University of Sheffield

A Wayfinding & Signage Strategy
Executive Summary

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PLACE
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Executive Summary

The Wayfinding Strategy stage is now complete. Specific wayfinding challenges and goals have been set out to improve the wayfinding challenges at the University of Sheffield. From our research, we have identified where there are gaps in the existing signage provision, consulted with university audiences to collect insights into how people navigate the estate and the key issues they face, carried out a legibility study and information review and set out our proposals in a new strategy that sets out design principles, content rationale and suggested information hierarchy to test and develop in the next stage of the project.

What We Did
Placemarque are wayfinding architects specialising in environmental design and communication. This project included a full audit of the existing signage provision across the estate and a series of consultation sessions. The consultation sessions included a drop-in session, focus group days and the distribution of a digital survey. The consultation exercises were open to all staff and students and had representation from the Student Union officers, education and Disability and Dyslexia Support Service.

Key findings from both the audit and consultation sessions led to the conclusion that the current wayfinding performs poorly, giving the impression of a campus that's not well-connected and hard for people to find their way around, especially for a new or unfamiliar user.

Why is the project required?
A well-designed wayfinding system can significantly improve the user experience by reducing stress, increasing efficiency, and promoting safety. The wayfinding system can positively affect reputation, especially for first-time visitors. The project aims to develop a Wayfinding Strategy for The University of Sheffield, set out the current key issues and problems and develop a strategy for a proposed solution. The document summarises the strategy, setting out the principles to inform further project phases to deliver a successful wayfinding scheme for the University of Sheffield.

Key Issues
There are four problem areas to address in the Wayfinding Strategy:

• New visitors and people familiar with the campus but visiting a new area need help finding their way around.
• The pre-visit and on-site information needs to be more consistent; there are gaps in signage provision and discrepancies in the information displayed across various pre-visit and on-site platforms/signage.
• There is no standard or design system that is comprehensively followed across the university.
• There is no clear sense of 'campus' or entry points across campus.

Strategic Opportunities
Based on the key issues, there are several strategic opportunities available with the design and development of this project. The Wayfinding Strategy sets out how to create an improved sense of place, encourage connectivity and build a sense of identity and community throughout the estate. Five strategic opportunities include:

• Having a consistent information structure applied to the wayfinding information.
• Applying a systematic function to sign types and strategic placement of signage across the estate
• Identifying and naming external spaces and routes to help with orientation
• Design of a bespoke sign family that identifies the University of Sheffield brand within the public realm creating an improve sense of place
• Remove existing and unadopted zone references across the wayfinding signage to remove notional borders and improve campus connectivity.

The implementation of the Wayfinding Strategy will minimise environmental impact and support the University of Sheffield's Sustainability Strategy by encouraging active travel, improving the walkability of the campus through improved directional signage and developing a design system that is easily updatable and built with flexibility for future rollout as the estate grows and changes as the estate masterplan is developed. The developed design will meet accessible requirements in the British Standards 8300, a guide defining best practices for designing an accessible and inclusive environment.

Vision
The vision for the project is to create a campus that's easy for visitors and people unfamiliar with the area to know that they have arrived on campus and to navigate through - an enhanced student, staff and visitor experience.

Applying an inclusive, sustainable, standardised and connected approach to the design of Wayfinding and Signage across the campus and related mediums, promotes a greater sense of place, ambition, community and safety. The Full Technical Report document sets out:

• Audit summary
• Consultation summary
• Design principles
• Information hierarchy
• A concept sign family
• Mapping development
• Indicative sign locations
• Placement principles
• Digital opportunities

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Next Steps
Following the brand ID refresh and significant investments into the public realm, the university can maximise these investments and enhance the student, staff and visitor experience through improved wayfinding and signage.

The Wayfinding Strategy carried out in 2023 provides a blueprint that will need to be tested in the Design and Development stage; this will then provide the guidelines and design principles to adhere to in a phased implementation stage.

Phase 2
Design and Development Stage

Scope of works include:

- Consultation on recommendations, including designs
- Workshop to develop digital strategy
- Review of planning consideration for high-level signage
- A phased plan
- Content Schedule
- Finalised information strategy
- Clear and concise mapping suite
- Finalised sign family design
- Budget for implementation
- Artwork Templates for sign types
- Design intent drawings
- Sign location plan
- Sign design manual
- Training sessions/resources
- Tender process to manufacturers

Phase 3
Implementation Stage

We envisage the implementation stage split into two phases:
Priority 1 - Pre-visit channels, gateway and orientation points, public space identifiers
Priority 2 - Building entrance signs, car parking signs, high-level indicators

Scope of works include:

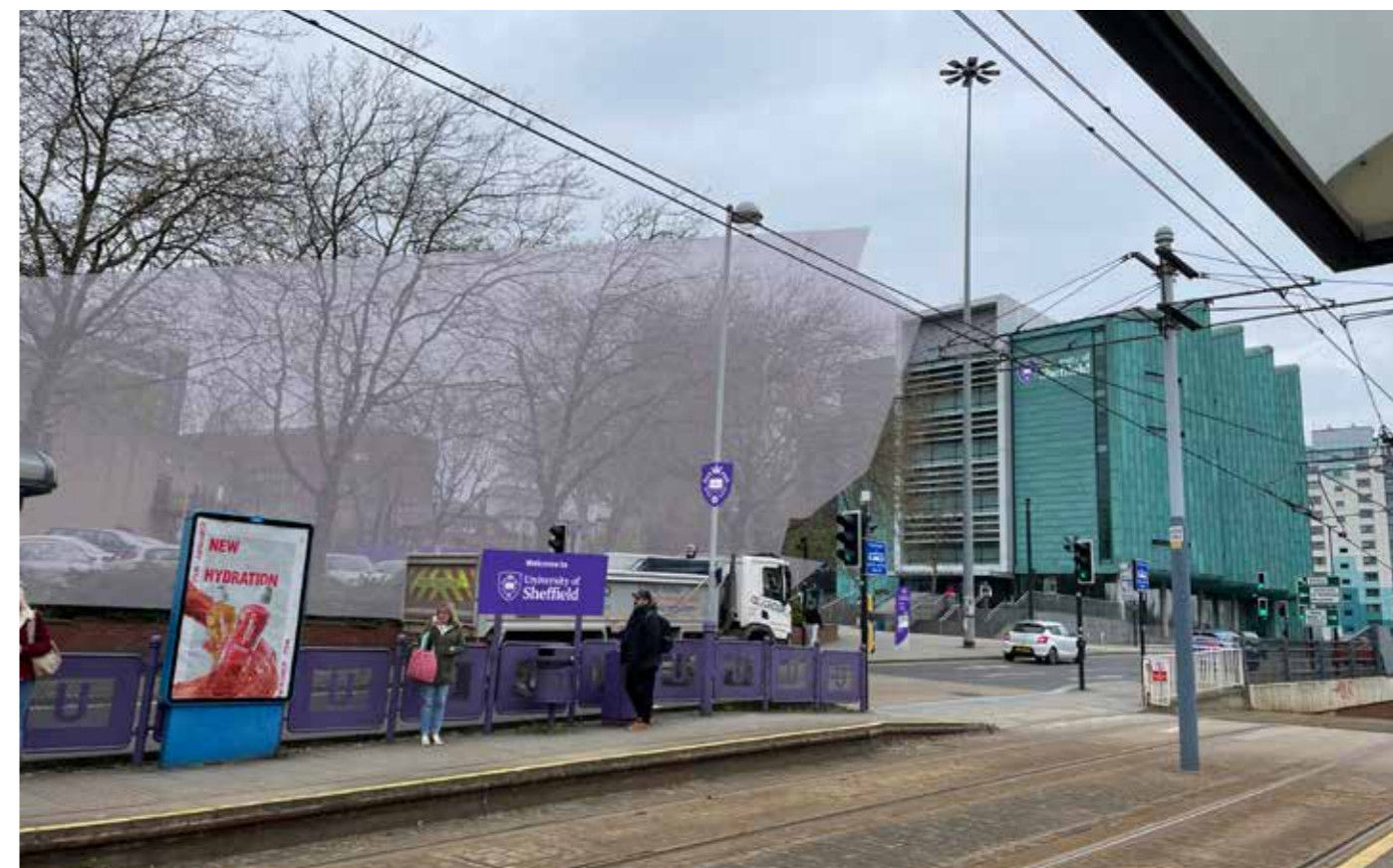- Appoint manufacturer
- Agree final scope of works

Fig 1 Indicative Visual
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Summary Report

Fig 2 Concept Sign Family
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