

# Clutter Busting - Less is More

An investigation of & recommendations for reducing the visual intrusion of traffic signs  
June 2010





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# Executive summary



Alan Baxter was asked by English Heritage and the Department for Transport, on behalf of the Signs and Environment Policy Working Group, to investigate practical mechanisms, ideally using existing regulatory processes, for reducing the visual intrusion of traffic signs.

The root of the problem is that the system for designing and approving traffic sign schemes is covered by road traffic legislation, which is concerned solely with safety, the enforcement of traffic regulations and information to road users. Environmental and design considerations, which are central to the planning system, play no part.

The aim of the project was therefore to identify key moments in the existing processes (of planning as well as highway design and approval) when design considerations could be taken into account, without the requirement for major legislative or other change, and with maximum cost benefit.

The project identified the following possibilities for change:

**In the planning approval process:**

- Amendment of the Town & Country Planning Act 1990, and of the General Permitted Development Order, allow the use of Article 4 Directions to bring selected traffic signing schemes within the planning system. This would enable design considerations to play a full part in the approval process, but would introduce a need for parallel consents (planning and highway) and would blur the currently clear division in responsibility between planning and highway authorities. It would also require primary legislation.

- Amendment of the Town & Country Planning Act 1990 and the Control of Advertisement Regulations 2007 to include traffic signs within the definition of an advertisement. This would also require primary legislation but would not be as effective as using the GPDO.

**In the Highways approval process:**

- Redrafting of the Traffic Signs Manual. This is a fundamental tool for those designing and approving signing schemes, but its complexities can foster a 'one size fits all' and risk averse approach amongst some designers. This has led in certain circumstances to placement of oversized and duplicated signs. The radical change of redrafting the Traffic Signs Manual could be considered, to be arranged by category of road, to reflect the differing signing requirements of, for example, Home Zones and Trunk Roads, and it could give a clear 'less is more' message. In the longer term, this could have a major impact on the design of new schemes, though its impact on reducing the clutter of existing signs would be more limited. It is noted that complete redrafting of the Traffic Signs Manual would also be a major undertaking and must be a long-term aspiration.
- Amendment of the Traffic Order Regulations, to allow consultation on traffic signs (for example, with local authority Design & Conservation officers) for proposals for new Regulatory signs. This would allow design and place-making considerations to be taken in to account, but using the existing, or slightly amended, procedure for making representations.

- Introduction of the Quality Audit, either as part of or alongside the existing Road Safety Audit process. Although the Quality Audit could be made statutory, a voluntary system is probably preferable, and could be incorporated into Local Transport Plan 3 (LTP3) objectives to incentivise local authorities. The appointment of 'Less Clutter Champions' could significantly enhance the effectiveness of both the Quality Audit and the Traffic Order Regulation consultation, by promoting a fundamental change of mindset among those responsible for the design and approval of traffic signing.

Of these possibilities, the amendment of the Traffic Order Regulation and the introduction of voluntary Quality Audits seem to be the most cost-effective ways of beginning to reverse the trend for traffic sign clutter and to introduce design and place-making criteria alongside the highway considerations which currently dominate.

It is recommended that these ideas are taken forward for more detailed consideration, in the wider context of other studies being undertaken by the various Working Groups of the Traffic Signs Policy Review.

# 1.0 Introduction



In September 2008 the Department for Transport (DfT) launched a traffic signs policy review with the objective of developing a traffic sign system that will meet the changing needs of road users and provide effective tools for the better management of the road network, incorporating new technologies and minimising the impact on the environment.

This is the most comprehensive review since the current basis of signing was established over 40 years ago following the Worboys Committee's Report of 1963. This project was commissioned through the Environment Group and is being taken forward as part of the agreed action plan for the review.

In March 2010, Alan Baxter was commissioned by English Heritage and the Department for Transport, on behalf of the Signs and Environment Policy Review Working Group, working as part of the Traffic Signs Policy Review, to investigate ways in which the visual intrusion of traffic signs might be reduced.

The focus of this study is on identifying practical mechanisms, ideally using existing regulatory processes, by which it would be possible to introduce place-making considerations, alongside the existing criteria of safety and information, in the decision making process which leads to the erection of new traffic signs.

The problem which the study seeks to address is, in essence, simple and all too visible in our streets and roads.

Traffic signs were originally designed to provide information for drivers, so there was no consideration of their impact on the environment. At a time when there was little traffic and few signs, this was not a problem.

However, the proliferation in both the type of signs (from 272 in 1964, to 862 in the 2002 regulations) and in their sheer quantity means that they are becoming evermore intrusive, for various reasons:

- there is an increasingly prevalent use of larger, brighter signs to compete for drivers' attention, which has in some ways led to signs losing their original design integrity
- there has been an accumulation of different types of signs in one place, caused partly by a lack of coordination between new and existing schemes, but also by the risk averse attitude of designers and Highway Authorities, which leads to the duplication of, for example, speed limit and no entry signs
- new designations, such as Home Zones, 20mph Zones and CPZs all require their own signs. Many of these designations are made in town or village centres and other historic places and, by reducing traffic or parking, should benefit the overall environment; much of this benefit, however, is being eroded by, in some cases, the resultant visual blight of signs located without regard to place-making considerations.

It is widely recognised that the situation has become serious, while various studies have demonstrated just how many signs are unnecessary or ineffective. There have been various studies too, which demonstrate how signs can be reduced, or sited more sympathetically. Yet, with a few beacon exceptions, very little has been achieved. The root of the problem lies in the fact that the system of designing and approving signs is covered by road traffic legislation, which is completely separate from the planning system, and which is concerned solely with safety, the enforcement of traffic regulations and information to road users. Environmental considerations, which are central to the planning system, play no part.

Manual for Streets does now bridge the gap between planning policy and residential street design, however more can be done.

The aim of this project, therefore, is to understand the current processes of the design and approval of traffic sign schemes, as well as the parallel process of planning consent, to identify key moments where design considerations could be taken into account, to consider the regulatory changes which might be needed, and to assess the impact in terms of the efficient use of scarce resources relative to the benefit. Since the problem lies not just in new signing schemes, but also in existing areas of clutter and visual degradation, we have also considered how to undo damage that has already been done. As much as possible this has been focused on taking advantage of existing processes.

The following sections take the various existing regulatory processes (Planning in Section 2, Highways in Section 3). In each case, we start by describing the existing process, before identifying where change could be introduced to allow place-making to be considered and then setting out briefly the pros and cons of each suggestion. Section 4 then pulls all the threads together, to make some overall recommendations on the best way ahead.

It is important that this report is not seen in isolation, but as complementary to the other projects for the Traffic Signs Review, in particular the reviews of area wide parking controls and the Traffic Regulation Order process for signing.



This scheme at Bank Street in Ashford provides a good example the 'less is more' approach to traffic signs

## 2.0 The planning process



## The current process

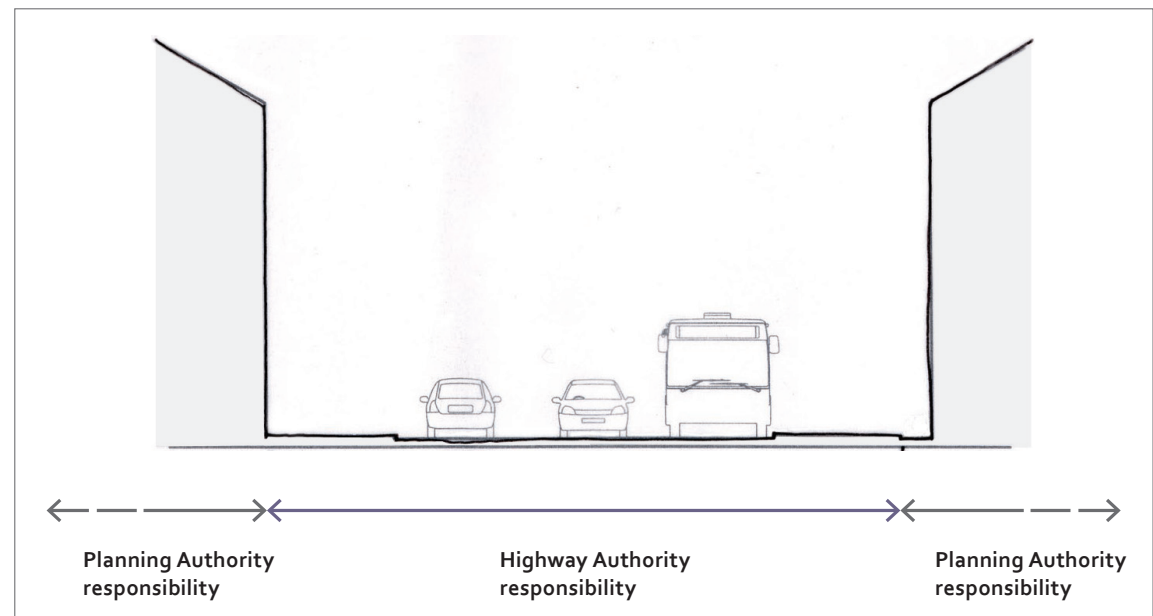
### Town & Country Planning Act 1990

The legal basis for the planning system is the Town & Country Planning Act 1990 (TCPA), which includes within it the basic framework associated with obtaining planning permission for new development.

In deciding whether to allow planning permission for a new development, Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) have a duty to consider the design merits of the proposals. Government guidance is set out in Planning Policy Statement 1: Delivering Sustainable Development (PPS1), (ODPM, 2005) and is supplemented by a number of good practice guides, including *By Design*, (DETR & CABE 2000) which establishes key design principles for development.

For the historic environment, the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act of 1990 includes within it a parallel process of Listed Building and Conservation Area consents where, again, design considerations – particularly the impact of proposals on the significance of a place – should be a key consideration in LPAs decisions on whether to approve development. Government guidance has recently been enhanced through the publication of Planning Policy Statement 5: Planning and the Historic Environment (PPS5) (ODPM 2010) and its accompanying Good Practice Guide.

It is important to note that, at present, the Town & Country Planning Act 1990 explicitly excludes as beyond its scope 'the carrying out on land within the boundaries of a road by a local highway authority of any works required for the maintenance and improvement of the road'. A clear boundary between the responsibilities of the Planning Authority and the Highway Authority is established, as shown in the figure below.



Clear distinction between responsibilities of planning and highway authority

**The Town and Country (General Permitted Development Order) 1995**

Under the General Permitted Development Order (GPDO) certain specified types of development are exempted from the need to make an application for Planning Permission. However, in certain cases where it feels that development would be for example detrimental to the local environment and amenity, LPAs can make a Direction under Article 4 of the TCPA, to remove certain permitted development rights in a specific area. An example might be a Conservation Area, where an Article 4 Direction can be used to prevent the painting of brickwork in a uniform terrace of houses, or the demolition of front garden walls to create off street parking. Anyone wishing to carry out these works within the specified area must then apply for Planning Permission.

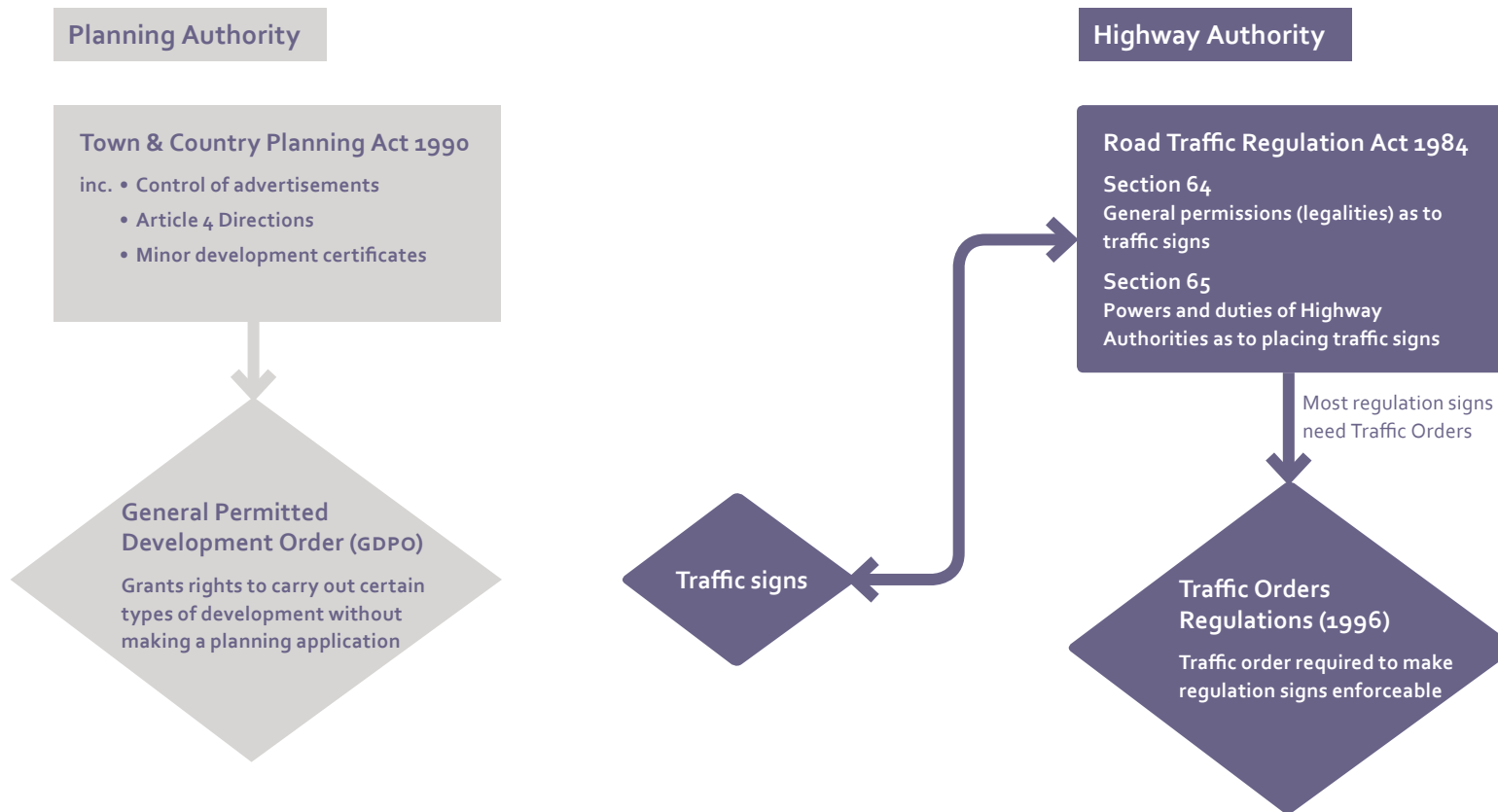
**The Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements) (England) Regulations 2007**

These regulations came into force in 2007 as part of the TCPA and apply to the display of advertisements on sites in England. The regulations give powers to be exercised by the LPA with regard to the siting of advertisements with the interests of amenity and public safety in mind.

These regulations do not apply to traffic signs that are located on Highway Authority land, however they do apply to directional notices located outside Highway land, such as within supermarket car parks and business parks with private (non-adopted) roads.

**Minor Development Certificates**

The Killian Pretty Review of November 2008 proposed the use of Minor Development Certificates to be used for non-householder, minor applications. At present, these have not been incorporated into planning legislation as doing so will involve an overhaul of all permitted development rights. It will also require a new system to be put into place in terms of dealing with the administration. The CLG is due to publish a timetable in terms of taking a review of permitted development rights forward in June 2010, although it is not known whether developing Minor Development Certificates will be continued.



Existing controls of the planning and highway authorities

### A possible amendment to the planning process

It may be possible to amend the Town & Country Planning Act to bring traffic signs within its control. Doing so would require an amendment to primary legislation together with an amendment to the GPDO.

Assuming this was possible, it has the potential to provide LPAs an option to make an Article 4 Direction which would require the Highway Authority to obtain planning permission for the erection of traffic signs. This in turn would allow the design considerations which are standard considerations in the determination of planning applications to be applied to new traffic signing schemes. It is considered that this approach is most likely to be beneficial in urban areas, for example where traffic should not always feel as it has priority over other street users.

In a Conservation Area, for example, it would be necessary for the Highway Authority to demonstrate that its proposals 'preserved or enhanced the character or appearance of the Conservation Area'. It would be up to individual LPAs to decide where it wished to introduce these stricter controls, which might be, for example, a World Heritage Site, Conservation Area or other Local Plan designations such as Town or Village Centres.

Should the use of Minor Development Certificates be accepted in the future by CLG, it may be worth considering their application to traffic signs in some areas.

### Pros and cons

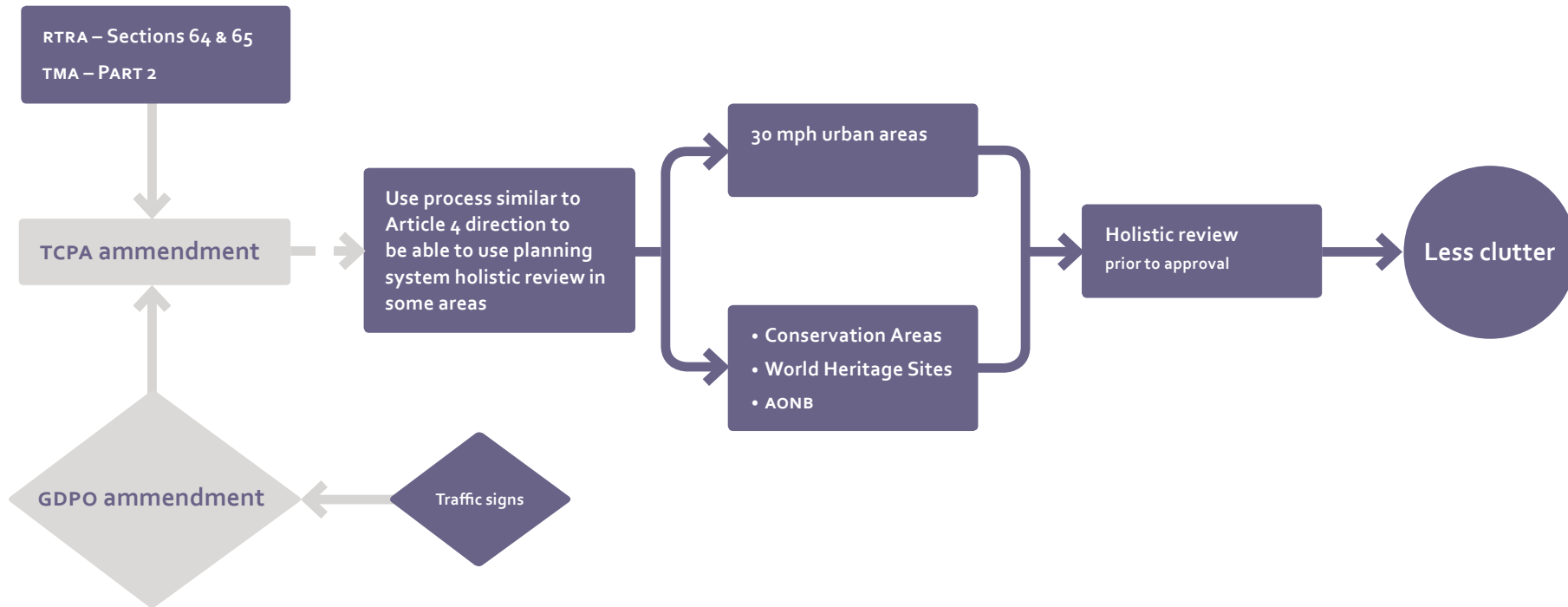
#### Pros:

- would allow design considerations to be taken into account
- could be targeted on specific areas
- would allow local participation (because of requirement to advertise (which would have significant cost implications) and because permission given by elected members of the planning committee)

#### Cons:

- requires an amendment to primary legislation (and further amendments to the GPDO)
- would increase the bureaucratic procedures required by the planning system and potentially put an overload on planning authorities
- introduces a second, parallel requirement for consent, with potential time and cost implications for both the Highway and the Planning Authority
- blurs the currently clear legal distinction between Highway and Planning matters
- divorces design considerations from safety and information considerations
- only applicable to new schemes

In theory it may also be possible to bring traffic signs within the Control of Advertisements Regulations. However, this would mean that every new traffic sign would require advertisement consent and bring with it considerable cost and time implications for LPAs. The use of the GPDO and Article 4 Directions would allow a more selective approach, which would be preferable.



Possible process for amending TCPA and GPDO to bring traffic signs into the control of the planning authority



## 3.0 The highways process



## The current process

The Highway Authority has responsibility for works to maintain and keep safe the adopted highway.

### The Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984

Under the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984, Highway Authorities have a duty to secure convenient and safe movement of cars and pedestrians. Under sections 64 and 65 of the Act, they are permitted to place prescribed or authorised traffic signs on or near any road.

Traffic signs that Highway Authorities are permitted to use are prescribed for use by the Department for Transport, by being included in the set of signs set out in the *Traffic Signs Regulations and General Directions* (TSRGD; see below). Signs not included in the TSRGD need special permission from the Secretary of State for Transport to be used.

### The Traffic Signs Regulations and General Directions 2002

The TSRGD prescribes the designs and conditions of use for traffic signs that can be lawfully placed on or near roads in Great Britain (as set out in sections 64 and 65 of the Road Traffic Regulation Act). It also sets out the legal aspects of allowing Highway Authorities to use and enforce traffic signs.

Traffic signs are divided into three categories:

- Regulatory Signs (circular: prohibited movements, prohibition of traffic, speed limits, bus lanes, cycle lanes etc, with exceptions such as stop signs, give way signs, waiting and loading restrictions, parking restrictions etc)
- Warning Signs (triangular: such as junctions ahead, deviation of route, road narrows, two-way traffic, dual carriageway, hills, bridges and other structures etc.)
- Information Signs (rectangular: such as direction signs, tourist attractions etc)

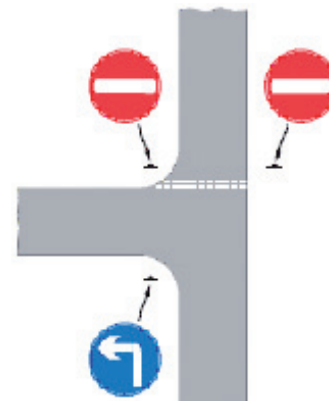
### The Traffic Signs Manual 1982, amended 2004

The TSRGD is a statutory instrument and is set out in the necessary legal format, using legal language which can make it difficult to understand. The Traffic Signs Manual (TSM) therefore provides practical, illustrated guidance for Highway Authorities on the use of traffic signs and road markings prescribed by TSRGD. The TSM is divided into chapters covering the three main categories of sign, as well as road markings and temporary signing. It is a guide book for highway engineers involved in the practical design or approval of signing schemes and it is thus a highly influential document. Rather than being produced in one go, it has been compiled and published chapter by chapter over a number of years, with various chapters including Chapter 2 – Informatory Signs still to be published.

The TSM is concerned with the safety and information aspects of traffic signs. Visual considerations are not necessarily part of its remit.

The TSM is very clear that traffic signing should only be provided where required and provides specific advice on how the overall impact should be managed. However, due to complexity of the TSM and its requirement to cover the multitude of situations that arise, its use can foster a cautious approach by highway engineers to specifying traffic signs. Due to these complexities, and perhaps a tendency to not fully understanding its purpose and the guidance set out within, it is considered that more signs than are sometimes necessary can be designed into highway schemes in an

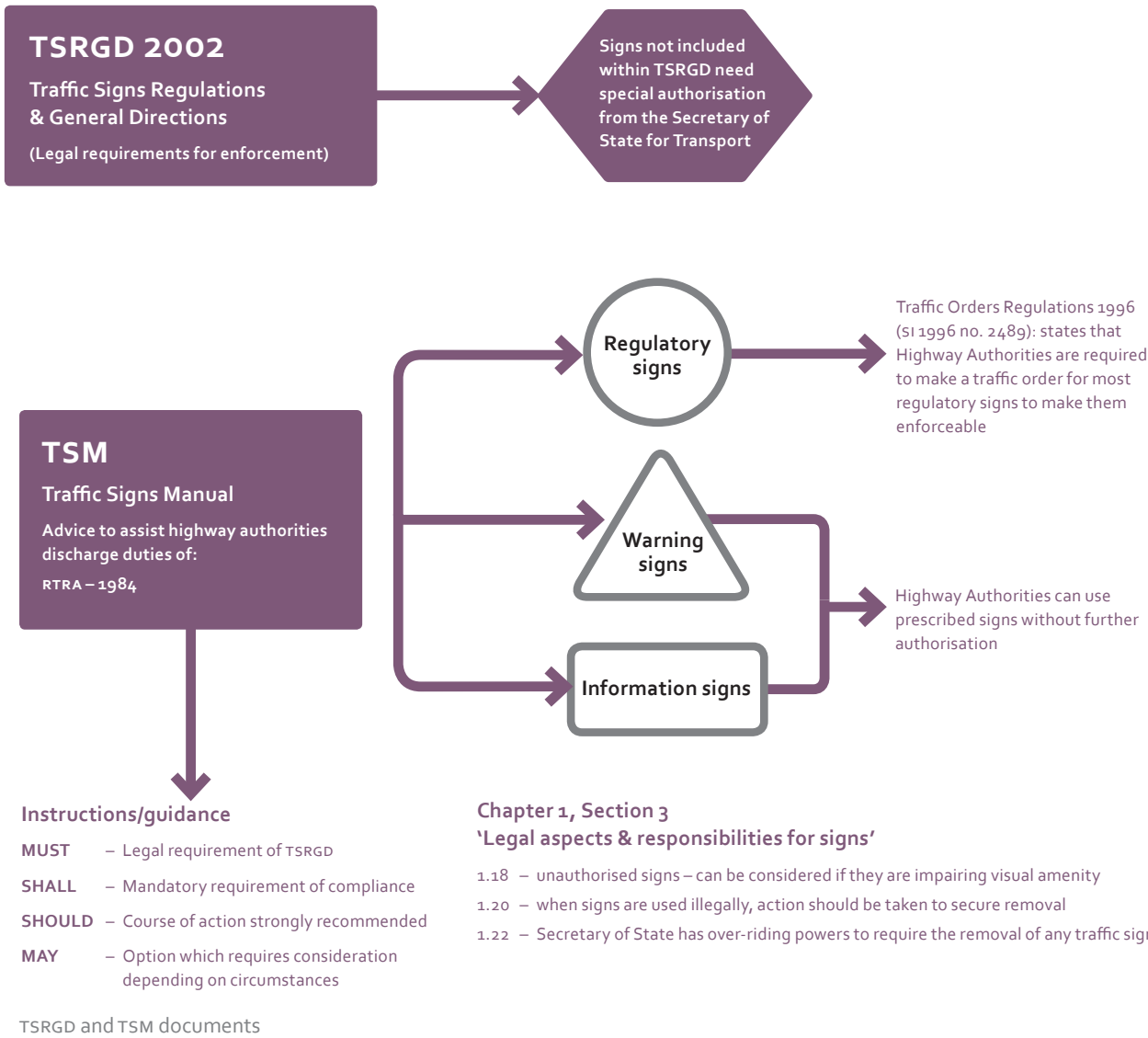
attempt by the highway engineer to provide a risk adverse approach. This approach is considered to have contributed to the abundance of traffic sign clutter we see on our streets today.



Approach currently recommended by the TSM



This conveys the same information with two less signs



### The process of erecting traffic signs: the Traffic Order Regulations (1996)

The process for erecting warning and information signs, as long as they are prescribed in TSRGD or have been authorised by the Secretary of State for Transport, is straightforward. The Highway Authority is entitled to erect these signs without further consultation or permissions. Since the TSM is the basic design manual used to decide the siting, number and design of new signs, designers tend to adopt the same risk-averse attitude, and there is no requirement to audit the current situation. This is a particular source of unnecessary duplication and the precautionary use of yellow backing boards for signs, which the TSM suggests can be used when it is felt a traffic sign needs to be given greater prominence. The potential disadvantages of using backing boards, including environmental intrusiveness, are noted in the TSM, with the use of larger than standard traffic signs being a way of increasing a sign's conspicuity. This approach can have other visual damaging effects on the environment.

As part of the traffic signs policy review, the DfT will issue guidance on auditing traffic signs, with a view to reducing unnecessary clutter. There is no requirement to audit, but Manual for Streets recommends that street authorities do so.

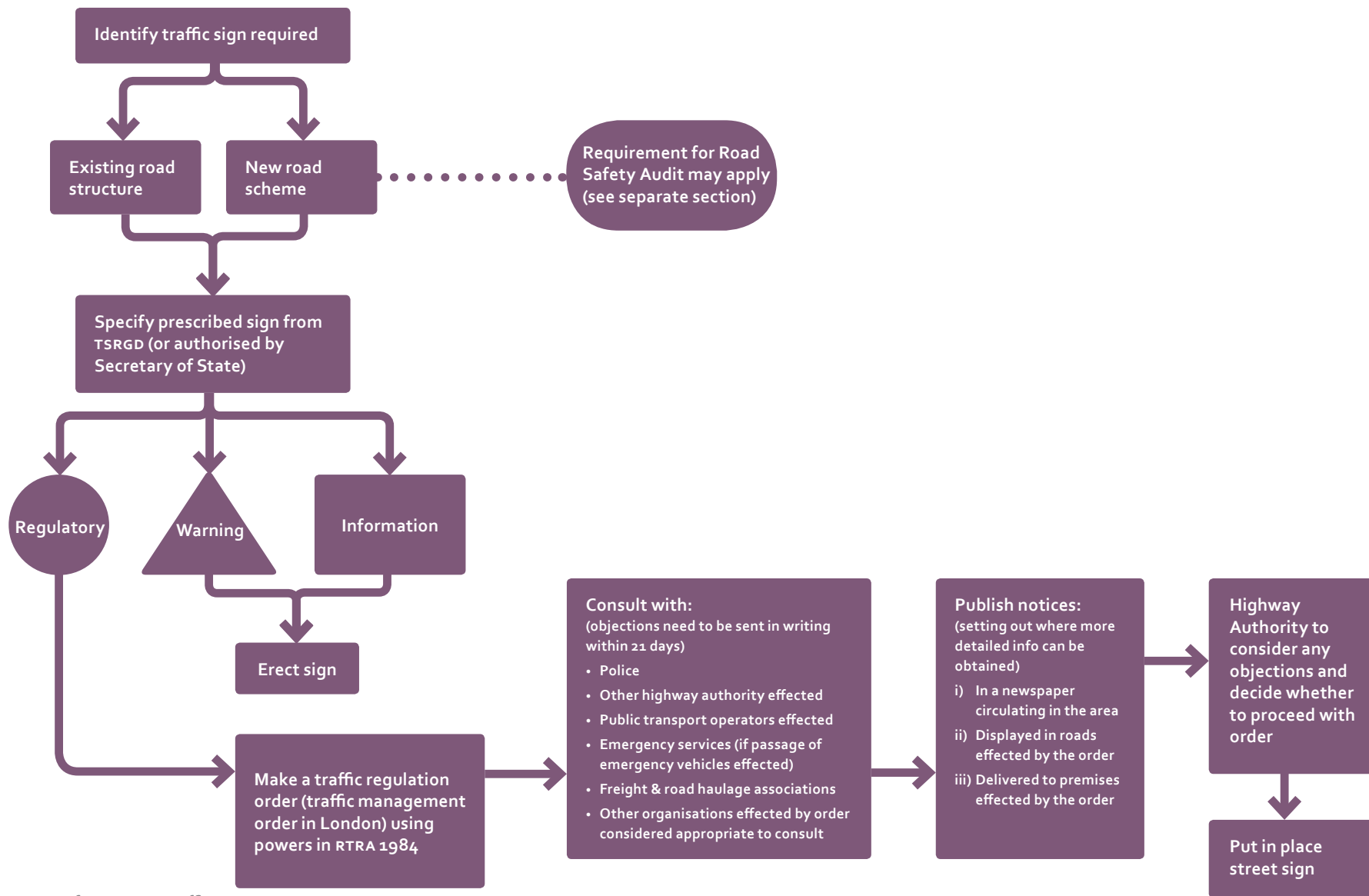
For regulatory signs, the Highway Authority is required to make a Traffic Regulation Order (TRO), which enables the Authority legally to enforce the regulation specified on the sign and in the Order. The Traffic Order Regulations (1996) specify the process that is required to achieve the order, as summarised in the diagram.

In order to make a TRO, there is a requirement for the Highway Authority to consult relevant statutory authorities and, by means of the publication of notices in a newspaper circulating locally and the London Gazette, individuals who might be affected by the order.

Statutory authorities and invited authorities have 21 days in which to object in writing to the content of the order. However, it seems the purpose of publishing notices is more of an information-giving exercise rather than a feedback loop approach and the regulations do not specify how objections may be made.

TfL currently has a budget of up to £3million per year for advertising Traffic Orders in relevant local press. This huge investment is considered currently to have very little effect.

New measures are being proposed in London to make it easier for local authorities to fix traffic signs and street lighting to buildings. In certain circumstances the necessary notice can be given to the resident or occupier of the building in question, or affixed to buildings or objects nearby. This has the potential to considerably reduce visual clutter and the multiplicity of posts and signs in the street.



Process for erecting traffic signs

### The Road Safety Audit process

A Road Safety Audit (RSA) is a way of reviewing design safety issues for new road schemes through an independent review process. RSAs are only mandatory for trunk road schemes, but are recommended as good practice for all highway schemes.

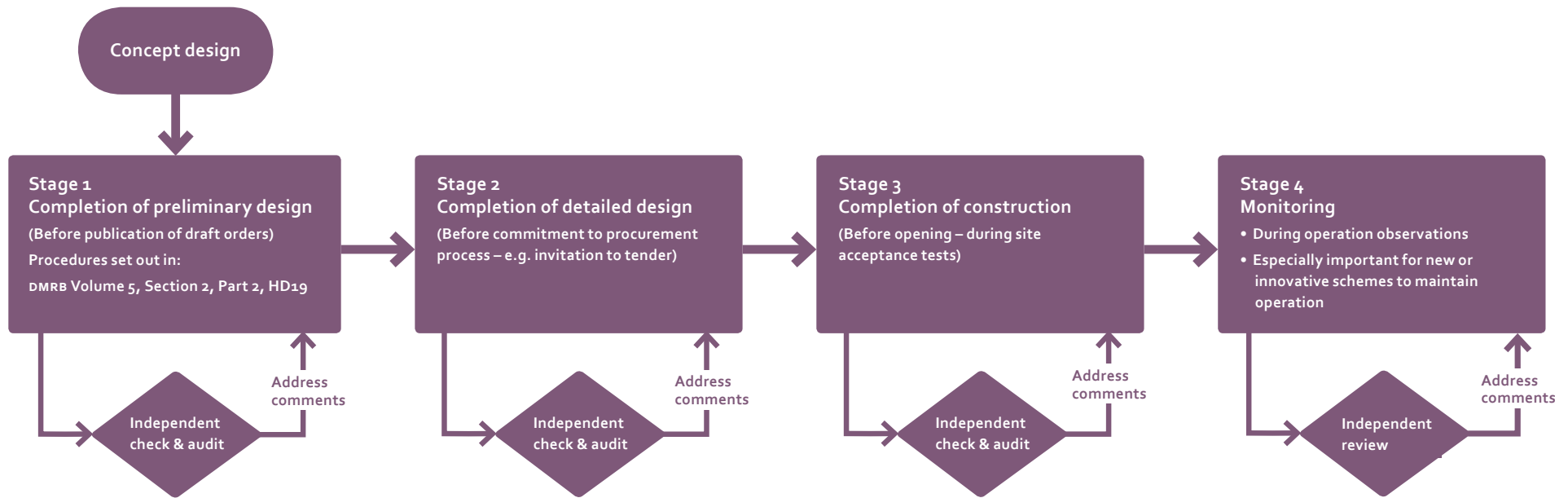
The purpose of an RSA is to identify road safety issues related to design, not to check the compliance of road design with design standards. The objective of an RSA is to minimise the number and severity of road accidents for all users. As currently constituted, it does not cover visual impact or place-making issues.

The road safety auditor, who has to be accredited, carries out the RSA at various stages of the design process and makes recommendations to the scheme designer.

There is no 'pass' or 'fail' for an RSA. It is up to the scheme designer to decide whether to implement recommendations from the RSA or justify reasoning against changing the design based on comments made based on the design rationale for the scheme. The designer would need to write an exception report for sign off by a senior office within the highway authority. The scheme designer always maintains responsibility for the overall design, which needs to be acceptable to the highway authority responsible.

### Possible amendments to the highways process

The above analysis of the various mechanisms for designing, auditing and approving signs has indicated a number of areas where consideration of visual impact and place-making might be incorporated.



Audit team is independent of design team

Stages 1–3 code of practice set out in DMRB, Volume 8, Section 1, Part 2 TA 84/06

**Notes**

1. Purpose of RSA is to identify road safety problems – **not** a check on compliance with design standards.
2. Objective is to minimise the number and severity of accidents on roads – for all users.
3. **Auditor** makes recommendations on scheme. **Designer** decides whether to implement or alter design, if the designer does not agree with the RSA comments he must write an exception report. The Designer maintains responsibility for the design which must be acceptable to highway authority.
4. There is no 'pass' or 'fail' for an RSA – Designers do not have to comply with recommendations, but have to justify reasoning in written report.
5. Road safety issues considered in isolation to visual quality or placemaking issues. Can be difficult to achieve a balanced design through dialogue and compromise.

Road Safety Audit Process

## The Traffic Signs Manual

As noted above, the TSM is the essential reference guide for highway engineers in the practical interpretation of the legal requirements of the TSRGD and the Road Traffic Regulation Act. It provides graphic and text examples of how signs should be used. The approach adopted within the TSM is one that is risk averse. This approach can lead to highway engineering interpreting the guidance to provide unnecessary duplication of signs and the use of yellow backing for signs which require specific attention to be drawn to them. Advice given within the TSM endorses use of yellow backing boards only in specific circumstances. Due to the prevalence of use of yellow backing boards, it is recommended the advice within the TSM regarding their use should be reviewed.

The TSM errs on the side of caution and in many cases provides a 'one size fits all' approach towards the use of traffic signs. This approach leads to an 'if in doubt, double it' attitude among designers, to the detriment of the place-making.

Re-drafting the TSM to shift its emphasis to 'less is more' and to encourage designers to think beyond pure highway considerations, would put in place a long-term basis for eliminating clutter.

One approach could be to split the TSM into different categories, to enable it to provide different guidance for different situations, so traffic signing can be recommended more appropriately.

Clearly, the TSM has to cover a wide range of functions. This suggestion would deal with place-making concerns but might not be appropriate for other areas. This exercise would of course entail

a huge undertaking to ensure coverage of the many situations the TSM must accommodate. The categories for TSM would need careful consideration. Speed and classification of route have been used as examples in the diagram opposite, but alternative categories could also be used. The Campaign for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE) has recently carried out some work entitled '*Thinking about zones and road hierarchies*'. The categories identified through this study (20mph zones, 40mph zones, Home Zones and Quiet Lanes) could be equally appropriate.

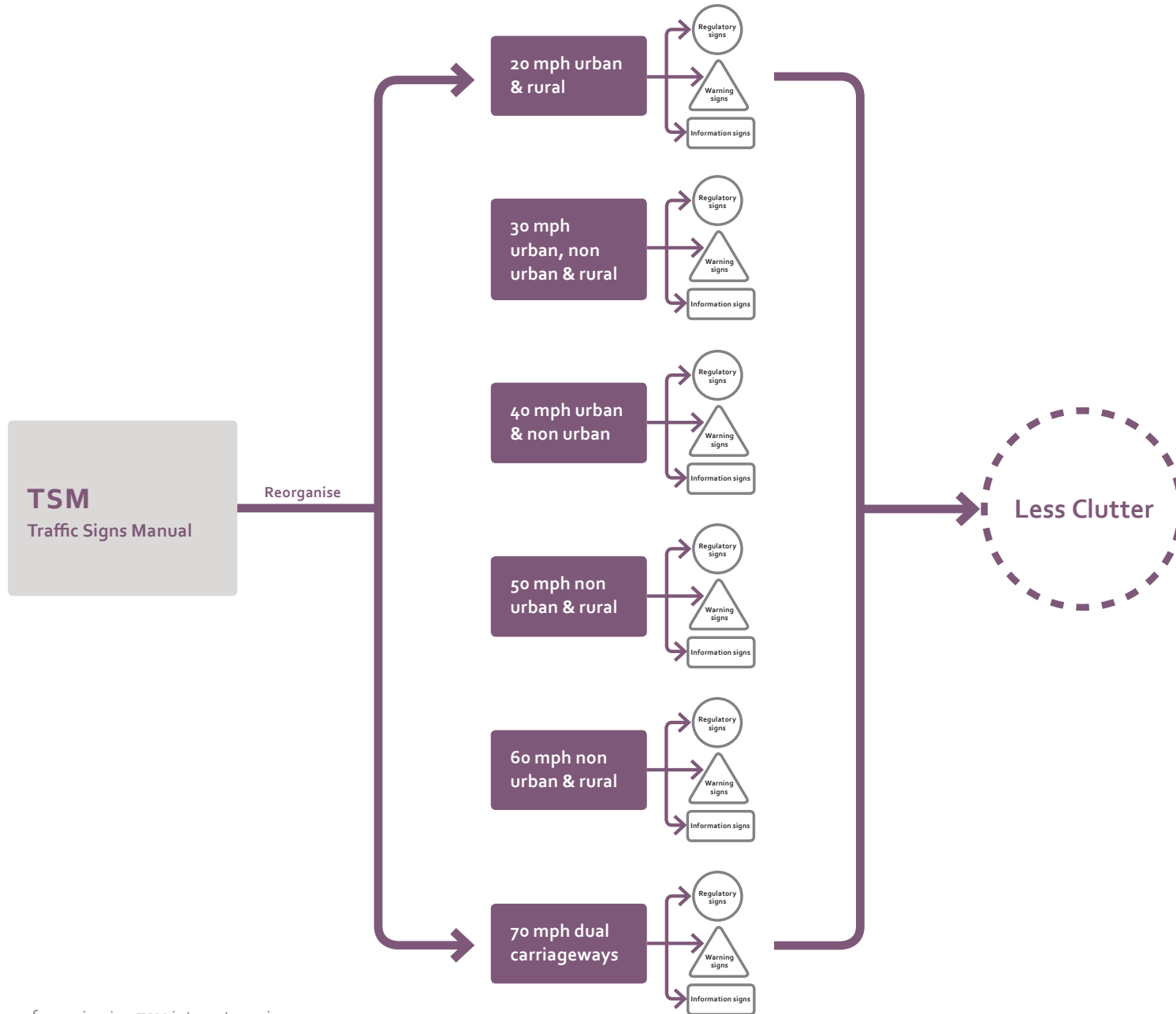
### Pros and cons

#### Pros:

- would provide widely accessible, authoritative and easily usable guidance for designers, with DfT endorsement of its 'less is more' approach
- addresses the route source of the problem for the long term

#### Cons:

- would be a considerable undertaking, requiring significant time and resources to implement
- risk of conflict with other priorities that the TSM must cover
- would not address existing clutter



Summary of process for reviewing TSM into categories

### Traffic Orders Regulations 1996 (SI 1996 No. 2489)

It is understood that a large majority of new sign schemes are regulatory and thus require a Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) to implement. We also understand that a separate Working Group is looking at a possible reform of the TRO procedure, which would shift the emphasis from the scheme to the sign itself.

In this context, it should be possible to extend the remit of the current consultation to include, for example, the Design and Conservation Officer in the Local Planning Authority to allow them – as with the other consultees – a fixed period in which to make comments. Local residents are given an opportunity to comment on some schemes through placement of signs displayed within the street. Comments from Design and Conservation Officers within the Local Planning Authority would focus on visual and urban design issues and would thus complement those from the other consultees, providing a holistic review of the proposals.

Comments would relate not just to the new proposals but would also identify opportunities to rationalise existing signs in the area covered by the scheme.

The consultation route could be updated in line with recent updates to the planning system, which now requires the LPA to provide details of planning applications that it has received on its website.

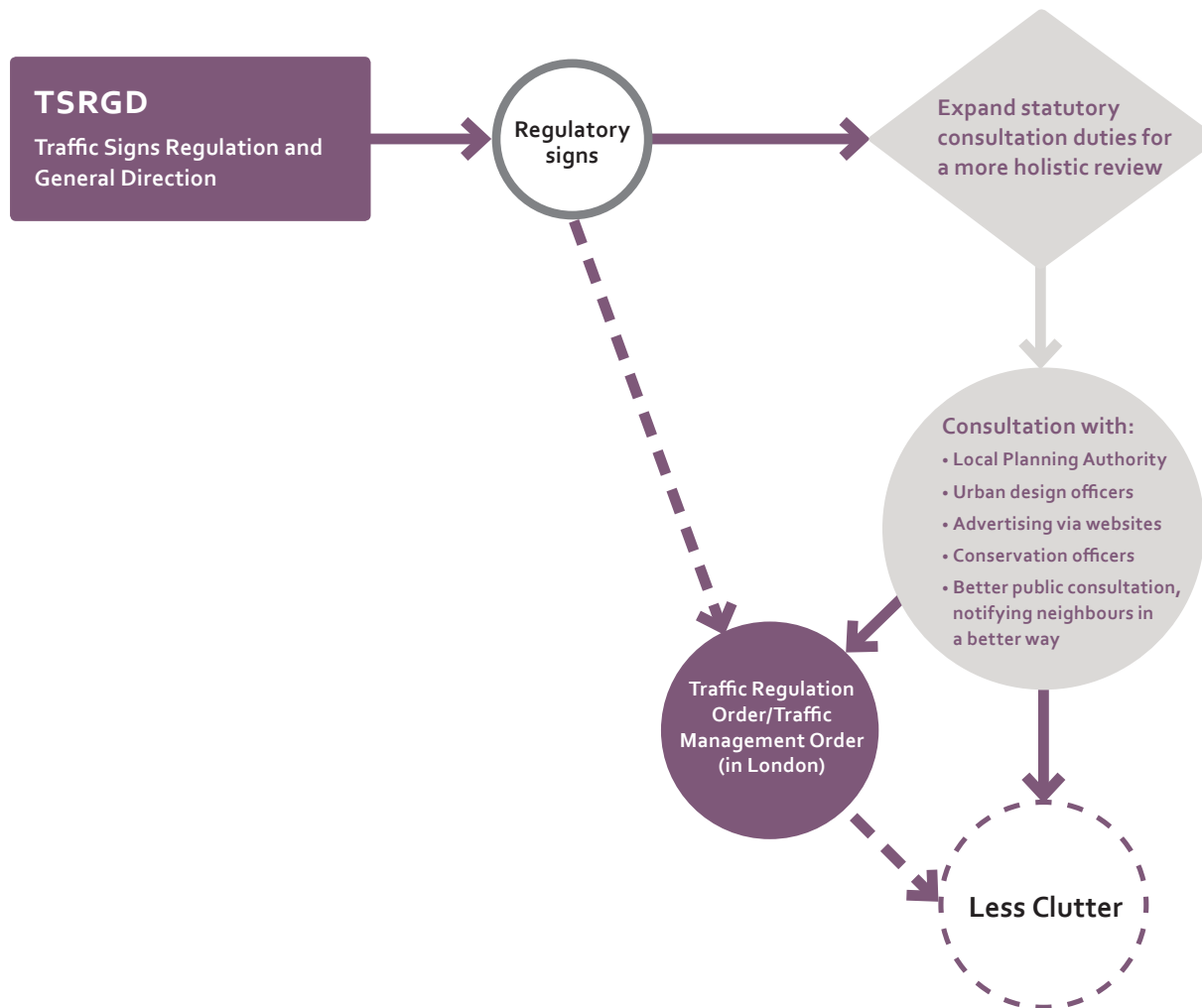
### Pros and cons

#### Pros:

- uses an existing procedure
- allows participation by the Local Planning Authority and residents
- no additional time required
- advertising on website could save money for highway authority during consultation (but not everyone has access to the internet)

#### Cons:

- only covers regulatory sign schemes
- requires an amendment to the TOR



## Quality Audits

The safety audit is part of the Quality Audit process. The idea of the Quality Audit was introduced in *Manual for Streets* (MfS) (Section 3.7) as a way of reviewing the contribution of a new street design to a range of criteria, such as townscape impact, how the streets will be used, access by non motorised users (pedestrians and cyclists), access for mobility impaired, community street audit and a place check audit. The use of traffic signs could form part of the Quality Audit, helping the highway and local authority holistically review traffic signs as part of the overall streetscene.

In the same way the RSA is not a statutory process for non-trunk road schemes, there is no requirement to complete a Quality Audit, but MfS recommends their use. The Quality Audit could either remain a recommendation, or become a statutory process. The Chartered Institution of Highways & Transportation (CIHT) is currently considering the use of Quality Audits as recommended in MfS on streetscapes. Guidance the DfT is producing on auditing traffic signs could also be useful for the Quality Audit process.

Whether the Quality Audit process becomes a statutory one or not, a process for self regulation of carrying them out for existing schemes would be required. If Quality Audits of existing streets were added as an objective of LTP3 (for example) to aim to improve the quality of streets within the urban environment, highway and local authorities would feel empowered to do them to address other responsibilities. The review of all LTP3 documents would be the self regulating mechanism for empowering local authorities to carry out Quality Audits.

The parallel with the planning system for this approach is the introduction of local Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPIs), through which central Government assesses performance and outcomes

delivered by local government. For example BVPI 219 measures LPA progress in producing Appraisals for its Conservation Areas.

'Less Clutter Champions' within the Highway Authority could be trained up to promote a more holistic 'less is more' approach to the design, siting and placement of traffic signs. For example, a 'Clutter Buster' was successfully appointed at Nottingham City Council to carry out a review of street clutter, including traffic signs. This has resulted in a blitz on unnecessary poles, signs and barriers in order to make the city more attractive and easier to use. The duties of existing design champions could be expanded to include the role of 'Less Clutter Champions', as well as encouraging Quality Audits.

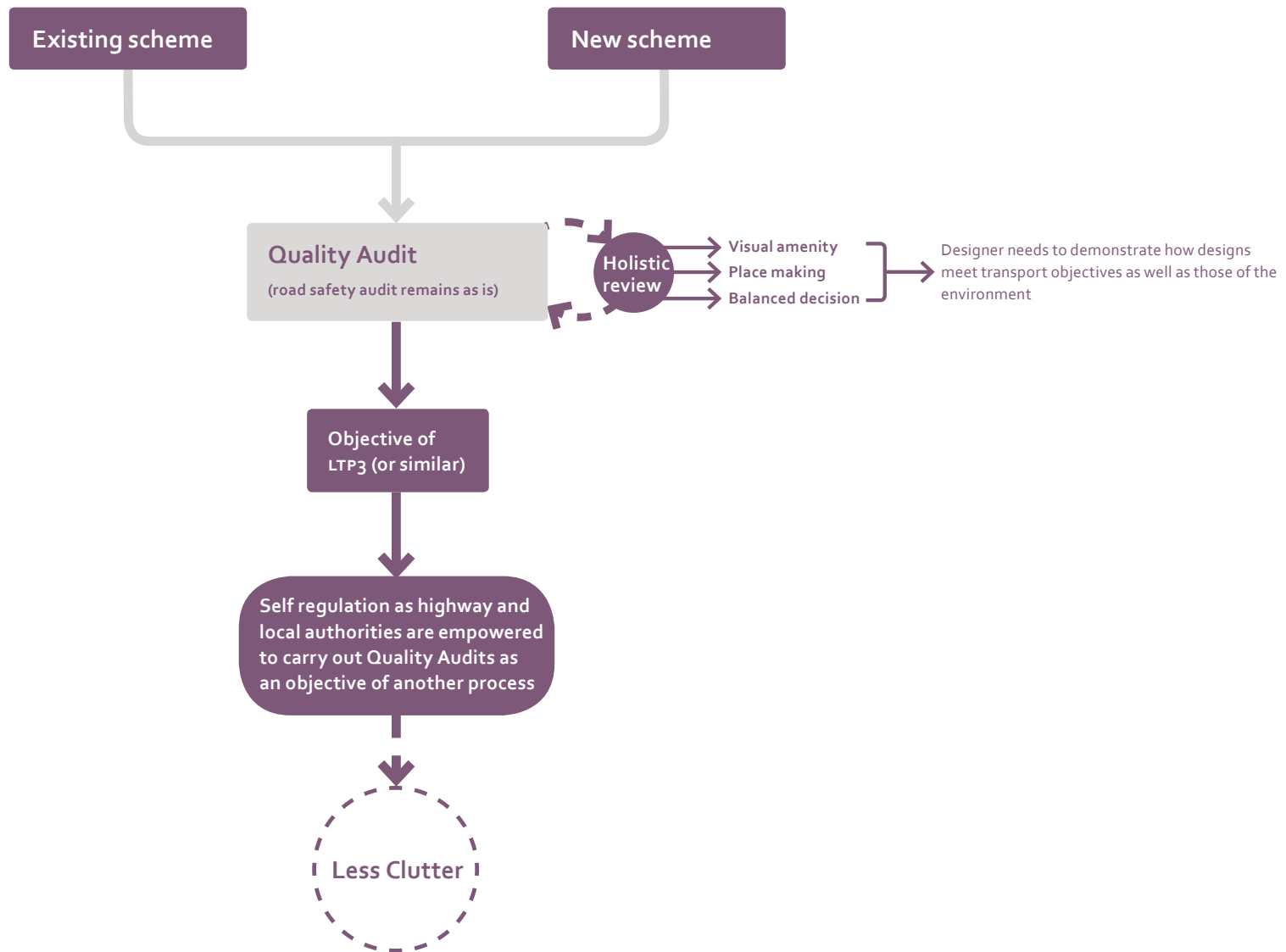
## Pros and cons

### Pros:

- could cover all sign types (warning, information and regulatory) in both new and existing schemes
- making it part of an objective of another system (e.g. LTP3) could encourage the regular application of Quality Audits to both new and existing schemes
- could be promoted by Less Clutter Champions

### Cons:

- Statutory processes are bureaucratic, therefore it is possible Quality Audits should be generally voluntary, but encouraged by central government as good practice
- If voluntary, would rely on a pro-active Highway Authority
- The cost of a quality audit is currently 3-4 times more expensive to carry out than a RSA due to the range of assessment included within it





## 4.0 Conclusions & recommendations



As this study has shown, the problem of the increasing visual intrusion of traffic signs is not caused by a lack of advice on good practice – there is plenty of that – but by the fact that the current process for designing and approving signs is concerned only with the criteria of traffic safety and information. It does not take account of wider concerns of the effect on visual amenity or place-making. This is equally true of the Traffic Signs Manual which encourages a 'one size fits all' and risk averse approach, making no distinction between the differing signing needs of a home zone and a trunk road.

The previous sections have identified the following possible changes to existing processes, which could begin to address the problem and allow urban design and place-making considerations to be included in the design and approval process:

- Amendment of the Town & Country Planning Act 1990 and of the General Permitted Development Order to bring certain categories of signs within the planning system;
- Revision of the Traffic Signs Manual to encourage different treatment of different categories of roads and to promote a 'less is more' approach to signs;
- Amendment of the Traffic Order Regulations, to allow wider consultation over proposals for new Regulatory signs;
- Introduction of the Quality Audit to sit alongside, or be incorporated in the existing Road Safety Audit process.

Of these, the amendment of the Town & Country Planning Act and GDPO is probably unrealistic, certainly in the short term, as it would require amending primary legislation. Bringing traffic signs within the planning system would also blur the currently clear division between highway and planning processes, and would introduce a requirement to obtain two separate consents for new schemes.

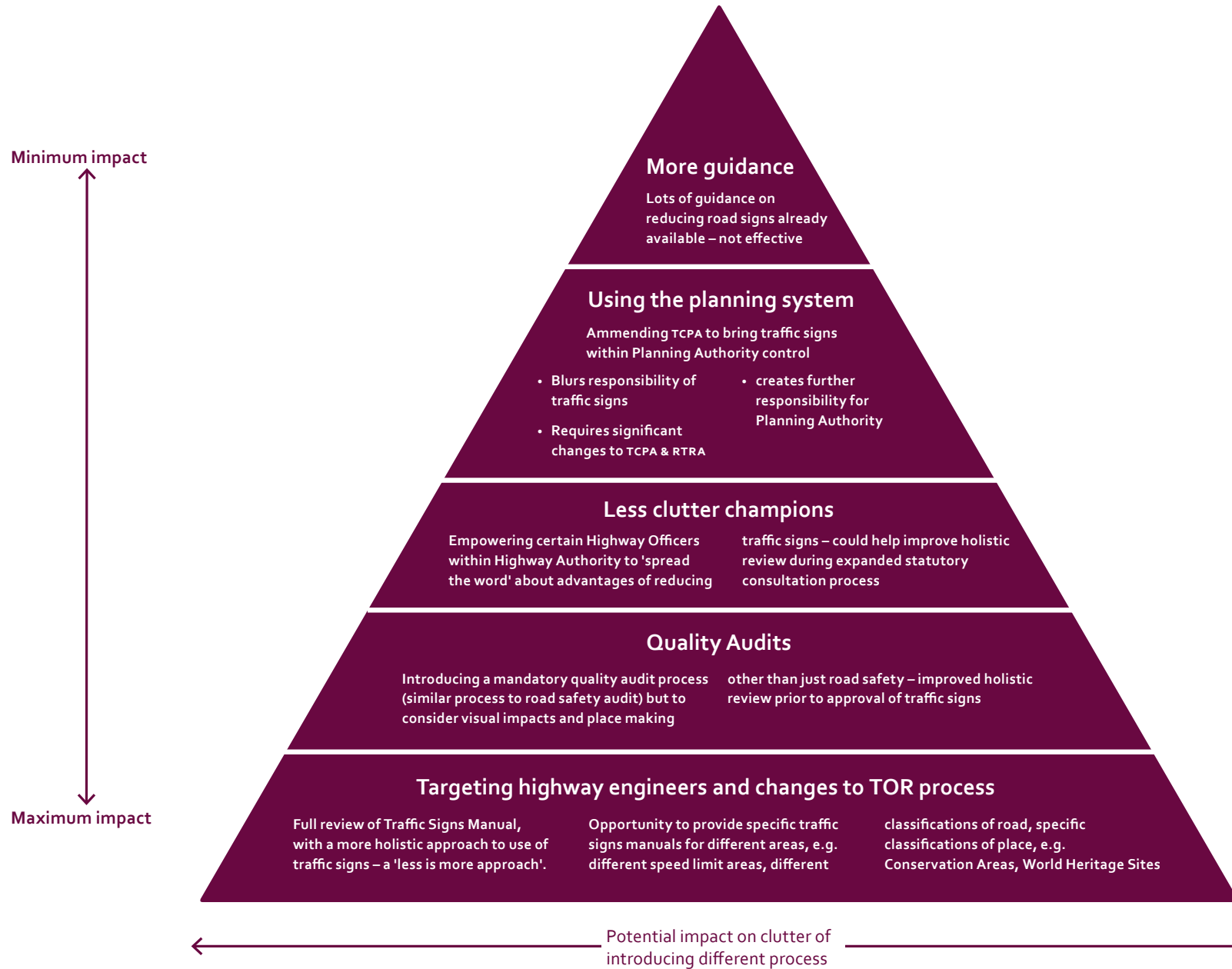
The suggested revision of the Traffic Signs Manual, although a large and potentially very complex exercise, could prove to be a highly effective way of improving the design and approval of new schemes, and in changing the design mind-set of highway engineers in the long term to a 'less is more' approach. It would, however, be of limited use in tackling existing clutter. Above all, it would have to be a long-term aspiration, as it would involve the complete re-drafting of the existing Manual.

In the short term, the amendment of the Traffic Order Regulations and the introduction of (probably non-statutory) Quality Audits as part of or in parallel with the Road Safety Audit appear the most promising. Both could be achieved without amending primary legislation and build on existing, well-established processes. The additional resourcing required would be minimal.






In both cases, their effectiveness could be significantly enhanced by the appointment of 'Less Clutter Champions', to promote what is, effectively, a fundamental change of mindset among those responsible for the design of traffic signs.

The suggested reform of the Traffic Order Regulations and the introduction of Quality Audits reflect two different approaches – statutory and voluntary – but together they stand the best chance of beginning to reverse the trend of ever more, bigger and brasher signs, not only for new schemes but in the review of the existing clutter of signing which is a blight to so many of our most cherished places.

It is recommended that these ideas are taken forward for more detailed consideration, in the wider context of other studies being undertaken by the various Working Groups of the Traffic Signs Policy Review.



This table summarises the pros and cons of each idea as well as commenting on the ease of implementation and potential effectiveness of different approaches.

Idea	Pros	Cons	Comments	Process for implementing change	Likelihood of being implemented
Amend TCPA/GDPO to include traffic signs	Enables holistic review of traffic signs from the range of planning professional to reduce traffic signs overall	Puts additional onus on planning authority	May be a step too far  There are some good reasons, not least safety, highway and planning authorities are separate	Amend the TCPA and GDPO  Possible extensions to the Advertisement Regulations  Creation of additional LPA resource base to reflect integration into planning system	
Amend TSM into categories	Goes direct to the source of the problem i.e. TSM and highway engineers	Only addresses new signs	Would need other process for reviewing existing signs	DfT to amend manual	
Introduce Quality Audit	Enables holistic review of traffic signs from the range of planning professionals to reduce traffic signs overall and improve generally street scenes	Statutory processes can become bureaucratic	Could form objective of LTP3?	Introduction of Local Authority Performance Indicator  Integration into Local Transport Plan	 
Change consultation process on Traffic Orders	Enables holistic review of traffic signs from the range of planning professional to reduce traffic signs overall Should be easy to implement process by changing Traffic Orders Regulations	Puts additional onus on planning authority and highway authority  Only addresses new regulation sign (but Quality Audits could pick up other signs)	Needs other process to address other signs	Amend Traffic Order Regulations to cover further consultation on traffic signs - potentially bringing section 65 of RTRA into TOR  (Need legal advice as to whether RTRA would need amending – section 65 says traffic signs are permitted)	



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