

WAKEFIELD CIVIC SOCIETY

Building Interest in Wakefield
www.wakefieldcivicsociety.org.uk



Kirkgate Challenge

A community-based challenge produced by Wakefield Civic Society

Improving Wakefield's Public Realm - Kirkgate



The quality of the public realm – our streets and open spaces – plays an important part in making our city an attractive place in which to live or work and a high quality public realm is essential if we want to encourage visitors to come to Wakefield.

As part of its preparations for Civic Societies Week 2009, members of Wakefield Civic Society's Executive Committee undertook an environmental audit of the public realm in Kirkgate. We looked at the condition of the buildings, roads, footpaths, street signs and street furniture and produced a photographic record. Our findings will be published later in the year. However, we also want to work with members of the community on this, particularly younger people whom we want to interest in the city's public realm.

We would like groups to come forward who are prepared to organise their own audit, using guidance overleaf, to inform the debate on how the features of this important and busy thoroughfare can be improved to provide an attractive link between the city centre and the waterfront attractions for residents and visitors alike. If you are interested in helping us to complete the audit, please contact the Society by email at info@wakefieldcivicsociety.org.uk

The Challenge

The Society is asking groups to prepare a report that can be presented to members of our Committee, local councillors, businesses and residents. The challenge is in two parts, either or both of which can be attempted:

Challenge 1:

Provide a survey of the history and historical features of Lower Kirkgate (from its junction with the Springs and Warrengate down to where it meets the Waterfront, including the Chantry Chapel and the Calder and Hebble Warehouse, just off Barnsley Road). The survey can cover the whole length of the area described or focus on elements of it – eg, the shopping area, the Waterfront.

This research-based project can be informed by articles and exhibitions in books, on the internet, or at Wakefield Museum. It could also be based on interviews with people who have recollections of Kirkgate in times past.

A word length of around 2,500 words is suggested for the report and this can be illustrated with photos, drawings, maps, etc.

Challenge 2:

This challenge is to conduct an environmental audit of Kirkgate as it is today and to produce a report that highlights both features of interest that make a positive contribution to the public realm and points out things that need attention and improvement. The survey should cover the whole length of Lower Kirkgate (from its junction with the Springs and Warrengate down to where it meets the Waterfront, including the Chantry Chapel and the Calder and Hebble Warehouse, just off Barnsley Road) and should include the area around Kirkgate Station.

A word length of around 2,500 words is suggested for the report and this can be illustrated with photos, drawings, maps, etc.

For both challenges, the report should be provided electronically in Word or pdf format. Alternatively, PowerPoint presentations can be used. Reports should be no more than 5Mb in size and should be submitted to info@wakefieldcivicsociety.org.uk to arrive no later than 28th August 2009.

Members of Wakefield Civic Society's Committee will review all reports received and may then invite groups to a meeting where the group(s) will be invited to talk through their reports and answer questions put forward by the committee. It is an important part of this project that once reports have been provided to the Society, copyright passes to the Society and the Society will be free to make use of the material in any of its own publications, presentations and reports, although acknowledgement will be provided of contributor's work.

Further Information

There are a number of materials available on Wakefield Council's website that you may find useful in attempting this challenge. Here is just a summary of a few key webpages:

For example, the Council has produced a number of Conservation Area Appraisals which detail the amenities, condition of buildings and make recommendations. Although Lower Kirkgate is not a Conservation Area, you may find the content of these Appraisals on interest and helpful in providing ideas about how to proceed. Have a look at: <http://www.wakefield.gov.uk/Environment/Conservation/ConservationAreas.htm>

There are a number of listed buildings in Kirkgate. Listed buildings are listed because of their historic or architectural significance and there is legislation that is designed to ensure these buildings are well maintained and safeguarded for future generations. The full list for the Wakefield District and further information is available on the Council's website at: <http://www.wakefield.gov.uk/Environment/Conservation/ListedBuildings.htm>

Details about Wakefield's regeneration can also be found at: <http://www.wakefield.gov.uk/Planning/Regeneration/Wakefield/default.htm>

Completing the report

First a reminder. Kirkgate is a busy thoroughfare – please take care when doing any kind of street audit that you are alert to the dangers of moving traffic! Don't get distracted by what you are doing – be aware of what is happening around you.

- Walk down the street or around the site you have chosen
- What do you like about the place?
- What don't you like?
- What needs to be improved?
- Write down your thoughts as you go.

As you go, make notes to remind you of what you see.

Things to consider

Overall:

What is the overall visual amenity of the area? Is there variety of visual amenity?

How does the area under review work in relation to adjoining areas? Does it form part of a continuous whole or is it a separate and specific area with its own identity? Are routes to other parts of the area sign-posted so that a visitor would know where they are, how to move through the area to best advantage, and how to move to other areas of interest?

Buildings:

- Fabric – are buildings in a good state of repair?
- Are there any listed buildings or buildings of special local interest?
- Design – Are the buildings of good design quality?
- Have alterations been made and, if so, do these add to or detract from the original design?
- Mix - is there a good mix of buildings and uses?

Street Furniture:

- Is there too much street clutter?
- Is signage legible and meaningful?
- Are seats provided? Are they in good order?
- Are there any railings to separate road users and pedestrians? Are these necessary, or in the right place?

Street lighting:

Is there adequate lighting? Is it of good design that complements the area, especially in Conservation Areas? Does it work?

Advertising:

- A-Boards – Are these being used? Do they comply with Council policies on their use?
- Advertisements – Hoardings and banner advertising? Are these acceptable, in good repair?
- How are local businesses advertising themselves? Is this attractive or does it spoil the look of the place?

Litter:

- Is there litter around? What sort of litter is it? Where does it come from?
- Graffiti, discarded chewing gum and cigarette ends – are these problems in this area?
- Is there evidence of proper cleaning being undertaken?
- Are there adequate litter bins? Are they being used?

Routeways:

- Are pedestrian, cycling and traffic routes well and adequately segregated?
- Are there adequate pedestrian crossings?
- Are pedestrian journeys convenient? Are they designed for ease of walking?
- What is the condition of subways and bridges?
- Are direction and street signs adequate and meaningful? Are they well sited? Are they all necessary?
- How do people use the space? Are there any main thoroughfares?
- Are there any bottlenecks or health and safety issues that need to be resolved?
- Are foot paths, kerb stones trip free and in good state of repair?
- Are roads pot-holed?
- Is the speed of traffic appropriate to the area?
- Is there evidence of congestion?
- Air quality and pollution?

