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Press release

By George! England's traditional counties can return to England's roads

From:

[Department for Communities and Local Government](#) and [The Rt Hon Eric Pickles MP](#)

History:

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Part of:

[England's traditional counties](#), [Bringing people together in strong, united communities](#), [Making the planning system work more efficiently and effectively](#), [Community and society](#) and [Planning and building + others](#)

Planning rules have been changed to allow councils to put up boundary signs marking traditional English counties.



To mark St George's Day, Eric Pickles today (23 April 2014) announced a new initiative to support the 'tapestry' of traditional English counties, including getting rid of a Whitehall ban on the names of traditional counties being displayed on street and road signs. The government is also publishing a [new online interactive map](#) of England's county boundaries.

England's traditional counties date back over a thousand years of English history, but many of the counties have been sidelined by Whitehall and municipal bureaucrats in recent decades, including the municipal restructuring by Edward Heath's government in 1972. By contrast, this government is championing local communities continuing to cherish and celebrate such traditional ties and community spirit.

Mr Pickles announced today that planning rules have been changed to allow for councils to put up boundary signs marking traditional English counties – including the likes of Cumberland, Huntingdonshire, Westmorland and Middlesex.

In addition, the government is shortly to propose changes to highways regulations to allow traditional county names to appear on boundary road signs. The current rules prevent unitary councils like Blackpool from having a road sign saying 'Lancashire', or Poole saying 'Dorset' – since they confusingly are not considered to be part of an 'administrative county'.

No council is being forced to make any change or put up unnecessary street clutter, but the intention is to free councils from Whitehall red tape, support local tourism and to cherish local ties and traditions. Local communities will be able to lobby their councils for the restoration of traditional boundary signs, including campaigns by public subscription.

This is part of a series of steps to champion England's national identities; the government has previously changed Whitehall rules to allow local and county flags to be flown without planning permission, and supported the [Flag Institute](#) in encouraging a new wave of county and community flags to be designed and flown by local communities.

Eric Pickles, Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, said:

The tapestry of England's counties binds our nation together, and is interwoven with our cultural fabric – from our cricket to our ales. Previous governments have tried to wipe the counties off the map, imposing bland administrative structures or alien euro-regions.

But I believe we are stronger as a nation when we cherish and champion our local and traditional ties. This government is proud to wave the flag of St George alongside both our county flags. Whatever one's class, colour or creed, we should have pride in our English identities within the United Kingdom's Union that binds us together.

Russell Grant, television personality and founder of the Association of British Counties, added:

This is great news for counties like my own, Middlesex. We lost our county council in 1965, but our county continues to exist. Some London boroughs like Hounslow have actively supported Middlesex signs on their boundaries, and Brentford Chamber of Commerce are keen to proclaim the town as the historic county town of Middlesex. These common sense changes will give local councils and communities the confidence to promote historic local heritage and identity.

Further information

New guidance on county signs

The section on 'advertisements' in the recently issued [planning guidance](#) by the Department for Communities and Local Government gives the green light for councils to put up traditional counties signs:

Local authorities may install signs indicating the boundary of a historic or traditional county on their land. Depending on circumstances, such signs may benefit from deemed consent, or the authority may be able to grant itself express consent ..., these powers being exercised as usual in the interests of amenity and public safety. Authorities need to bear in mind how such sign-posting can benefit the local economy and reflect this through the decision-taking process, where such signs are appropriate and locally-supported.

The government is also proposing to consult on amending the highways sign regulations to allow for traditional counties signs. These currently only allow for 'administrative' counties to be signed – not historic/traditional counties. It also means that unitary councils cannot mark their underlying county. The [2003 guidance](#) (Department for Transport circular 02/2003 (paragraph 37)) explains how only administrative counties can be marked:

Signs ... can now be used on all-purpose roads to sign administrative area boundaries of county, district and London borough councils in England, county or county borough councils in Wales, and councils in Scotland, as well as the boundaries between England and Wales and England and Scotland.

New online map

The government has also published a [new online interactive map](#).

Current and historic counties

Interactive maps showing current ceremonial counties of England (left hand screen), historic (traditional) counties of England and Wales from the 19th century (middle screen) and both combined (right hand screen)

SYNCHRONIZE MAPS: Scale Location

Ceremonial counties of England



Ceremonial counties of England. Click on the map to see which counties are which and to zoom in to them. How do they compare with the counties of yesteryear in the right hand map?

Historic (traditional) counties of England and Wales



Historic (traditional) counties of England and Wales from the 19th century. Click on the map to see which counties were which and to zoom in to them. How do they compare with today's counties shown in the left hand map?

About England's counties

The [Association of British Counties](#) is a society dedicated to promoting awareness of the continuing importance of the 92 historic (or traditional) counties of the United Kingdom. The Association of British Counties believes that the link which the historic counties provide between our present and our distant past adds great value to the life of the nation and therefore deserves to be preserved and enhanced.

The 39 counties of England have mostly existed largely unchanged since before 1066. They provide an instant means of reference to different parts of the country, to a set of cities, towns and villages; to distinctive scenery, architecture and wildlife; to particular industries and pastimes, accents and dialect, tourist attractions, weather and so on.

A large literature focuses on each of the counties; they give their names to clubs and societies, to teams people play for, to regiments they serve in; they are familiar holiday and business destinations. And they often provide a family link with past generations.

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