

Wickham Market Mystery Shopper Audit

Prepared for: **East Suffolk Council**

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Prepared by:



Produced for:



Town Mystery Shopper Audit – Wickham Market

Introduction

WHAT?

The audit provides information useful to those involved in destination management. It covers aspects of the town that are important to the quality of the visitor (tourist, day tripper, shopper). The audit evaluates the standard of infrastructure that visitors can expect when they arrive.

WHERE?

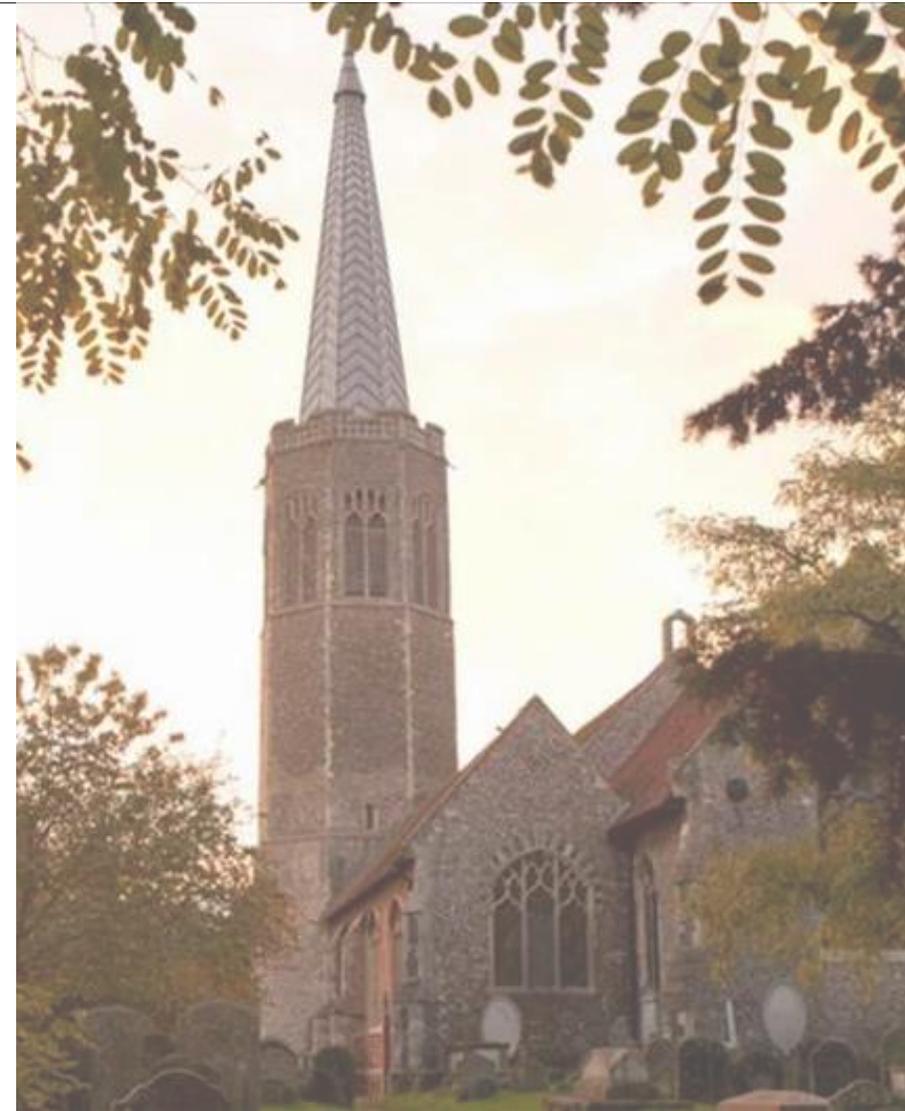
Wickham Market town centre

HOW?

An experienced researcher uses a detailed check list to evaluate the town's facility in an objective way. The researcher measures what is observable, using objective questions that can be answered with yes / no responses.

WHEN?

One visit to the town centre carried out on Wednesday 23 August, 2023.



Source: www.thesuffolkcoast.co.uk



Introduction

First impressions are all important, with visitors often basing their entire opinion of a town on their arrival experience. Not only is it important that visitors can find their way to the town centre or local amenities and attractions, they should also be able to park quickly and easily within the town centre.

A clean and tidy appearance will go a long way to creating a positive visitor experience. It is also essential that visitors are provided with information to enable them to find their way around the town.

They should be able to expect a safe and welcoming atmosphere. Street furniture should be provided and must be well maintained and in working order to ensure a positive impression.



Signage

It is important that visitors can find their way to, and around a town. Both road and pedestrian signs can help ease the visitor's arrival. Road and pedestrian signs are important as they play an important role in helping visitors to find the town centre easily and make their way around its streets.

There should be:

- Signs indicating arrival on approach roads to the town;
- Clear road signs to the town centre and brown signs to main attractions (if applicable);
- Pedestrian signs pointing the way to all major attractions, shopping streets, car parks and leisure facilities.

The signs should be:

- Clearly legible;
- At a suitable height;
- Of uniform design;
- Free from dirt and graffiti.



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Signage

There was a black, cast-iron ornamental village sign on the High Street, next to The Hill car park. It was of a very high standard, showing key characteristic features of the village, such as the church tower or its farming roots.

The mystery shopper could not find pedestrian signs pointing the way to all major attractions, shopping streets, car parks and leisure facilities.

There were village signs at the side of the road located near the boundaries of the village. The mystery shopper drove along the High Street (B1078, B1438) and inspected the main village signs on arrival from Charsfield (B1078) and from the A12.

Overall, the signs were poorly maintained, some were damaged or dirty and in some cases they were surrounded by overgrown vegetation, making sign visibility very limited (See map and images overleaf).

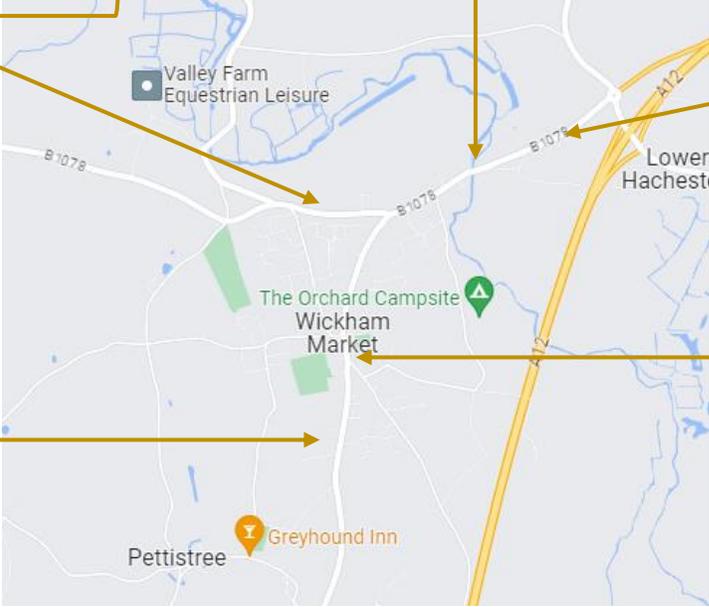


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Arrival signs



Some arrival signs are damaged, dirty and hidden in overgrown vegetation



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Signage – Parking and information

There were several signs throughout the village pointing to public car parks, the village hall and the library. The combined parking and information signs spotted showed evident signs rust and dirt. In some cases, signs also showed signs of disrepair or damage. Consideration should be given to either cleaning or removing it if it does not longer serve a purpose.

There were also good examples of clear signage and signs within a neat and tidy soundings and floral displays.



Information Boards

It is important that information is readily available for the visitor so that he or she knows where to locate attractions or how to find a particular street or shop. The provision of information can also be used to direct visitors away from areas that may be perceived in a negative light.

Boards should be:

- Present and located where clearly visible to arriving visitors;
- On a hard standing area such as Tarmac or concrete (a grass area will soon become worn and retain water when it rains);
- Positioned at an appropriate height and at an angle that doesn't retain rain water or snow, or glare in bright sunlight;
- Well lit, either by general street lighting or dedicated lights;
- Legible with large print for those with impaired vision, clean and free from graffiti.



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Information Boards

The mystery shopper inspected the information boards along the High Street. The supermarket carpark benefits from a good information board. There were also information boards on The Hill. The Parish Council information board displayed a range of leaflets and posters with information about local activities and advertisements for local businesses. A second board showed a map of the village, details of key local amenities and facilities as well as tourist highlights.

The overall quality of the information boards on The Hill was very good although there a small amount of dirt at the top of the of the information board to The Hill.



Open Spaces & Floral Displays

Open spaces such as gardens and parks, along with floral displays can be important to the quality of the visitor experience. Whilst not essential, they help to make towns more aesthetically pleasant.

Open spaces should be:

- Well maintained, with tidy borders; Free from rubbish;
- Safe, with a feeling of security.
- Litter bins, furniture, lighting and hard surface pathways.

Floral displays should be:

- Well maintained, free from weeds and litter;
- Include a range of colours or plant types;
- Clearly visible along main routes or in central locations.



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Open Spaces & Floral Displays

During the visit to Wickham Market, the mystery shopper spotted some floral displays. The displays were limited in number, but of good quality and pleasant design. Some good examples were the green area around the war memorial and the lawn area around the Public Library and the Health Centre.

Unfortunately, there were also some clear examples of untidy side streets, such as Chapel Lane, with a large presence of weeds.



Parking

Ease of parking, car park design and the cost of parking are all important. Visitors should be able to find spaces close to the town centre relatively easily. The design should facilitate easy and safe movement of traffic and pedestrians within the car park. Provision should be made for various types of visitor and vehicle. Car parks or street parking should also be located close to an area attractive to visitors, i.e. the high street.

There should be:

- Provision for parking either through car parks or street parking.

Car parks and areas of street parking should be:

- Easy to locate and enter from the local street network;
- Secure with visible deterrents against vandalism and theft;
- Well lit, with lights thoughtfully placed to provide security and safety for pedestrians;
- Clean and tidy with well maintained Tarmac or concrete surfaces.

They should provide:

- Spaces for disabled motorists, parents with children, and motorbikes;
- Direct and signed pedestrian routes from the car parks to the town centre, segregated from traffic routes;
- Clear indications of one way or directional systems.



Parking

Spaces should:

- Conform to the minimum standard length of 4.8 metres, with a width of 2.4 metres for normal spaces and 3.6 metres for disabled and parent spaces. Disabled and parent spaces should be clearly signposted and marked with yellow lines and wheelchair symbols, and close to pedestrian walkways. Motorbike spaces should also be marked and signposted;
- Be clearly delineated;
- Be sufficient in number to meet maximum demand.

Charges:

- Charges should be clearly indicated along with time limits and complaints procedures.
- Where applicable, pay and display machines should give change and be free from obstruction, dirt or graffiti.

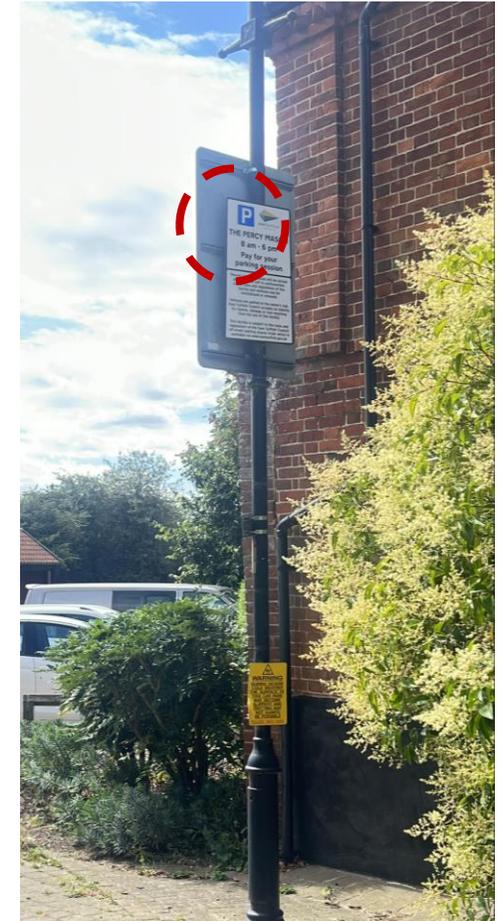


Parking

The mystery shopper inspected the car parks at Chapel Lane, the Village Hall car park, the Percy Mason car park and The Hill car park. Signposting immediately adjacent to the entrance to some of the car parks was too small and could be easily missed. Some showed clear signs of disrepair and consideration should be given to mending or replacing them at the earliest opportunity.

The sign at the entrance of the Percy Mason car park was not visible to see from The Hill, as it was completely obstructed by a large bush. There were no other signs pointing to the car park entrance, making it impossible to find for anyone not already familiar with its location.

Signage to the Village Hall car park also needs urgent attention.



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Parking

- On the whole the public car parks have poor delineation and, in some cases, delineation was practically non-existent.
- The car park on Chapel Lane benefit from a number of designated disabled person's parking spaces as well as spaces for library and surgery staff. These were well positioned and of suitable width, but delineation is poor.
- Charges are clearly marked on the sign adjacent to the pay machine. However, it was noticed that some of the tariff signs were of poor quality (laminated paper signs). Consideration should be given to changing them for more permanent and better quality signs.



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Parking



Street Furniture

Street furniture such as benches, litter bins and fences all help to improve the visual aspect of a town.

Furniture should:

- Stand on hard surfaces, free from obstruction;
- Be free of graffiti, dirt, gum or bird droppings;
- Be regularly and well maintained.

Cleanliness

Cleanliness refers to the general appearance of the town in terms of tidiness and lack of litter.

The town should be:

- Tidy in appearance with no visible litter;
- Free from graffiti, gum and other forms of vandalism.



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Street Furniture

Street furniture was generally of a basic quality, with limited provision of seating and of bike racks.

Seating benches were generally clean but basic in appearance. Consideration should be given to replacing them with new ones, more comfortable and of better quality, should the opportunity arise.



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Cleanliness

Litter bins were present in a range of designs. Generally, they were black and made of plastic, but other designs were also present, including wheelie bins and commercial recycling wheelie bins. Most bins appeared to have been emptied frequently but one of the bins on The Hill was full.

The wheelie bins did not interfere with pedestrian or vehicle access to buildings, but consideration should be given to ensuring they are positioned in the shade or under shelter, to avoid potential odours.



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