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COUNCILS URGED TO CUT STREET CLUTTER

Councils will today be urged to get rid of unnecessary signs, railings, and advertising hoardings in a bid to make streets tidier and less confusing for motorists and pedestrians.

Communities Secretary Eric Pickles and Transport Secretary Philip Hammond are concerned that the character of the country's urban spaces is being damaged and have written to councils leaders calling on them to reduce the number of signs and other 'street clutter'.

The Government believes that in some cases traffic signs and railings are installed by councils in the mistaken belief that they are legally required. However, although some signs are required by law, Government advice is that for signs to be most effective they should be kept to a minimum. To help councils do this the Department for Transport is reviewing traffic signs policy and new advice on how to reduce clutter will be published later this year.

Ministers want communities to inform local authorities of particularly bad examples of clutter as part of the Big Society in action. Organisations who promote good urban design like Civic Voice, Living Streets and fixmystreet.com are already helping people alert councils to examples of clutter and showing people how to carry out street audits.

Eric Pickles said:

"Our streets are losing their English character. We are being overrun by scruffy signs, bossy bollards, patchwork paving and railed off roads wasting taxpayers' money that could be better spent on fixing potholes or keeping council tax down. We need to 'cut the clutter'.

“Too many overly cautious townhall officials are citing safety regulations as the reason for cluttering up our streets with an obstacle course when the truth is very little is dictated by law. Common sense tells us uncluttered streets have a fresher, freer authentic feel, which are safer and easier to maintain.

“Organisations like Civic Voice, Living Streets and fixmystreet can help councils provide a Big Society solution – local people carrying out street audits will bring power and character back to neighbourhoods.”

Philip Hammond said:

"We all know that some signs are necessary to make our roads safe and help traffic flow freely. But unnecessary street furniture is a waste of taxpayers' money and leaves our streets looking more like scrap yards than public spaces.

"We have written to councils to remind them that it need not be this way - we don't need all this clutter confusing motorists, obstructing pedestrians and hindering those with disabilities who are trying to navigate our streets.

"Empowered local communities working together with councils can bring an end to this blight on our national landscape."

Salisbury is a beautiful Cathedral City, full of history and renowned architecture. However the Salisbury Civic Society concluded, after carrying out a survey of over 60 streets, that it has become cluttered over time markedly reducing its character. They found the city centre was littered with hundreds of bollards. For example one parking area for 53 cars had 63 bollards. They now have a comprehensive public realm strategy aimed at creating an attractive, safe, clean and green city.

Tony Burton, Director of Civic Voice, said:

“Too many streets are plagued with pointless clutter, blighting the local environment and people’s lives. Civic Voice believes in streets we can all be

proud of. Our Street Pride campaign gives people the power to make a difference. With today's welcome backing from the Government we should reclaim our streets and see them cleared of clutter."

In addition to reducing clutter, well designed streets can also help reduce accidents. Street clutter was removed from Kensington High Street, which has helped reduce accidents by up to 47%. The revamp of Oxford Circus reduced street clutter and barriers and introduced a diagonal crossing to let pedestrians navigate one of London's busiest intersections faster.

Tony Armstrong, Chief Executive of Living Streets, said:

"It's about time action was taken on our cluttered streets. For too long have pedestrians had to struggle with unnecessary bollards, guard-railing and pointless signs. Community involvement, stronger guidance from central government and a coordinated approach from local councils are all crucial ingredients to rid our streets of unnecessary obstacles for pedestrians. Councils in particular should ensure that de-cluttering is prioritised and championed across all departments.

"Through our own audits with local communities and councils, we have found that stripping back street clutter transforms our streets from trip hazards to enjoyable open spaces where people want to walk. We welcome this step towards cutting the clutter."

The Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment's (CABE) technical design expertise has also helped councils and communities with practical advice on cutting clutter and creating the best public space.

Notes to Editor

1. Government advice is clear that "the excessive or insensitive use of traffic signs and other street furniture has a negative impact on the success of the street as a place" and that "street signs are periodically audited with a view to identifying and removing unnecessary signs" (Manual for Streets, Department for Transport,

2007 can be found at:

<http://www.dft.gov.uk/pgr/sustainable/manforstreets/pdfmanforstreets.pdf>)

2. Traffic signs, road markings, street furniture, advertising boards and other obstacles all contribute to street clutter. Many signs and lines are simply not needed, perhaps a legacy of earlier but obsolete schemes or unnecessary duplicates provided as part of a 'belt and braces' approach to design. Wherever possible, these should be identified, reviewed and removed on a regular basis as a cost-effective means of improving the streetscape. ('Traffic Management and Streetscape', DfT local transport note 1/08)
3. 'Appropriate warning signs can greatly assist road safety. To be most effective, however, they should be used sparingly.' (Traffic Signs Manual <http://www.dft.gov.uk/pgr/roads/tss/tsmanual/>)
4. The Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) is available to support community groups and other bodies to ensure that buildings and public spaces are well-designed and managed. A range of case studies that communities and councils can draw on at can be found at <http://www.cabe.org.uk/>
5. Several organisations are also helping reduce street clutter including:
 - **Civic Voice** is the national charity for the civic movement. It makes places more attractive, enjoyable and distinctive and promotes civic pride. Street Pride is Civic Voice's national campaign supporting local action to help rid our streets of unnecessary clutter. At its heart is a street survey undertaken by local people to provide evidence for councils to take action. The local surveys are being combined to support a national call for action to create more streets we can be proud of. Civic Voice's Street Pride campaign toolkit and briefings can be downloaded here <http://www.civicvoice.org.uk/campaigns/street-pride/>
 - **FixMyStreet** is a site to help people report, view, or discuss local problems they've found, problems such as graffiti, fly tipping, broken paving slabs, or street lighting, to their local council by simply locating them on a map. It

launched in early February 2007. The free site reports postings to the relevant council by email. The council can then resolve the problem the way they normally would. Alternatively, you can discuss the problem on the website with others, and then together lobby the council to fix it, or fix it directly yourselves. <http://www.fixmystreet.com>

- **Living Streets** believes that streets should be designed with people in mind. Unnecessary street clutter and design can get in the way of people safely making their journey on foot. <http://www.livingstreets.org.uk/news/uk/-/stripping-back-street-clutter>

6. Other organisations with an interest in de-cluttering, all of which are involved in the DfT's Traffic Signs Policy Review, include English Heritage (www.english-heritage.org.uk), the Campaign to Protect Rural England (www.cpre.org.uk) and the RAC Foundation for Motoring (www.rac.co.uk).

7. The Salisbury Civic Society full street survey report can be found at:
<http://www.salisburycivicsociety.org.uk/streetscape/Final%20Report.pdf>

This is now been developed into a public realm strategy for Salisbury Vision. Contact Wiltshire Council for more details.

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