, and contributing to the creation of an interwoven network, are a series of streets that should be detailed to give clear pedestrian priority. The second tier of streets serve to mesh together the town centre thoroughfares and to provide a more attractive, safer circulation route for pedestrians. These include the key historic streets within the heart of the town and the three stepped routes that link Waters Green with Churchside. The pedestrian priority streets will be delivered through: the sensitive detailing of kerb heights and careful definition of level changes; appropriate hard detailing and specification of materials including the use of larger scale paving; the narrowing of carriageways where agreed; and, a greater emphasis on street furniture.

In addition to these two categories it is recognised that some streets will necessarily remain as dual use streets and these provide a third tier to the circulation strategy.

Equally important to the circulation strategy is the need to ensure effective links and integration of the circulation network with the surrounding town parks and other public facilities. The circulation strategy plan identifies these and also indicates where, at present, they remain unresolved. Two key areas are highlighted: the western end of Hibel Road and the southern end of Churchill Way, both areas being a reflection of the severing effect of the newer road alignments. It is important for the town that the interface between the new major development opportunity and Churchill Way is sensitively addressed. New built form needs to engage with the road to animate the edge and aid integration. Ultimately it would benefit the town if consideration could be given to re-aligning this section of Churchill Way so that it better accords with the historic grain of the street pattern.

An adjustment to the alignment of Churchill Way that respected the historic routes of Elizabeth Street and Crossall Street would better enable adjoining buildings and any future development to engage with the streets and deliver an enhanced public realm. Similarly, the town centre public realm strategy needs to enable and facilitate improved pedestrian and cycleway links with the River Bollin Walkway and surrounding parks and areas of public open space.
4 Signage and Wayfinding

‘The delivery of a legible and high quality signage and wayfinding scheme.’

Signage

Macclesfield is a well-connected and frequently visited town and both vehicles and pedestrians are able to converge on the town centre. Few of the streets are pedestrianised and cars, public vehicles and access/delivery vehicles are all able to obtain access to much of the town centre. The relative permeability of the town centre to vehicles is, in turn, reflected in the number of open car parks that presently occupy a significant amount of land within the town centre. Signage, in all its forms, is thus a key element in assisting visitors and residents alike to successfully orientate and navigate themselves around the town centre.

Signage provision broadly falls into three categories: highways signage, information signage and wayfinding. Commonly these three categories include the following:

- **Highways signage** includes signage relating to:
  - Local and national destinations beyond the town centre - aiding those journeying through/across town
  - Circulation/Access around the town – no entry signs, waiting restrictions, access controls etc.
  - Parking control - information relating to permitted parking, restrictions etc.

- **Information signage** includes signs relating to:
  - Locations of specific public buildings offering services
  - Historical buildings
  - Public Parks

- **Wayfinding signage** includes signs relating to:
  - Local areas/quarters
  - Retail streets
  - Historic trails
  - Public buildings
  - Public Parks
  - Key pedestrian/cycleway routes (such as Middlewood Way)

Clearly, all three categories of signage occur within, and around, the town centre and need to be catered for within any new strategy for the town centre. The delivery of the signage strategy also needs to be carefully co-ordinated so as to prevent proliferation of signage which then becomes visually intrusive and confusing.

Existing signage provision

Site appraisal work within the town centre has revealed that there is no clearly recognisable signage strategy in place to inform either the location or the appearance of the different types of signage required. This is not uncommon and the result is that signage is provided on a generally ad-hoc or ‘needs must’ basis. Highways signage accrues over time and this can result in a proliferation of signage in strict accordance with highways requirements but with no regard for aesthetic considerations. The same approach commonly tends to be adopted for information signage and wayfinding.

Existing signage provision within Macclesfield indicates that the ad-hoc and ‘needs must’ approach has prevailed within the town. Highways signage proliferates and would benefit from rationalisation whilst both information signage and wayfinding markers are infrequent and patchy. The existing levels of signage are often visually intrusive and significantly clutter the streetscape. Multiple columns supporting an array of different signage information often occur in key locations. These frequently visually dominate the scene and can provide confusion as opposed to providing readily accessible information. Highways signage must obviously ensure the safety and efficient operation of the highway network but this does not have to mean that no consideration is given to visual amenity. Highways signage in particular has an adverse effect on general amenity and thus the impact of signage should be carefully considered.

An appraisal of the existing signage provision found within the town centre identified a number of issues that will need to be addressed if a cohesive and functional signage system that will be of benefit to both pedestrian and vehicular users is to be achieved. At present there are no particularly obvious identifiable strengths of the current signage provision other than that it is presumed that it broadly works effectively.

1 – 2 Excessive and confusing signage of different, dimensions, colours and states of repair
3 Within the town centre historic plaques are currently limited
4 – 5 A proliferation of signage posts
The perceived weaknesses of the existing signage provision include:

- Current signage provision is inconsistent and uncoordinated.
- Signs are of differing styles, types, ages, dimensions, colours and states of repair.
- Signage, particularly highways, is often overly visually intrusive.
- Unnecessary duplication of posts/poles frequently occurs – rationalisation needs to occur. This will reduce clutter, limit confusion and arguably reduce the number of hazards within the public realm.
- Information and wayfinding signage is often poorly located and/or absent.
- Highway signage appears to be lacking at some key junctions. This can frustrate circulation routes and hinder those navigating the town centre.
- There is no clear information and wayfinding signage strategy.
- There is no obvious consistency in the installation of signs between Council Departments.
- Maintenance of signage could be improved.
- There are limited historic plaques/historic trails publicising Macclesfield’s cultural heritage.

1 Obvious break down in communication between the various signage types

2 - 3 Alternative forms of signage/information

Destinations that should be signed for wayfinding/information (mapped features - pedestrian signage)

Directional signage for destinations within town centre (primary directional signs - road signage)
Signage strategy guidelines

Clear, legible and effective signage is important in assisting both pedestrians and vehicles to navigate their way around and through the town centre. A good signage system will provide what is necessary without cluttering the public realm at the same time as minimising driver distraction and thus improving highways safety. Consistency of signage type will entail speed of recognition and comprehension further minimising distraction. Carefully located signage with appropriate levels of information will improve the accessibility of services and cultural heritage. Bearing in mind the inadequacies of the existing provision, and in order to deliver a more cohesive and coordinated system of signage, the following proposed guidelines should be applied:

A Highway Signage

- Existing provision should be rationalised to reduce signage numbers and de-clutter the streetscene. Remaining signs will thus be quicker to identify and understand bringing possible highways safety benefits.
- Rationalisation will enable the removal of duplicate and unnecessary posts.
- There should be consistency in the sizes and type of signs used. Within the town centre the smallest size of signs acceptable should be preferred.
- There should be consistency of typeface.
- Wherever possible signage should be reduced – it may well be that one sign would suffice in lieu of several existing signs.
- Sensitivity to the existing conservation areas should be acknowledged through subtler signage, yellow linage etc.
- The approach to parking signage should be reappraised – fewer signs, if correctly located, may satisfy regulations for proper parking control.
- There should be strong and effective dialogue between all authorities with an influence and impact upon the town centre’s public realm. This will result in a coordinated approach.
- There should be a consensus reached on the desired circulation strategy outlined in this document – this will help to reduce superfluous highways signage.
- There must be a proportionate commitment to maintenance of highways signage to ensure a good state of repair.

1–5 Sensitive shop frontages
6 Traditional finger post
7 Signage in the form of art
8–11 Unsympathetic shop frontages
B Information Signage

- Information signage should be carefully located in key public spaces and along key routes as identified by the “threads and beads” spatial strategy.
- Establish a limited palette of information signage panels.
- The information signage system should be easily recognisable.
- Information signage should be consistent and common throughout the town centre area.
- Signage shall be aesthetically pleasing and contribute positively to the public realm.
- The information provided on the signs must be readily legible to all user groups.
- There should be a clear hierarchy of signage and information content.
- Information content should address:
  - basic locational information;
  - key public buildings and services;
  - key districts / quarters / character areas within the town centre (thereby reinforcing identity); and,
  - Key cultural heritage destinations.
- Information panels could be interactive.
- Consideration should be given to utilising a colour-coded system to emphasise local identity.

C Wayfinding Signage

- Shall be part of a co-ordinated range with the information signage system.
- Where possible wayfinding information shall be included within the information signage panels.
- Finger post signs should be rationalised to avoid the proliferation of posts.
- Colour coding could be used, consistent with the information signs.
- Key routes such as cycle routes and historic trails should be identified and included in wayfinding markers.
- Wayfinding markers to be carefully located so as to not create visual clutter – possible use to be made of light columns in lieu of new posts.
- As for the information signage there must be an adequate maintenance commitment.
Delivering the signage strategy

As highways signage must necessarily accord with highways regulations and design parameters there is only limited scope for influencing the appearance of highways signage. However, opportunities do exist, particularly within conservation areas and in the vicinity of listed buildings, and design control should be exercised where possible.

In contrast, the appearance of information signage and wayfinding is a key public realm element that can be controlled and influenced. It is important that the system selected relates well aesthetically to other street furniture items such as seating, litter bins, cycle racks and lighting columns. A classic style of signage is judged to be most appropriate although there is the opportunity for a fresher, more contemporary approach to be adopted. The selected signage range should ultimately be simple in design and immediately recognisable. Pastiche “Victoriana” or an excessively contemporary system that might date rapidly and be insensitive to the existing architectural heritage within the town centre should be avoided. The signage should identify routes to and destinations of all public facilities both within the town centre and beyond. This will include the surrounding parks and pedestrian and cycleway recreational routes.

The public realm and shop frontages

The character of the public realm is not just determined by the space between the town’s buildings. The appearance of individual shop frontages, in particular their quality and character, also greatly influences the character of the public realm and contributes to the perception of the street as a whole. In order to secure a quality public realm it is important that the character and quality of shop frontages are appropriate, particularly within Conservation Areas as their overall collective image can heavily determine the appearance of an area/street. Mechanisms to encourage sensitive, appropriately scaled signage should be put in place.

The public realm signage strategy should also encourage the sensitive development of shop frontages and ensure that they are sympathetic to their surroundings. This, however, does not mean that the shop frontages have to be historic in appearance. Contemporary frontages/treatments can be equally appropriate if implemented competently and sensitively designed.

Summary recommendations for delivering a comprehensive signage system

- Signage elements shall be coordinated and consistent in style and appearance.
- A classically styled suite of elements is thought to be most appropriate.
- The location and distribution of all signage shall be carefully considered and controlled. It shall not be delivered on an ad hoc basis.
- There needs to be full dialogue and coordination between Macclesfield Borough Council and Cheshire County Council Officers.
- There needs to be a regular commitment to maintenance and tight control of maintenance tasks.
- Mechanisms should be established to shape the treatment of shop frontages so that the public realm is not compromised by inappropriate facades, lighting and architectural treatments.
- The signage system could be conceived as “pieces of art” in their own right.
- The signage system should be coordinated with lighting levels and fittings.