

TOURISM SIGNS

POLICY REVIEW

1. Introduction

1.1 A tourist attraction is now broadly defined for signing purposes as a permanently established destination or facility that attracts or is used by visitors to an area and which is open to the public without prior booking during its normal opening hours.

1.2 Tourist attractions can be divided into two main categories: Attractions and Facilities.

An “attraction” includes those establishments which were covered by the previous definition, i.e. places of interest open to the public offering recreation, education or historical interest. These include theme parks, historic houses, museums, and leisure complexes. This category is now extended to include garden centres, farm centres and craft centres to a greater extent than previous guidance permitted.

A “facility” covers places which provide a service, i.e. accommodation, restaurants, cafes, pubs, shops, etc. Tourist Board guidance suggests that cinemas, theatres, concert halls and sports venues should also come under this heading.

1.3 The basic qualifying criteria included in previous guidance shall remain broadly the same. Thus, any attraction should have a minimum visitor level of 5,000 visitors per annum, be open at least 50 days per year and only be signed from the nearest A or B road or nearest town or village. Consideration will be given to signing from further afield for the larger attractions or for attractions which do not meet the criteria if there are other merits such as significant educational value, uniqueness in what they offer, exhibit or display or localised traffic management reasons.

1.4 All attractions and facilities shall be expected to comply with certain quality standards before consideration can be given to the provision of tourism signs. The Tourist Boards have a Visitors’ Charter, which is a national code of practice for visitor attractions. By signing the Charter, attractions commit themselves to observing minimum quality standards. All attractions requesting signs should have signed up to the Visitors’ Charter scheme, the onus being on the applicant to demonstrate that they have signed the Charter. In order to retain confidence in the tourism signing scheme, it is important that a minimum quality level is maintained.

1.5 A general principle running through the policy will be that all attractions and facilities will be expected to help themselves in terms of promotion to the tourist industry, by distribution of leaflets and information, etc. It will not be deemed acceptable to rely solely on the provision of highway signs to guide visitors.

1.6 A general principle in the policy will be that road safety, traffic management and environmental considerations will take precedence in the event of conflict.

2. Tourist Attractions

- 2.1 An “attraction” includes those establishments which were generally eligible under the previous regulations, i.e. places to which the public make excursions for sightseeing, recreation, education or for cultural or historical interest. These include theme parks, historic houses and castles, ancient monuments and museums, historic abbeys, churches and cathedrals, parks and gardens, nature reserves and leisure complexes. This category is now open to wider interpretation to include garden centres, farm centres and craft centres to a greater extent than previous guidance permitted.
- 2.2 The eligibility for signing for the majority of attractions is a relatively simple matter subject to the criteria listed. However, the eligibility of garden centres, craft centres and farm centres is more complex. Previous guidance indicated that the retail element should not form the predominant activity at the site. That requirement is no longer mandatory. However, it is still considered necessary to exercise some form of control over the number of venues which are potentially eligible.
- 2.3 All attractions of this type will be expected to promote themselves to the tourist industry and serve a wider catchment area rather than catering for purely local needs. Garden centres should include laid out gardens and/or offer specialist interest and advice. Craft centres should include a basic display of crafts rather than just displaying craft type goods for sale.

3. Tourist Facilities

- 3.1 A facility covers those places which provide a service to the public and generally were not eligible for signing under the previous regulations. They can be divided into several different categories and these together with relevant eligibility criteria are referred to below.

3.1.1 Hotels, Guest Houses, Bed and Breakfast Establishments

It is impractical and probably undesirable on environmental grounds to sign all such establishments. They will be encouraged (and local authorities can help to promote) the use of central points for accommodation information, e.g. information boards with clear maps, telephone numbers etc. available for our of hours use.

All establishments offering serviced accommodation must be members of quality assurance schemes which require independent inspection of members premises. The three largest schemes are those run by the English Tourist Board, the AA and the RAC. Membership of one of the above schemes will ensure that only establishments which satisfy strong quality criteria will be signed. Consideration will also be given to the removal of signs to any establishments which fail to remain a part of any such scheme.

They will generally be expected to be open all the year round.

Hotels which cater for homeless people and are therefore effectively hostel type houses in multiple occupation will not be signed. (This is in accordance with Tourist Board guidance).

Bed and breakfast establishments will not need to be open all the year round, although signs should be removed or covered when not in use. They will still need to be open seven days a week in the holiday season.

3.1.2 Self-Catering Accommodation

Self-catering establishments will not normally qualify for signing since customers tend to book their accommodation in advance and proprietors generally issue maps or instructions to their visitors. If there are locational difficulties, it might be appropriate to consider improvements to local directional signing.

3.1.3 Camping and Caravan Sites

Eligibility for signing will be in accordance with previous guidance. Sites should have at least 20 pitches for casual overnight use by touring caravans or tents and they should be licensed under the Caravan Sites and Control of Development Act 1960 and/or the Public Health Act 1936.

3.1.4 Public Houses

There are no quality assurance schemes in existence for this type of facility. It is clearly impractical and probably unnecessary to sign all public houses, particularly in urban areas or on main roads. The vast majority of such establishments will cater mainly for local needs. The main purpose of the broader tourism signing regime is to provide signs for visitors to an area rather than for local needs. There will therefore be a general presumption against considering signing such facilities unless they can satisfy some comprehensive criteria. The discussions which have taken place with other interested parties have indicated the following minimum criteria should apply:

- (i) meals not just bar snacks should be served at lunchtime and in the evenings without the need to pre-book;
- (ii) facilities should be provided inside to allow children to accompany parents;
- (iii) adequate parking should be provided;
- (iv) there should be no traffic management problems associated with the premises;
- (v) they should have locational problems and demonstrate a need for signing (not a need-based advertisement);
- (vi) they should promote themselves to the tourist industry and not just advertise occasionally in the local paper;
- (vii) they should be able to show that a significant number of visitors are from outside the area.

3.1.5. Restaurants and Cafes

The criteria, as above, for public houses will apply.

3.1.6 Retail Facilities

Tourist Board guidance suggests that to be signed, shops should have facilities which are aimed specifically at tourists. It might be difficult to define precisely what that means but it would rule out signing most town centre shops. Town centre factory shops may well not qualify if there are other general retail outlets in town which offer a far wider selection of similar goods unless they can demonstrate that their catchment area is significantly wider than normal.

Other forms of directional signing are already available for superstores and out of town shopping areas and the guidance relating to that type of development will continue to apply, i.e. general signing only to Retail Park, Superstore, etc. have adequate parking, locational difficulties.

3.1.7 Recreational and Sports Facilities

These can be considered under the attraction or facility category. Many will be signed already with black and white signs and that may be the most appropriate means of signing since they will cater primarily for local needs. Exceptions may be considered for attractions such as ten pin bowling where there are fewer such sites in the County and which will therefore have a wider catchment area. Signs may also be considered where facilities such as golf clubs attract significant numbers of visitors from outside the area or there are locational difficulties.

3.1.8 Tours and Leisure Drives

It is considered that such means of promoting an area are generally inappropriate now that there are so many more cars on the road. In these days of seeking to reduce exhaust pollution, etc., it may be viewed as environmentally unfriendly to encourage driving around.

There may still be a case for themed routes as long as they do not cover too wide an area and the theme is specific rather than general. Any route would need to be agreed with the highway authority who will co-ordinate appropriate signing.

3.1.9 Cycle Routes

This type of activity can be encouraged by positively signed routes but will not be encouraged except on safe routes, e.g. dedicated cycle routes, etc. Schemes must be promoted in association with the highway authority who will co-ordinate appropriate signing.

3.1.10 Tourist Information Centres, Points, etc.

The "i" symbol is used only to sign tourist information centres networked by the tourist boards. It may also be appropriate to use the "I" symbol for tourist information points, subject to certain standards being met. There may be a greater need for tourist information points to display information if the number of direction signs is to be kept to a minimum.

4. Signing in Urban and Rural Areas

- 4.1 More restrictive criteria may apply in urban areas where there is greater scope to provide tourist information boards, thereby obviating the need to an unsightly plethora of highway signs. In urban areas, there will often be little space available to erect additional signs or to add tourist destinations to existing signs.
- 4.2 More restrictive criteria may apply in conservation areas and areas of special landscape significance where the amount of signing may be restricted on environmental grounds.
- 4.3 On occasions, it may be necessary to turn down a request for a sign at a particular location because of siting difficulties or where the number of destinations and signs would be excessive. The maximum number of destinations will normally be six.
- 4.4 There will be cases where improvements to local direction signing can help to solve problems and perhaps reduce the need for additional tourism signing. Consideration will be given to that, where appropriate, and, if agreed, the owners of the establishments requesting the improvements may be asked to contribute to the highway authority's costs.

5. Application Procedure and Financial Arrangements

- 5.1 All applicants for signs will be expected to complete a comprehensive questionnaire, supply supporting information if requested, and pay a non-returnable flat fee of £104 to the traffic authority for determining the application. (A separate application is required for each site). The fee is retained whether application is successful or not in order to cover administration costs and site visits as necessary. This fee is deemed to be outside the scope of VAT.
- 5.2 If an application is successful, it will then be necessary to design an appropriate signing scheme. The guidelines indicate that all signing should be at the expense of the applicant so that traffic authorities incur no financial burden in allowing tourism signs on their roads. It is therefore necessary to include an additional sum on top of any final works cost. This sum is to cover costs in designing and supervising the approved signing scheme and to cover future routine maintenance of the signs. Any signs that require replacement due to normal wear and tear or accident or vandal damage will only be replaced at the expense of the applicant. Operators will be expected to sign a Tourist Attraction Operators Agreement which sets out the conditions under which the signs are provided. The additional sum for this work is a flat charge of £100 for schemes costing up to £400 and thereafter a charge of 25% of the works cost. All costs are quoted exclusive of VAT which will need to be charged at the appropriate rate.