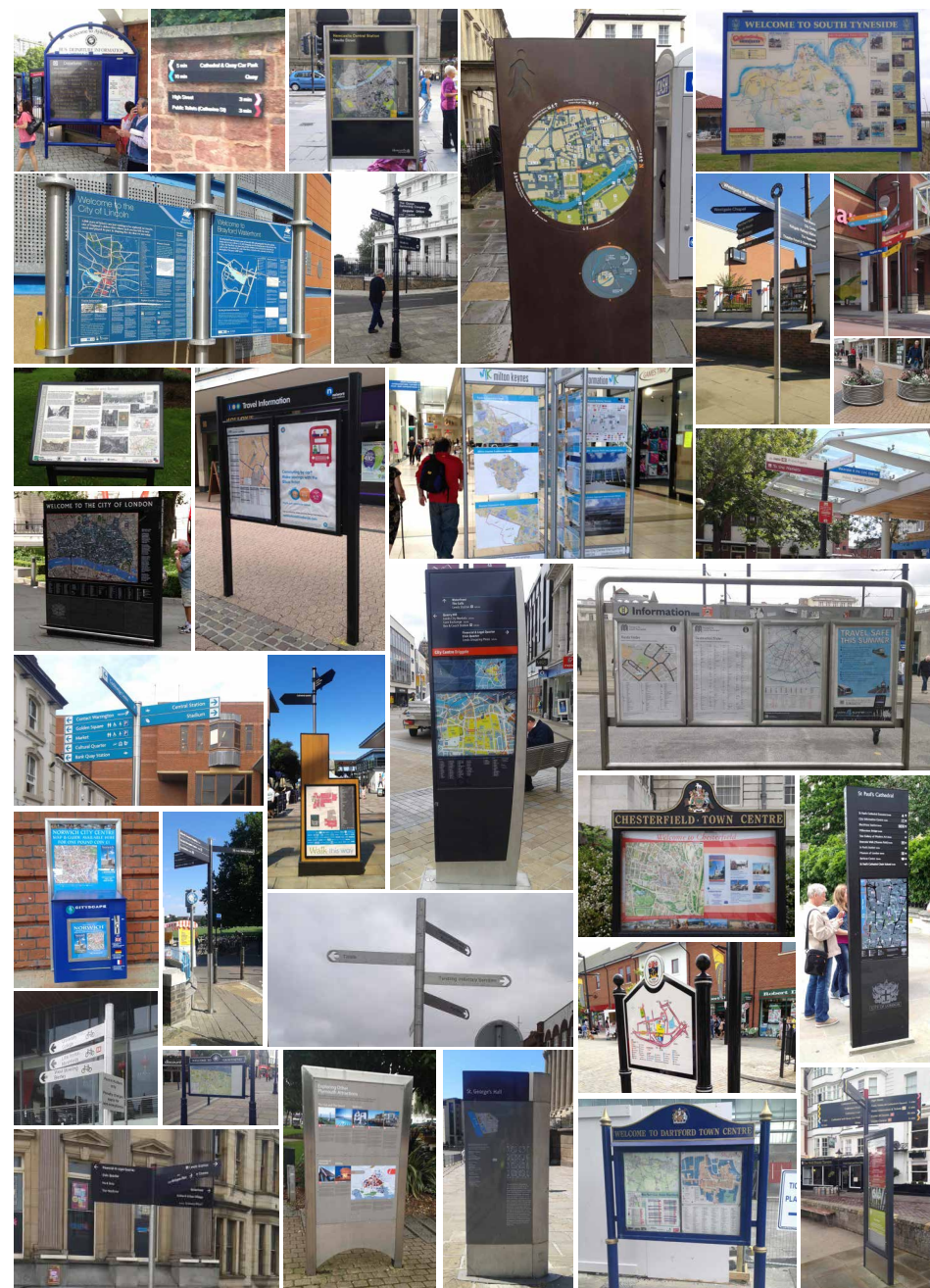

Wayfinding - what's out there?

A survey of 186 cities and towns

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44 Palmerston Place
Edinburgh
EH12 5BJ

Tel: 0131 226 6232
Fax: 0131 226 3288



info@streetwisesystems.com
www.streetwisesystems.com

What we did and why:

In 2012 we decided to undertake a survey of cities and towns primarily across England, outside of London itself. It was not possible to visit every town, so we undertook to survey 186 of the largest cities and towns, the full list of which can be found at the end of this summary.

The task was to identify and record what types of wayfinding assistance was provided for pedestrians in each city or town centre and to assist with carrying out the study we employed two town planning and urban design students for two months. One, a recent graduate and the other a second year student. Each on average visited two destinations per day. The survey was completed in September 2012.

Although we had a reasonable understanding of what is out there generally; we wanted to gain a much better knowledge base of what individual cities and towns have in place to help visitors find their way around. Thus by so doing we would have a very good comprehension of the overall situation across the country that would prove useful in helping our clients in the development of new systems. We did this principally for commercial reasons of course, but we also understand that this subject is of broader interest. We believe this to be the largest survey of its kind.

Please note that images shown within this report, unless otherwise stated, are images taken during our survey of the cities and towns as listed at the end of this report.

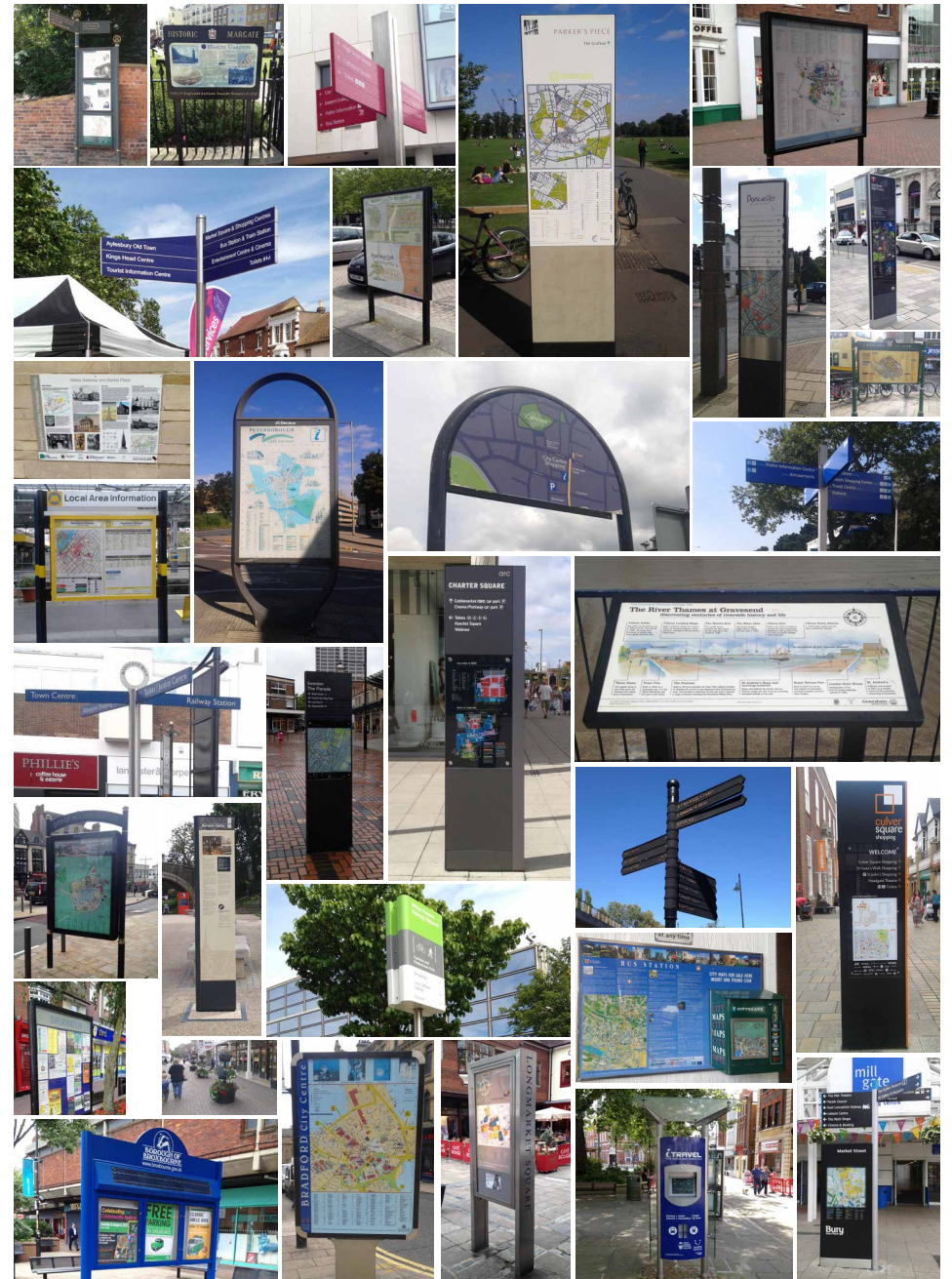
The base statistics

The report shows the types of wayfinding assistance we found on-street. The percentages are essentially the proportion of cities and towns that had this element as part of its system. We were not recording every incidence of a type of sign, purely what type had been provided.

Following are comments related to the individual groups and some of our observations overall.

Who we are

Streetwise Orientation and Navigation Systems designs and develops pedestrian wayfinding and orientation systems. We have designed and developed successful systems for a variety of cities and towns across the UK.



Fingerposts

Fingerposts are still the most prevalent - 92% of cities/towns have them.

Time served and well understood, the fingerpost is by far the most widely used element for wayfinding. Not too much of a surprise, but the very traditional black and gold or black and silver fingerpost was to be found in 78% of the destinations. More contemporary fingerpost designs were to be found in 41% and this in itself points to the fact that there are places that have both the traditional and contemporary designs operating. This can reflect the fact that traditional designs are often preferred in the older, historic parts of city/town centres while, in newly developed business districts for example, the contemporary designs are preferred.

The condition of fingerposts varied widely across and even within destinations. At one end of the spectrum there were fingerposts in perfect condition while others are the exact opposite, not clean, often rusted in places. We also found reasonably frequently that fingerposts had fingers pointing in the wrong direction. Occasionally this can happen by accident but often it has been done deliberately as an act of mischief or vandalism. There are systems available now that have much better locking systems to prevent this problem.

As you will see when examining the selection of photographs accompanying this paper, the legibility of the lettering varies widely and the state of cleanliness and condition of the paint on the lettering has a major impact on usability.

While fingerposts provide a simple basic level of wayfinding assistance, they are limited in what they can achieve on their own. Use of them does not readily provide visitors with an easy understanding of how different parts of a city or town relate to each other and in fact can make the user very dependent on them. In order to overcome that, it is necessary to provide other forms of information such as maps.

As can be seen, we found 7% of cities/towns have fingerposts that also incorporated information panels. This trend has grown in recent years and is expected to continue.



Traditional Fingerpost

78%

Contemporary Fingerpost

41%

Fingerpost with panel

7%



Pointers

We observed that some cities/towns have different designs of fingerposts in what appear to be very similar districts with little or no reason evident in terms of urban or streetscape design to warrant the difference. This can occur due to a simple lack of co-ordination or even communication as different areas have been developed or re-developed. From a wayfinding viewpoint certainly, one of the key issues is consistency in terms of ensuring that users feel comfortable with the system.

Fingerposts in good condition and up to date give a very good impression to visitors, unfortunately the opposite is true of those that are not well maintained. This applies across all elements of a system but it is much better to have a monitoring process in place and even a quarterly inspection, which does not take long, can flag up any problems and allow remedies to be sought.

Freestanding Panels

Overall, 85% of cities/towns have Freestanding Panels.

In the region of 85% of cities and towns make use of freestanding panels to provide mapping and information. Most have a mixture of types on offer. The styles employed tend to reflect the fingerpost style present although not always unfortunately. What we are looking at here is the more standard two poles and a display case, one or two sided. The most common form we found was the freestanding map display that incorporates a pocket map dispenser. These are provided by private sector companies in co-operation with the local authorities. They carry advertising and other information around the map itself and the maps are normally charged out at £1 or £2. The two brand names on these are Cityscape and Infopoint.

Although the largest segment of these were using a traditional design, there were a significant number using more contemporary designs and again often both co-exist in the same city or town depending upon the style of the district. These commercially funded units do make a real difference to improving wayfinding and are often to be found in key locations. They are however necessarily restricted in what they can provide as space has to be given over to advertising. It is also more difficult for them, even in their graphics, to reflect the particular characteristics of a city or town due to their need for standardisation.

One final point to end on here, it is heart warming to see that even in this digital age there is still a place for the good old fashioned Notice Boards in our cities and town centres, with 33% offering at least one of these for you to publicise your 'bring and buy sale' or local drama group performance!



Pointers

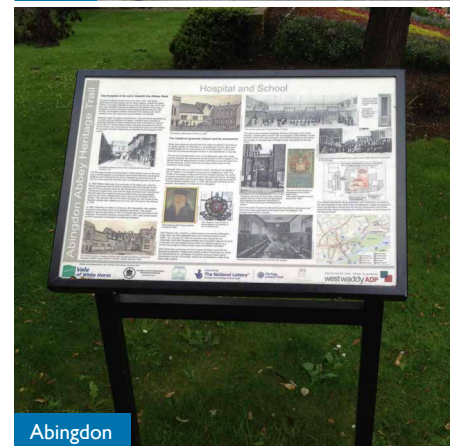
As with fingerposts, the same approach needs to be adopted for these freestanding panels in that they need to be kept up to date and in a good state of repair and cleanliness. They can fall victim to, amongst other things, fly-posting and small stickers advertising taxi services and 'earn money by working from home'. In our experience, regular checking and removal of such items usually pays dividends in that the perpetrators understand it has only a very limited lifespan and cease to apply them.



Lincoln



Leeds



Abingdon

Freestanding map or information panel with map dispenser

57%

Freestanding map or information panel without map dispenser

37%

Freestanding interpretive lectern style panel

24%

Victoriana freestanding notice board

33%



Chesterfield

Monoliths

Overall, 28% of cities/towns use Monoliths to display information.

Increasingly seen in our city and town centres is what we refer to as monoliths, often also called totems. What was once the preserve of up-market car dealers has hit the High Street for over 15 years now. These take on many forms but essentially consist of directional signs, mapping and local information. Looking at the percentages they are still in the minority but are becoming much more popular. They are almost always of a contemporary design.

By contrast with the fingerpost networks, the monoliths were generally in better condition. This will undoubtedly be due to the fact that most have been installed much more recently but also that they tend to be maintained more regularly or at least would appear to be in terms of state of cleanliness. One of the most common faults in these systems from our experience is that they are not updated as frequently as they need to be, due either to a lack of someone having a clear mandate to do so or due to the cost of updating. This should be considered as a very high priority at the outset and be reflected in the design to ensure ease of keeping them current.



Pointers

Although the largest segment provides mapping and lists points of interest, there were far fewer that took the opportunity to offer some sort of interpretive information on the surrounding area. In most cases this represents a missed opportunity. If you look at almost all research on why visitors like to visit a particular destination, high on the list is enjoying the local street ambience and getting a feel for the place. On-street interpretive materials can really make a difference and help people appreciate the character of the town.

One factor worthy of note is that in only 9% of destinations did we find information on street that could be deemed to be some sort of shopping guide. Considering how difficult it is at the moment for retailers in city and town centres it is certainly an area that should be looked at in terms of making sure visitors can find what there is on offer easily, especially in those places just off the main high streets. Although this can place burdens on keeping them up to date, there are means by which this can be tackled to make it much easier to manage.



Contemporary monolith map only

7%

Contemporary monolith map and information

18%

Contemporary monolith interpretive

4%

Contemporary monolith shopping guide

9%

Contemporary monolith map and cycle information

3%

Wall mounted panels

Overall, 75% of cities/towns have some type of wall mounted information.

The use of wall mounted panels is fairly widespread. The style of these followed closely to the style adopted for free standing units in almost all cases.

Considering the economic advantages of wall mounted materials, we were surprised to find that as many as 25% of cities/towns have not taken advantage of opportunities to provide information at key points where there was good availability of wall space.



Pointers

Mounting information on walls will generally incur as little as 20-25% of the costs of freestanding information due to the much reduced level of hardware and installation required. When developing a system be sure to consider this factor to help supplement the network at low cost.



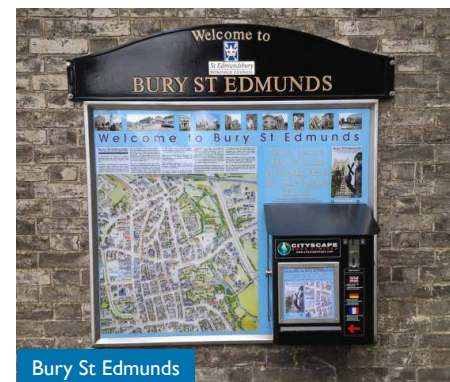
Rugby



Dartford



Bury



Bury St Edmunds



Peterborough

Wall mounted map without map dispenser

39%

Traditional wall mounted map with map dispenser

10%

Wall panel – commercial map

39%

Wall mounted interpretive board

28%

Wall panel – map car park

12%

Digital interactive travel/information points

Overall, 65% of cities/towns have some type of electronic or interactive travel/information points.

Growing in popularity, we found that 27% of cities/towns had free standing interactive travel/information points that provided useful information in terms of local services and their location. Technology on street has had a very poor reputation over the past twenty years with almost all systems proving expensive to install, unreliable and costly to maintain. There has been however, truly significant progress made over the past few years and we believe the time has come to look again at the incorporation of digital media in wayfinding systems.

Car Parks

With the majority of people arriving in our city and town centres by car, it was interesting to note the very low percentage of destinations that provide mapping and information in their car parks, both open air and multi-storey. Including wall mounted and free standing displays, under 25% of car parks provide information, many not even providing a basic sign for the way to the city/town centre.

On the other hand we are now seeing significant growth in the provision of real time parking capacity information with 26% of cities/towns observed having at least one post mounted electronic parking display available. There could of course be more of these signs further out from the city/town centres. The installation of these systems represents a significant investment and we could encourage that at the time of specifying, more emphasis be given to helping people to find their way from these car parks to all parts of the city/town centre.



Pointers

Offering visitors information at their arrival points provides the best opportunity to influence their behaviour during the visit. This allows visitors to understand the layout of the city/town centre, get a fuller picture of what there is to do and enables them to plan out their visit. This applies just as much to those arriving by car as any other form of transport.



Wolverhampton



Southport



Colchester

Freestanding interactive travel/information point

27%

Post mounted electronic parking display

26%

Electronic transport arrival/departure information

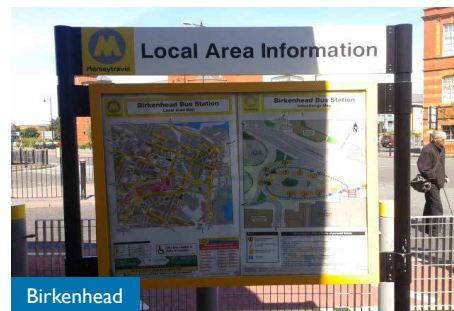
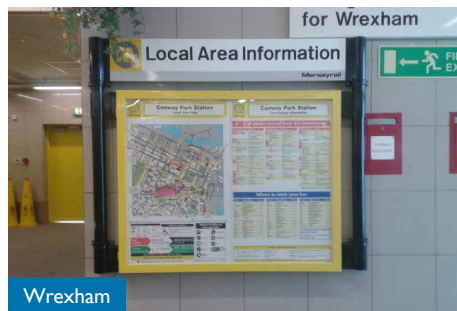
35%



Norwich

Rail Stations and Bus Depots

In our summary we have not highlighted the placement of wayfinding information in and around rail stations and bus depots. Overall we found that if there was a system in place at all then you would certainly find it at these points, as you might expect. The rail stations and bus depots in many if not all cases have some sort of local map available. These however tend to be of the commercial type discussed earlier and not part of an organised network to be found throughout the city/town. In other words they tend not to be integrated. One other point we noted; there were many cities and towns that had clear signage to help you go from for example the train station to the bus depot, a common requirement. Surprisingly however, a large minority did not provide this signage at all while other places gave you one sign but no follow up, leaving you guessing thereafter.



Pointers

We have ourselves encountered the problem whereby transport points understand the need to provide wayfinding assistance from the arrival point but do not necessarily see it as part of their remit to ensure it engages with whatever else is to be used in the city/town. Our recommendation is that at the very early stages someone from each of the key transport points, and in this we would include the owners/operators of the main car parks, are brought into the consultation process to help achieve the level of integration that makes the pedestrian wayfinding system much more effective overall.

So what is the state of play?

We looked at 186 cities and towns. Of these we feel they fall into three categories.

Those that have a very good system in good condition.

37%



Those that have a reasonable system in place but could do with improvement or further development over the next few years.

49%



Those that have a poorly maintained or inadequate system, that need to take action as soon as possible.

14%





Best Practice Pointers

We have seen some very good systems and some not so good. Here are our top tips of what you must do to create the best.

- 1 Get everyone on board at the outset and agree with the key interested parties in your city or town centre just what the objectives are and agree the remit for the project. All too often this is not done sufficiently and as a result projects lack focus.
- 2 Think like a visitor when planning the network. Make no assumptions of knowledge and make sure that the system allows the visitor to find what they need, and indeed what you need them to, in order that you maximise the economic benefit from their visit.
- 3 Make sure it is integrated with transport point information and existing visitor information where at all possible; taking into account trains, buses and car parks.
- 4 Consistency is important in how the system works and in the design of the different elements used. Resist where economically possible holding on to old systems and adding new layers of elements that provide an inconsistent network, better to wait until you have the funds to do it well.
- 5 The design should present the directions, mapping and information in a well organised fashion. To do this it will be necessary to prioritise what information is to be given and at the outset accept that it cannot be all things to all people. Focus on delivering the key information but make the system point to other sources of information.
- 6 Being easy to update is absolutely essential, especially in destinations with ongoing development plans. Whether using static materials or digital presentations, the system should at the outset have an updating schedule and the wayfinding elements employed must be designed to make this easy to achieve.
- 7 Well maintained systems give a better return in two ways. The visitor sees a first class 'welcome mat' for them and uses the system. The system will last longer and therefore prove a better investment. Any hardware involved should have the ability to be maintained easily and be vandal resistant. The responsibility for maintenance must be clearly defined and an adequate annual budget created for its execution.



Nottingham



Edinburgh



Kirkoswald



Reading

Cities/Towns included in our survey

Abingdon	Bury St Edmunds	Eastleigh	Huddersfield	Newark on Trent	Sheffield	Wallasey
Aldershot	Cambridge	Ellesmere Port	Ipswich	Newcastle under Lyme	Shrewsbury	Walsall
Andover	Cannock	Enfield	Kettering	Newcastle upon Tyne	Skelmersdale	Warrington
Ashford	Canterbury	Exeter	Kidderminster	Northampton	Slough	Washington
Aylesbury	Carlisle	Fareham	King's Lynn	Norwich	Solihull	Waterlooville
Banbury	Chelmsford	Farnborough	Kingston Upon Hull	Nottingham	South Shields	Watford
Barnsley	Cheltenham	Folkestone	Kingwood	Nuneaton	Southampton	West Bromwich
Basildon	Cheshunt	Gateshead	Leamington Spa	Oldbury/Smethwick	Southend on Sea	Weston Super Mare
Basingstoke	Chester	Gillingham	Leeds	Oldham	Southport	Weymouth
Bath	Chester Le Street	Gloucester	Leicester	Oxford	St Albans	Whitley Bay
Bebington	Chesterfield	Gosport	Lichfield	Paignton	St Helens	Widnes
Bedford	Clacton on Sea	Gravesend	Lincoln	Peterborough	Stafford	Wigan
Birkenhead	Colchester	Grays	Littlehampton	Plymouth	Staines-upon-Thames	Wilmslow
Birmingham	Corby	Great Malvern	Liverpool	Pontefract	Stevenage	Woking
Blackburn	Coventry	Great Yarmouth	London	Poole	Stockport	Wolverhampton
Blackpool	Crawley	Grimsby	Loughborough	Portsmouth	Stockton on Tees	Worksop
Bognor Regis	Crewe	Guildford	Lowestoft	Preston	Stoke on Trent	Worthing
Bolton	Crosby	Halesowen	Luton	Ramsgate	Stourbridge	York
Bootle	Darlington	Halifax	Lytham St Annes	Reading	Sunderland	
Bournemouth	Dartford	Harlow	Macclesfield	Redditch	Sutton Coldfield	
Bracknell	Derby	Harrogate	Maidenhead	Rochdale	Swindon	
Bradford	Dewsbury	Hartlepool	Maidstone	Rotherham	Tamworth	
Brentwood	Doncaster	Hastings	Manchester	Rugby	Taunton	
Brighton	Dudley	Hemel Hempstead	Mansfield	Runcorn	Telford	
Bristol	Dunstable	Hereford	Margate	Sale	Tonbridge	
Burnley	Durham	High Wycombe	Middlesbrough	Salford	Torquay	
Burton on trent	East Grinstead	Horsham	Milton Keynes	Salisbury	Tunbridge Wells	
Bury	Eastbourne	Hove	Morley	Scunthorpe	Wakefield	