

**ABERDEENSHIRE COUNCIL**

**TRANSPORTATION AND ROADS**

**POLICY ON UNAUTHORISED SIGNS**

**A REASON FOR POLICY**

There has been inconsistency across Aberdeenshire regarding signs which have been erected in verges and on footways. This policy seeks to address the relevant issues and come up with a set of guidelines which will allow a fair assessment of any unauthorised signs.

Problems with unauthorised signs tend to fall into two categories. Firstly signs placed on verges which usually advertise specific events and secondly signs on footpaths in towns and villages which highlight shops and services. These signs within settlements can, along with other items such as bins and rubbish bags, often result in the obstruction of footways.

This policy is divided into two sections to reflect these two different categories. Signs outwith the road boundary are a matter for the Director of Planning and Economic Development and outwith the scope of this Policy.

**B SIGNS IN VERGES**

**1 The Present Situation**

Although no unauthorised signs should be erected within the road boundaries, (normally between fencelines) the situation has arisen over a number of years whereby signs, for hotels in particular, have become semi permanent in rural locations.

Also signing on main roads and bypasses has increased in recent years as a form of advertising. This advertising can be for community events such as local gala days, church organised activities, fund raising, local theatre groups, etc. It can also be for more commercial concerns such as events in hotels, forthcoming commercial sales eg woollen sales in a hotel or a local garage having a reduction in price on all cars for sale.

There is also pressure from housing developers to have signs in verges directing construction traffic and potential customers to their sites.

There have been reports of drivers becoming distracted whilst reading unauthorised signs with too much information or too small letter size to be clearly understood.

**2 The Present Policy**

Aberdeenshire Council has presently adopted GRC's policies and this includes Traffic Note 16. This Note states that it "has been agreed by the Regional Council to remove all unauthorised signs, new and existing".

The informal interpretation has been that any new signs come down but existing signs which have not been causing a problem have not been taken down.

The policy regarding the removal of all unauthorised signs has therefore never been fully implemented.

**3 The Legal Situation**

Advice has been taken from the Director of Law and Administration on how much notice, if any, has to be given to people who have erected signs before these signs can be removed. The advice is that as the signs are erected in property under our control we can remove the signs without notice.

**4 Road Safety Issues**

Consideration has to be given to the following safety issues.

- a complaints have been received from motorists that they have had near misses with cars whose drivers are distracted by reading notices placed in the verge.
- b complaints have also been received that drivers have been distracted by notices that have been placed too close to junctions and roundabouts.
- c there is also concern for anyone who stops his or her car or arrives on foot to erect notices in the verges of what are usually busy roads; particularly as they won't have the protection of roadworks warning signs or reflective clothing.

**5 Maintenance Issues**

The erection of unauthorised signs and notices prevents verge maintenance such as grass cutting and cleaning to be fully undertaken.

**6 Trunk Roads**

The policy of the Scottish Office is that no unauthorised signs are to be erected on trunk roads.

**7 Tourist Signs**

Aberdeenshire Council's current policy states that all tourist signs should have a brown background, include the "thistle" logo and be authorised by the Director of Transportation and Roads. No other tourist signs shall be permitted.

It should be recognised that not all establishments will qualify for tourist signposting and many of those which do qualify will not get as many signs as they presently have erected in verges.

**8 Proposals for Unauthorised Signs in Verges**

The following set of guidelines has been produced taking account of:-

- Aberdeenshire Council is actively seeking to encourage tourism by granting permission for suitable "thistle" signing to tourist attractions which meet the requirements of the current policy.
- Aberdeenshire Council is attempting to cater for the needs of local people who are organising and running events which benefit the local community.
- Aberdeenshire Council should not sanction commercial signs on the verges of public roads.

**a Guidelines for Community Event Signs**

It is proposed to allow only signs which highlight a community event such as local gala days, church organised events, a local play or fund raising activity.

Commercial signs are dealt with in section 8(b).

Community event signs will be allowed to be erected no more than 7 days before the event takes place and should be removed as soon as practicable after the event. If not lifted within 3 days after the event the signs will be removed and stored at the nearest depot for collection.

Signs will be allowed only on the nearest main road unless otherwise approved by the Director of Transportation and Roads. No signs will be allowed on any trunk roads.

No signs will be allowed at junctions or within 100 metres of the approach to a junction or in the first 50 metres when exiting a junction.

The recommended maximum size of sign will be A3 with a recommended minimum size of letter of 50 mm. Larger signs may be considered in exceptional circumstances if considered appropriate. The maximum height of the sign above verge level shall be 750mm and the minimum clearance to the edge of the sign shall be 600mm from the edge of the carriageway.

At any one location the maximum number of signs allowed will be three.

Any signs erected should not emulate or attempt to copy recognised traffic signs.

Some larger events such as the Tarlair Music Festival, Braemar Highland Games or the Seniors Open Golf Tournament will generate significant amounts of traffic and visitors and could qualify for temporary direction signs.

These temporary direction signs should follow the guidelines given in the Department of Transport's Network Management Advisory Leaflet "Provision of Temporary Traffic Signs for Special Events".

It is not proposed that permission or approval will be formally issued by the Transportation and Roads Service but that all signs erected which do not satisfy the criteria for a community event will be removed under the procedures detailed under Guidelines for Commercial Signs. Guidelines on safe methods of erecting signs in verges shall be made available to all interested parties.

No signs will be allowed to be fixed to any street furniture including lighting columns or traffic signs.

Notwithstanding the above guidelines Aberdeenshire Council's Transportation and Roads Service shall have the authority to remove any signs under any circumstances at any time if it is felt that the signs are unsuitable or dangerous.

#### **b Guidelines for Commercial Signs**

It is proposed that no signs shall be allowed for commercial activities such as hotels, restaurants, commercial sales and any other profit making activity.

The vast majority of Commercial signs advertise hotels, restaurants etc and it is accepted that many of these signs have become permanent.

It is proposed that "a period of grace" of 3 months will be allowed during which time hotels and other establishments which presently have unauthorised signs will be approached and given the opportunity to apply to the Scottish Tourist Board for tourist signing.

At the end of the period of grace it is proposed that all existing signs will be removed. As this is a one off exercise it is proposed that Commercial Operations will be instructed to remove the signs and the costs incurred to be funded by Transportation and Roads.

Any new signs erected in the period of grace will be subject to removal immediately following the procedures given below.

Unofficial road safety signs such as "Cattle Crossing" or "Slow Down Children Crossing" are to be treated as other unauthorised signs.

**c Removal of Unauthorised Signs**

It is proposed that all signs which are erected and deemed unsuitable will be immediately removed and those responsible contacted and given 14 days to collect them. If left unclaimed, after a further 14 days they shall be destroyed.

If there is no contact name or number and no one comes forward to collect them the signs shall be stored for 28 days before they are destroyed.

**C SIGNS (AND OTHER OBSTRUCTIONS) ON FOOTPATHS AND FOOTWAYS**

**1 Background Information**

During January 1996 Grampian Regional Council's Department of Roads conducted a publicity campaign aimed at removing all unnecessary obstructions from footpaths and footways within towns and villages throughout the Region. This campaign included articles in the press and the publication and distribution of leaflets.

The public were made aware of the difficulties and dangers which obstructions on footways can cause pedestrians, especially the elderly, the visually impaired or a parent with a pushchair. Examples of typical obstructions include advertising signs and goods on display which occupy a significant part of the footway. It was also pointed out that wheeled bins and rubbish bags can create similar problems.

In order to create a safer environment for pedestrians and at the same time avoid a complete ban on all advertising signs and displays, which would be an unnecessary restriction in certain circumstances, a set of guidelines was included in the leaflets.

**2 The Present Policy**

The guidelines mentioned in the previous paragraph still apply within Aberdeenshire and are summarised as follows:-

- (a) In all cases the remaining available footway width for pedestrians should be at least 2 metres in busy town centres and 1.5 metres elsewhere.

- (b) Signs and/or displays *should* -
- (1) Be located at the rear of the footway
  - (2) Be no wider than 0.5 metres
  - (3) Be securely fixed
  - (4) Be removed when premises are closed
- (c) Signs and/or displays *should not*
- (1) Be hazardous to pedestrians or their belongings
  - (2) Be an obstruction to wheelchair users
  - (3) Reduce visibility for road users at a junction, access or bend
  - (4) Obscure road or other directional signs
  - (5) Be secured to street furniture or railings

The guidelines also stated that the consent of the local Planning Authority may be required before advertising signs can be erected; and that wheeled bins and refuse should be neatly placed at the front of the footway as close to collection time as possible and the wheeled bin returned to the property as soon as practicable after emptying.

### 3 **Proposed Alterations to the Guidelines (refer to the relevant sub-section of previous paragraph)**

- (a) "In all cases the remaining available footway width for pedestrians should be at least 1.5 metres except where pedestrians are separated from the adjacent moving traffic by a pedestrian barrier, verge or layby in which case the footway may be reduced to 1.2 metres". The reason for this change is that the expression "busy town centres" is rather vague and some existing footways are presently restricted to 1.2 metres width without much obvious difficulty.
- (b)(3) "be securely fixed" should be changed to read "be securely fixed or sufficiently stable so that it cannot be easily moved or blown over in the wind."
- (b)(5) Additional condition :- "Only one object (which includes a sign or a display) will be permitted for each shop or premises."
- (b)(6) Additional condition :- "The permitted object will be located on the frontage of the premises. No signs or advertising will be allowed outwith the frontage for the purpose of directing customers to the premises."

(c)(1) should read “be hazardous to pedestrians or their belongings (eg sharp edges, protruding nails or moving signs which could injure children)”.

**4 Removal of Unacceptable Signs and Obstructions**

It is proposed that in the first instance the owner/manager of the premises responsible for the obstruction be verbally requested to remove it. If this is not done within 24 hours then the obstruction will be removed. Thereafter the procedure will be dealt with as for the Removal of Unauthorised Signs (Section B, 8(c)).

**5 Footways and Footpaths Adjacent to Trunk Roads**

Footways and footpaths adjacent to Trunk Roads will be treated similarly to Aberdeenshire Council’s footways and footpaths.

**D RAISING AWARENESS OF NEW POLICY**

The proposals within this policy are significant and wide reaching and will require to be well publicised. It is proposed that a publicity campaign with supporting leaflets and guidelines be launched.