



**Oxfordshire County Council**  
**Tourism Signage Policy**

## **1. Introduction:**

### **1.1 Tourism Signing Regulations**

The Department for Transport defines a tourist attraction as a permanently established destination or facility which attracts or is used by visitors to an area and is open to the public without prior booking during its normal opening hours'.

### **1.2 Brown / White Signs**

Brown and White tourism signposting is NOT for advertising, but to help visitors from outside the local area find facilities easily and safely and by the most desirable route which may not be the most direct. Tourism signs should supplement rather than duplicate information already provided on existing directional signs (i.e. as an aid to navigation and for road safety and traffic management reasons). Should tourism signs be approved, all other existing signs located on the highway referring to the establishment must be removed.

### **1.3 Cost Involved**

There are costs involved – applicants pay a £358 plus VAT (2023/24 price) non-refundable application fee, and then if successful, are responsible for the cost of design and construction of the signs plus 20% administration costs. In addition to this there will be a one off payment equal to 2/3rds of the cost of the sign assembly to cover any future maintenance or removal cost. Should any cost be incurred due to amendments to the signs requested by the applicant, the applicant shall meet the actual costs for the amendments plus 20% administration fee.

## **2. General Principles:**

**2.1** Eligibility for signs does not imply a right to signs. It may be necessary to decline a request for a sign at a given location because of siting difficulties or where the number of destinations signed at a junction would be excessive. The maximum number of destinations that a driver can read and understand on a sign whilst driving is six. If long names are used or the road carries fast-moving traffic – generally 'A' class roads – this number will be lower.

**2.2** If the application is turned down, consideration could be given to gateway signage incorporating visitor attraction symbols (subject to the agreement of the local Town or Parish Council), the costs of which would be borne by the applicant and the local council.

**2.3** Approval of signs and any other attraction that may qualify for signage is the responsibility of the County Council in its capacity as highway authority. In all cases a completely new sign must be provided consolidating the approved detail for the attraction (if applicable), together with the existing signage destination. Costs to be divided equally between the interested parties.

- 2.4** Clearly there are major differences in response between requests for signing in rural and urban areas. Signing in urban areas should generally be to public off-street car parks with destination signing for pedestrians from these and from public transport centres. This would be best approached by a comprehensive scheme undertaken in liaison with local planning and tourism officers to ensure good results.
- 2.5** Where an attraction is within an area which is itself signed as a tourist attraction (such as Oxford City), only pedestrian signing will be permitted, unless the attraction has a dedicated car park. Applicants are recommended to advertise through the local tourist office. The County Council will endeavour to ensure that there is continuity of signing between neighbouring councils.
- 2.6** Where two or more similar attractions are located within 400 metres of each other, along the same road or street, only collective signing will be permitted. It will be for the proprietors of the attractions to agree a joint approach, and funding. If greater than 400 metres, additional signage will be at the discretion of the Highways Authority.
- 2.7** Retail parks, shopping centres and garden centres will not be signed using brown/white tourism signs. In exceptional circumstances, standard directional signing may be used where it can be justified for traffic management or safety reasons.
- 2.8** All applications will be subject to approval from the local District, Town, or Parish Councils.
- 2.9** Establishments which are located directly on 'A' and 'B' roads will not generally be considered for signage unless there are specific road safety or traffic management reasons. Consideration may be given to signing an attraction from the nearest 'A' or 'B' road junction if it would otherwise be difficult for drivers to find the establishment and/or the facility is of significant value to the local tourist market. In a few exceptional cases it may be necessary to sign an attraction more extensively, either because of its visitor attraction or its importance or for traffic management reasons.

**3. Eligibility:** (refer also to Appendix 1)

**3.1 An eligible tourism destination is defined as:**

'A permanently established attraction or facility which attracts or is used by visitors to an area and is open to the public without prior booking during its normal opening hours.'

**3.2 All establishments must:**

- a) have adequate parking on site or close by unless located in a town centre where pedestrian signage is provided. (N.B. the signs should direct road users to the parking facilities rather than the destination itself)
- b) have adequate toilet facilities on site, including for people with disabilities.
- c) be publicised, for example, within tourist guidebooks, leaflets, on a web site and at Tourist Information Centres
- d) be accredited to the Visitor Attraction Quality Assurance Service (VAQAS) run by the English Tourist Council. (Exceptions to this include sports centres concert venues, theatres, and cinemas).
- e) attract a minimum of 5,000 visitors per year.
- f) be open at least 2½ hours a day for 150 days a year.

**3.3** Eligibility does not automatically guarantee entitlement to tourism signs. All applications will be judged on considerations of road safety and traffic management needs, the appropriateness of the establishment and the usual impact of the signage.

**3.4** The eligibility of the attraction is at the discretion of the Area Engineer, who will consider if the entrance is visible and identifiable from a safe distance as well as the visual and road safety impact of additional signage on the principal route.

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## **Appendix 1 – Tourism Signs** – Guidance Notes

### **1. Tourist Attractions:**

Including historic houses, museums, gardens and arboreta, craft, and wild-life centres, etc.

**Note:** English Heritage and National Trust properties are already eligible for tourism signs and are therefore exempt from the need for recognition as a bona fide tourist attraction.

<b>Eligibility Criteria</b>	<b>Additional Supporting Evidence Required</b>
1. Must attract a minimum of 5000 visitors per year unless the need can be clearly demonstrated on road safety and/or traffic management grounds.	1. Evidence of annual visitor numbers.
2. Must provide adequate off highway parking facilities of its own or in conjunction with a local authority or other establishment.	2. Details of opening times.
3. Must agree to remove any advertisement sign at or near the location of the proposed tourism traffic sign.	3. Details of parking facilities.
	4. Evidence that the attraction has signed up to the Visitors Charter through the Regional Tourist Board.
	5. Written agreement for signs to be removed.

## 2. Serviced Accommodation:

**Note:** Serviced accommodation catering for long term residents which are therefore in effect hostel type houses in multiple occupation are NOT eligible.

<b>Eligibility Criteria</b>	<b>Additional Supporting Evidence Required</b>
2. Only inspected serviced accommodation will be considered for tourism signing. The inspection agency will be the English Tourist Board, the AA, or the RAC.	1. Evidence of the inspection report for the accommodation.
3. Must provide adequate off highway parking facilities of its own or in conjunction with a local authority or other establishment.	2. Details of available parking facilities (unless a town centre establishment).
4. Accommodation must have a minimum of 6 bedrooms available for visitors.	

## 3. Self-Catering Accommodation:

**Note:** Establishments with built accommodation who show evidence that they meet the English Tourist Board's quality standard for self-catering accommodation, and static caravans MAY be eligible for tourism signage.

<b>Eligibility Criteria</b>	<b>Additional Supporting Evidence Required</b>
1. Must be members of the British graded Holiday Parks Scheme (the Q Scheme).	1. Evidence of membership.
2. Must provide adequate off highway parking facilities of its own or in conjunction with a local authority or other establishment.	2. Details of available parking facilities.

#### 4. Restaurants / Public Houses:

##### A. Rural Public Houses:

**Note:** Public Houses not offering hot food and/or serviced accommodation are NOT eligible.

<b>Eligibility Criteria</b> (As for ALL applicants. In addition)	<b>Additional Supporting Evidence Required</b> (As for ALL applicants. In addition)
1. A selection of hot meals must be served during normal opening times.	1. Details of opening times, times food is served and sample menus.
2. Must comply with the Food and Safety (General Food Hygiene) Regulations and Food Safety Act 1980.	2. Up to date evidence that meets Food Safety Regulations I.e. District Council Department of Health certificate.
3. If offering overnight accommodation, must meet Serviced Accommodation eligibility criteria listed above.	3. If offering accommodation written evidence of an up-to-date Quality Assurance Scheme grading.
4. Must have room for children indoors.	

##### B. Restaurants:

<b>Eligibility Criteria</b> (As for ALL applicants. In addition)	<b>Additional Supporting Evidence Required</b> (As for ALL applicants. In addition)
1. Must be of either recognised historical importance or culinary significance.	1. Evidence that it is recognised historical importance or culinary significance such as an up-to-date culinary award (e.g. Michelin Star) or special recommendation (e.g. entry in Good Pub Guide).
2. Must comply with the Food and Safety (General Food Hygiene) Regulations and Food Safety Act 1980.	2. Details of opening times, times food is served.
	3. Up to date evidence that meets Food Safety Regulations I.e. District Council Department of Health certificate.

## 5. Retail Facilities:

Retail Establishments:

**Note:** The following retail establishments are NOT eligible for tourism signing: retail parks, shopping centres, garden centres, and out of town supermarkets and superstores.

<b>Eligibility Criteria</b> (As for ALL applicants. In addition)	<b>Additional Supporting Evidence Required</b> (As for ALL applicants. In addition)
1. Must be of particular interest to the tourism market and have facilities and features that are aimed specifically at tourists.	1. Evidence of the facilities' special interest to tourists and publicity aimed at visitors from outside of the local area.
2. Should have adequate toilet facilities and be able to offer light refreshments where appropriate.	2. Note: the final decision as to whether the facilities are of particular interest to the tourism market will be made by OCC
3. Should offer at least one of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Tours of facilities or demonstrations</li><li>○ Interactive displays for tourists</li></ul>	3. Evidence of tours/ demonstrations if appropriate.

## 6. Recreational Facilities and Sport Venues:

A. Recreational Facilities:

<b>Eligibility Criteria</b>	<b>Additional Supporting Evidence Required</b>
1. Should be open for at least 100 days per year and for at least 400 hours during that period.	1. Details of opening times.
2. Should have adequate toilet facilities and be able to offer light refreshments where appropriate.	2. Details of facilities and equipment hire tariff.
3. Should be open to non-members without prior booking and where necessary equipment should be available for hire.	



**B. Sports Venues:**

<b>Eligibility Criteria</b>	<b>Additional Supporting Evidence Required</b>
1. Should be the venue for at least 15 major events each year and should be able to prove that each event attracts visitors from outside the local area.	1. Evidence that the attraction has signed up to the Visitors Charter through the Regional Tourist Board.

**C. Cinemas/Theatres:**

**Note:** Unless in a rural situation will NOT be eligible for Tourism signage.

<b>Eligibility Criteria</b>	<b>Additional Supporting Evidence Required</b>
1. Should be open to non-members during normal opening hours.	1. Details of opening times.
2. Should have adequate toilet facilities and be able to offer light refreshments.	


**7. Camping And Caravan Sites:**

<b>Eligibility Criteria</b> (As for ALL applicants. In addition).	<b>Additional Supporting Evidence Required</b> (As for ALL applicants. In addition)
1. Must either participate in a nationally approved Quality Assurance scheme i.e. Visit Britain or AA <u>Or</u>	1. Evidence of up-to-date Quality Assurance Scheme grading or membership of the Caravan Club / Camping and Caravanning Club.
2. Must be under the membership of the Caravan Club or the Camping and Caravanning Club.	2. Details of facilities offered on site, including the number of pitches.
3. Should have at least 20 pitches for casual overnight use by touring caravans.	3. Evidence of up-to-date licensing.
4. Must be open to non-members without the need to pre- book.	
5. Must be licensed under the Caravan Sites and Control of Development Act 1960 and/or the Public Health Act 1936.	

## 8. Youth Hostels

<b>Eligibility Criteria</b> (As for ALL applicants. In addition).	<b>Additional Supporting Evidence Required</b> (As for ALL applicants. In addition).
1. Must be open without the need for prior booking during normal opening hours.	2. Evidence that it is managed by the YHA if appropriate.

## 9. Tourist Information Centres / Points

<b>Eligibility Criteria</b> (As for ALL applicants. In addition).	<b>Additional Supporting Evidence Required</b> (As for ALL applicants. In addition).
1. Must be recognised by the Regional Tourist Board in order to be signed with the recognised symbol. 	1. Up to date evidence of recognition by Regional Tourist Board.
2. A District, Town or Parish Council or a Local Tourist Board in conjunction with one of these councils, may set up Tourist Information points within their locality. These points should be off street, although on-street points may exceptionally be possible.	
3. Parish Councils may add a tourist facility symbol to their place-name signs.	

## 10. Bypassed Community – Local Services

These signs are provided for the benefit of drivers on all-purpose roads to highlight the availability of services, during working hours in a bypassed community.

**Note:** Bypassed Community Tourism Signs will NOT be eligible if the destination is already signed as a primary destination using standard directional signing.

<b>Eligibility Criteria</b> (As for ALL applicants. In addition).	<b>Additional Supporting Evidence Required</b> (As for ALL applicants. In addition).
1. The Community must usually be a small town or village with a population of less than 10,000.	1. Up to date evidence of the population of the community.
2. The community must offer a variety of services to visitors from outside the local	2. Details of the services offered within the community.

area. These might include adequate parking and public toilets (both must clearly be signed within the community), public telephones, shops and / or refreshments.	
3. The community must be within 3 miles of the road from which the services are to be signed and be the first community reached after leaving that road.	3. Map detailing the location of the community in relation to the road from which the services are to be signed.
4. Adequate confirmatory and return signing must be provided.	Details of existing or proposed confirmatory and return signing.

### **Additional Guidance for Tourism Signs for Bypassed Communities:**


- There must be no detriment to road safety, good traffic management or the environment because of traffic looking for services.
- Encouragement of this traffic must be acceptable to the local community as a whole and should be determined by the appropriate District Council.
- If a community has tourist facilities which qualify for tourism signs these may be included on the local services sign in the form of a small standard symbol. Individual qualifying attractions may also be eligible for other tourism signs within the bypassed community.
- A descriptive phrase which refers to the history of the community, the attractions present, or important environmental features may be included i.e., 'Historic Market Town.' The phrase will not exceed three words.

### **11. Rural Community Signing:**

These signs are provided where there may be several tourist facilities in one rural community. All rural settlements in the county are eligible for this type of sign and will be developed in consultation with Parish/Town/District Councils who may also wish to consult business interests.

The local town or parish council will be responsible for deciding the detail and content of individual rural community signing schemes.

Such schemes might incorporate:

- A local information board with the words 'Local Information' in addition to the standard sign (if appropriate):  

- Supplementary plates attached to the village name plates which could be

- erected at the village entry points.
- Signing within the settlement. This should look to direct the traffic to adequate car parking facilities where possible. Individual attractions should be signed with pedestrian signs from these. It may also be possible for the local information points to be provided at car parks to highlight the location of the major facilities.
  - The entry sign for rural communities should incorporate a standard symbol for a village shop.
  - If highway signs already exist in a rural settlement, OCC retains the right to remove these signs in conjunction with the introduction of a rural community signs scheme under this policy.

## **12. Signs and Facilities located on a Motorway and/or Trunk Road:**

There are additional rules to those detailed above for each category for tourism signs on motorways and trunk roads, and it is necessary to involve the Highways Agency in this type of application.

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