

Wide Open Space Michael Pinsky

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Introduction

The ambition of making roads safer places to use and live near has been around since the invention of the car. As walking in front of the car with a red flag is no longer feasible the majority of engineers and designers over the past decades have concentrated on ways of encouraging drivers to slow down through physical obstacles such as speed bumps and legal measures. However this has meant a vast proliferation in visually intrusive signage and regulation, something which is particularly undesirable in sensitive rural landscapes.

One response to this has been the application of environmental psychology to road systems, encouraging safer driving through increasing perceptual risk for drivers; for instance narrowing roads, marking entrances to built up areas and creating shared spaces between cars, pedestrians and cyclists. It is this approach which has been adopted by local authorities in Dorset through the new Rural Roads Protocol. This aims to ensure local character and 'sense of place' is considered as a key part of highway planning, helping to make roads safer and eliminating unnecessary visual clutter.

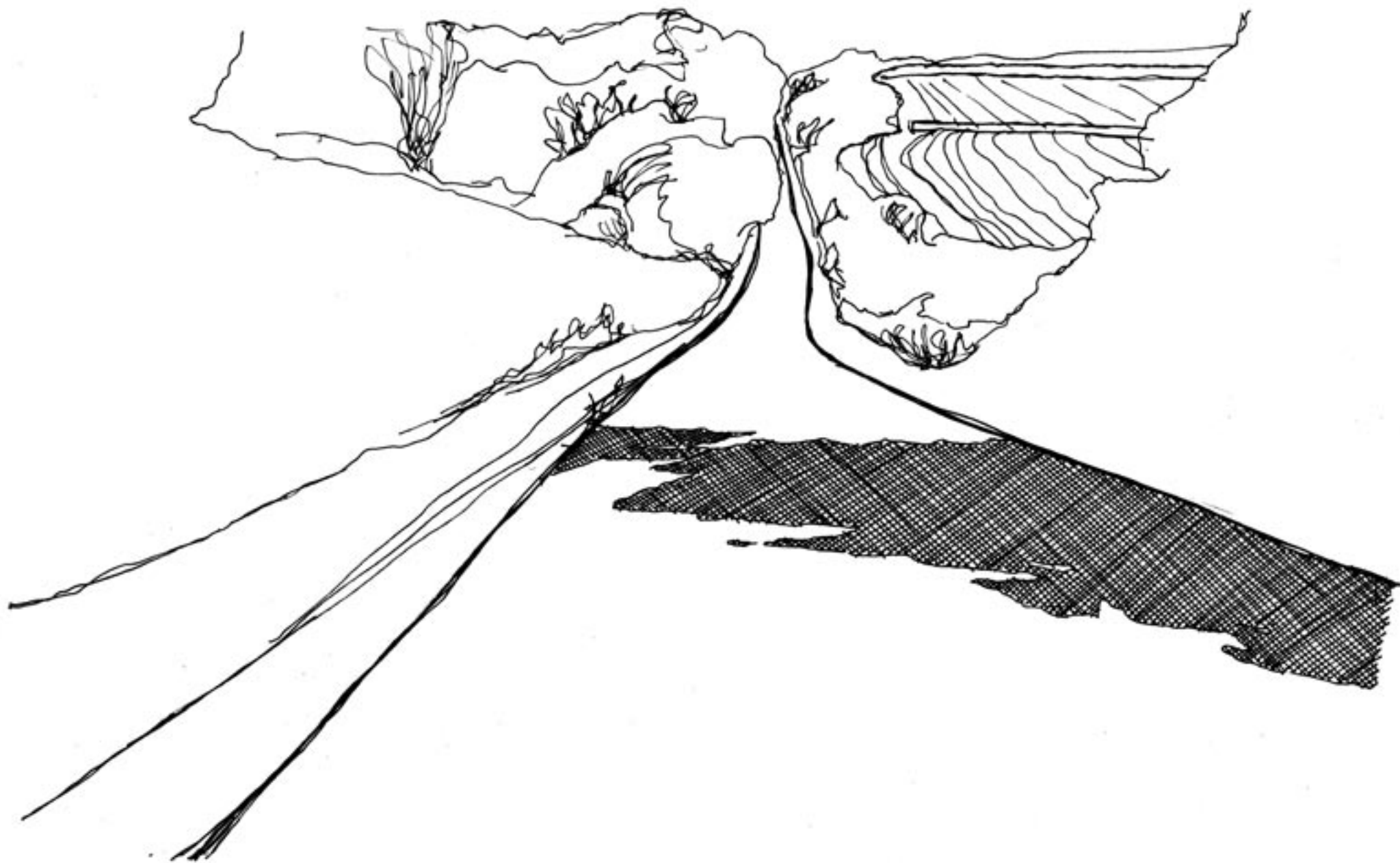
Innovative thinking and new attitudes will be needed if this vision is to succeed. This is why Dorset County Council Environmental Services and the Dorset Design and Heritage Forum commissioned one of the UK's most innovative artists, Michael Pinsky, to collaborate with the designers and engineers responsible for road improvements. Their response has been to develop alternatives to typical rural road design; essential infrastructure has become an integral part of the particular place it is located in; temporary interventions build up a long term memory of potential risk for drivers; new interest is created for road users; and the need of residents for safer public spaces next to roads (or even as shared spaces) is addressed.

Michael's ideas are not intended as a manual for road design, after all one of the main purposes of this work is to enhance local distinctiveness not replace one standardised way of thinking with another. They are intended to demonstrate the potential of working with artists to anybody working on highway projects - local authorities, government agencies and the communities affected. They clearly show that bringing in new perspectives could contribute to making the dangerous, ubiquitous, non-places that are the current reality of our road networks into sympathetic, sustainable and safer spaces for the future.

Alex Murdin - Creative Places Development Manager, Wide Open Space

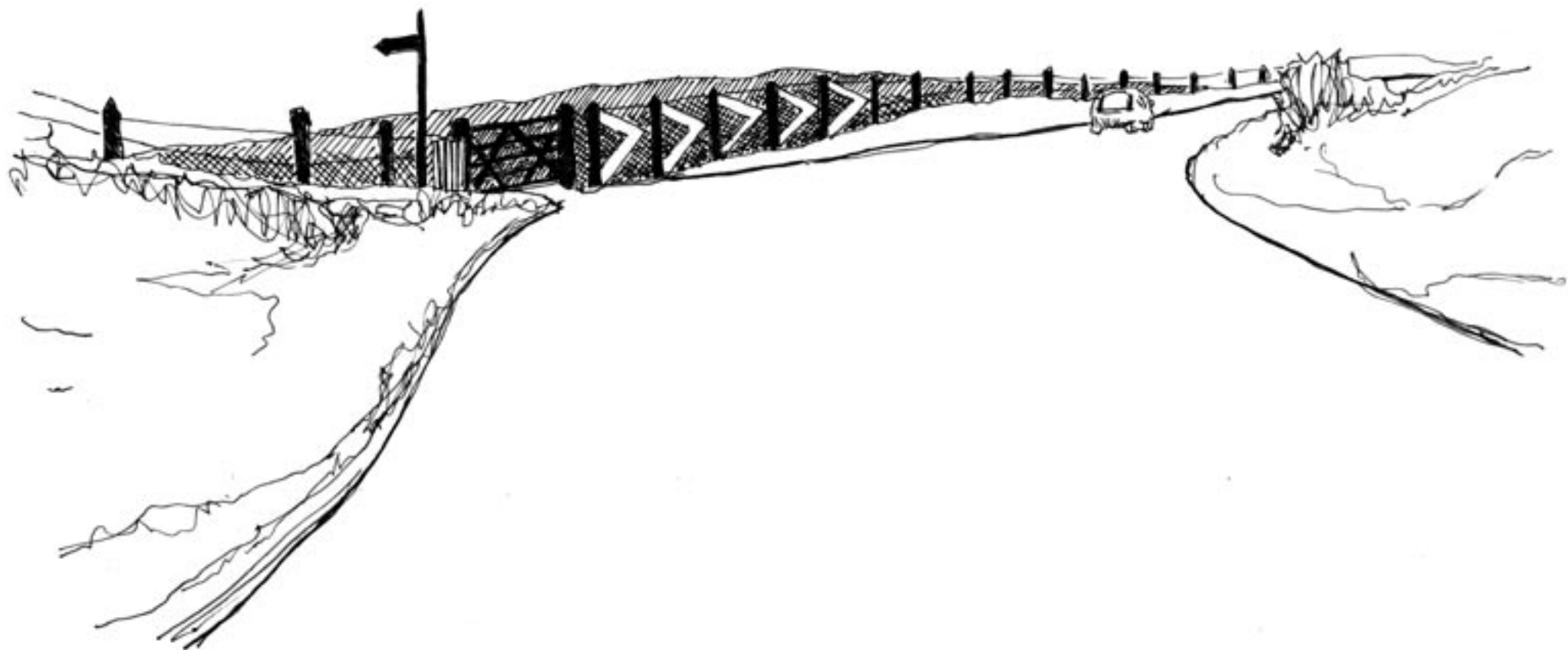
Eternal Shadows

Shadows cast by the landscape and architecture are inscribed into the road. These markings record one moment in time; midday on midsummer's day. Whether or not the day is bright these shadows will remain. On a sunny day the inscribed shadows will interact with the real shadows creating the effect that we live in a solar system with two suns.



Taking the corner

I have rethought the existing signage, considering ways we could incorporate this signage into other structures, which surround the road. In this example the fence is restructured to show the warning arrows. The fence is stained natural wood and the diagonal supports, which form the arrow, are painted in brilliant white. During the day this is quite a subtle intervention, but at night when these signs are most necessary the arrows catch the light thrown from the car headlamps and give sufficient warning of a bend in the road.



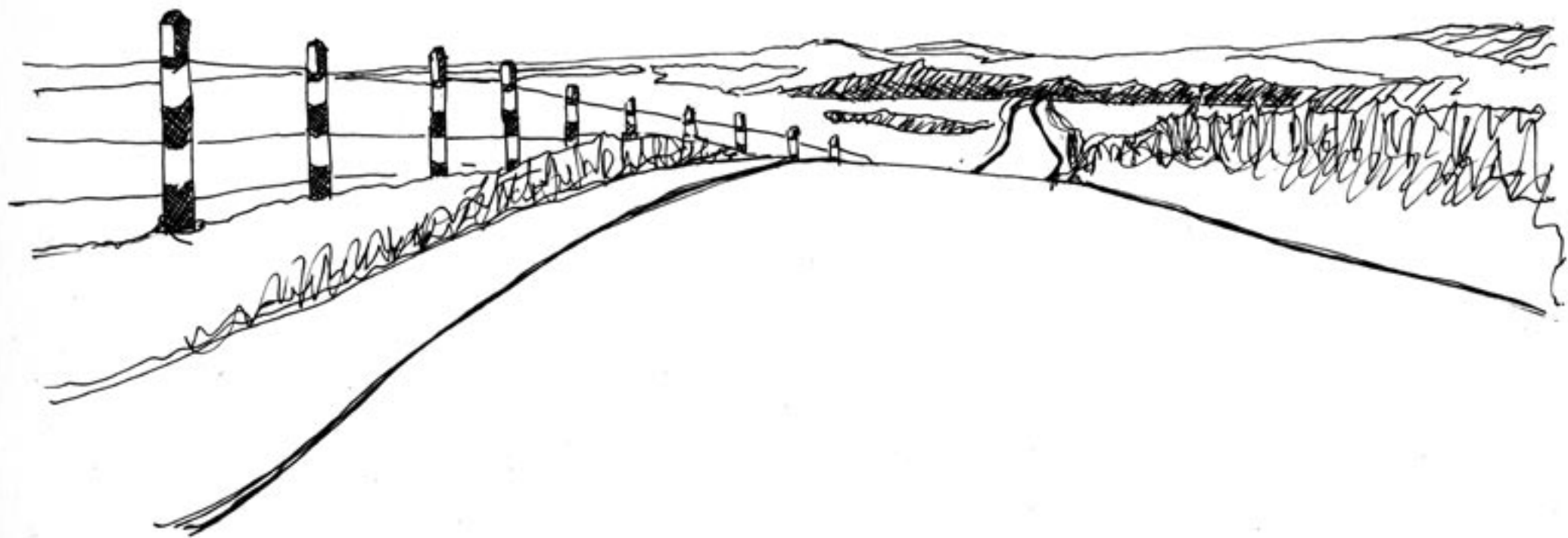
Slow Race

A series of competitions on the route, makes the last person across the finishing line the winner. These races include many modes of transport such as: cycling, motorbiking, driving and running. The races last for days, attracting a great deal of publicity.



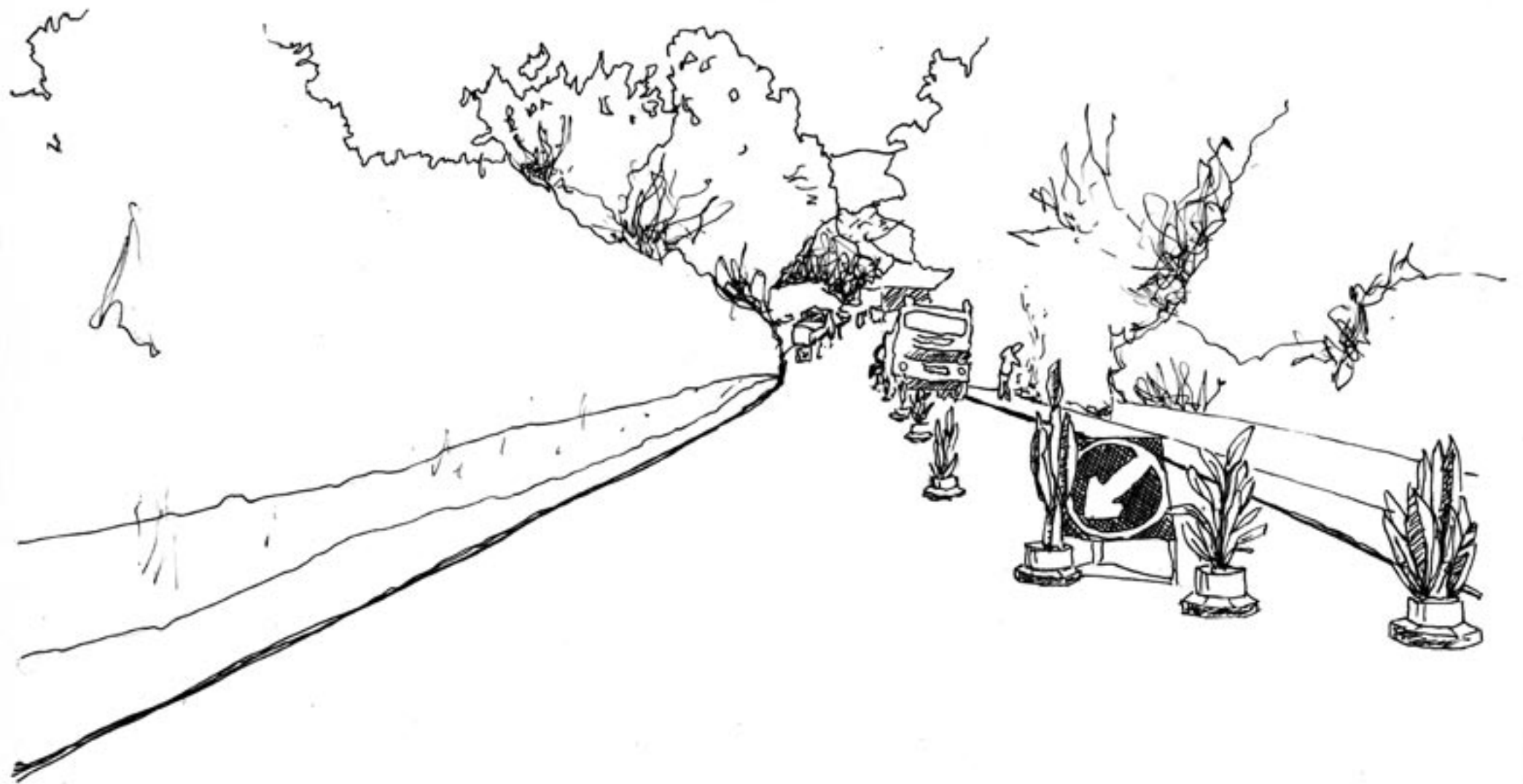
Reflective Fence

There is often a doubling of fence posts and reflective bollards. The reflective fence integrates both functions. These reflective posts are not particularly evident during the day, but function well at night when they are most necessary.



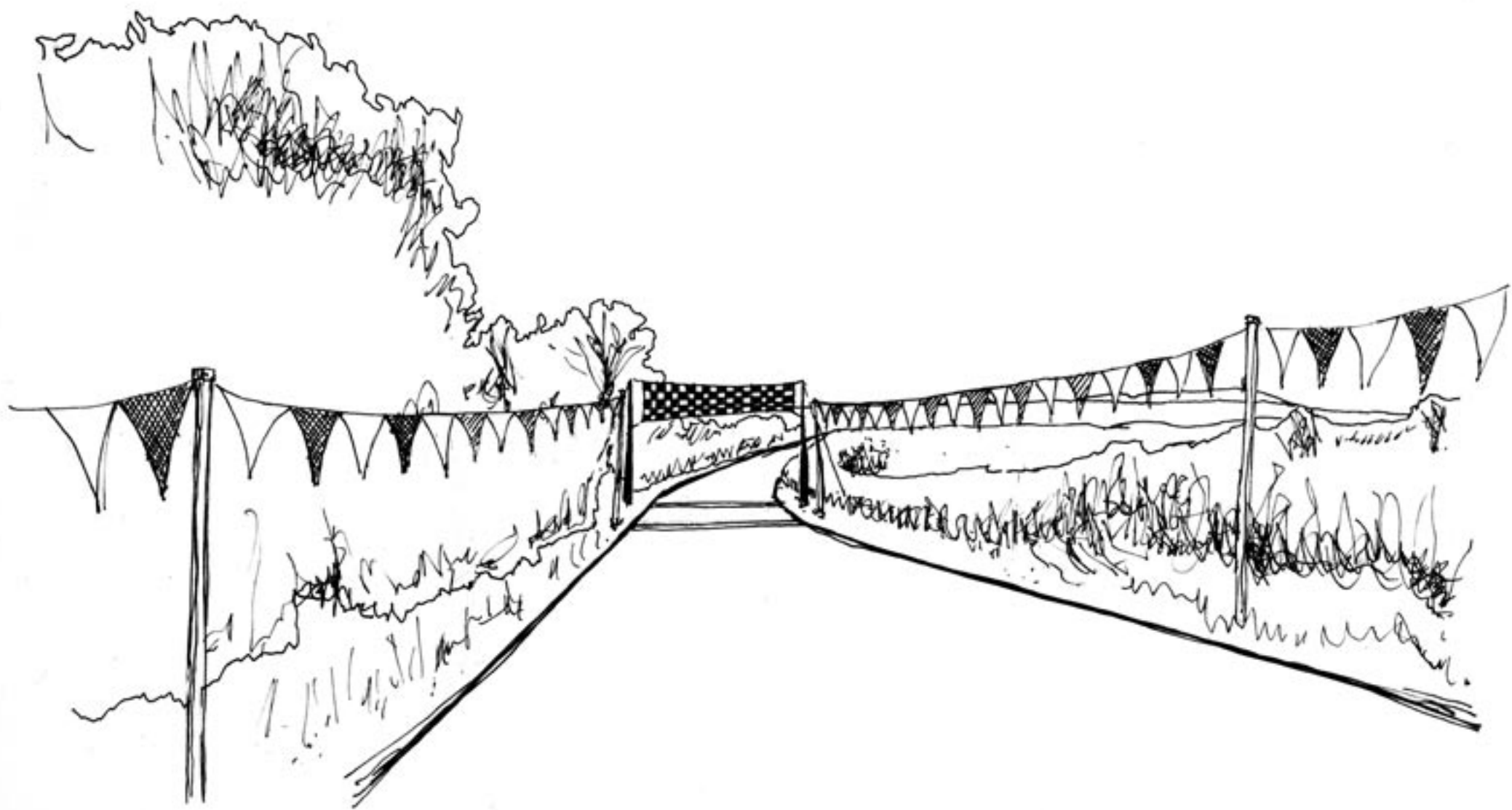
Flowering Cones

Every aspect of traffic management should be reconfigured to change the perception of the road from a place to pass through, to a place to be. Traffic cones are often used indiscriminately, and are often in place after work is finished. Using pot plants rather than traffic cones changes the tone of the roadworks entirely, adding interest to the area, rather than creating patterns which are homogeneous with every other road in Britain.



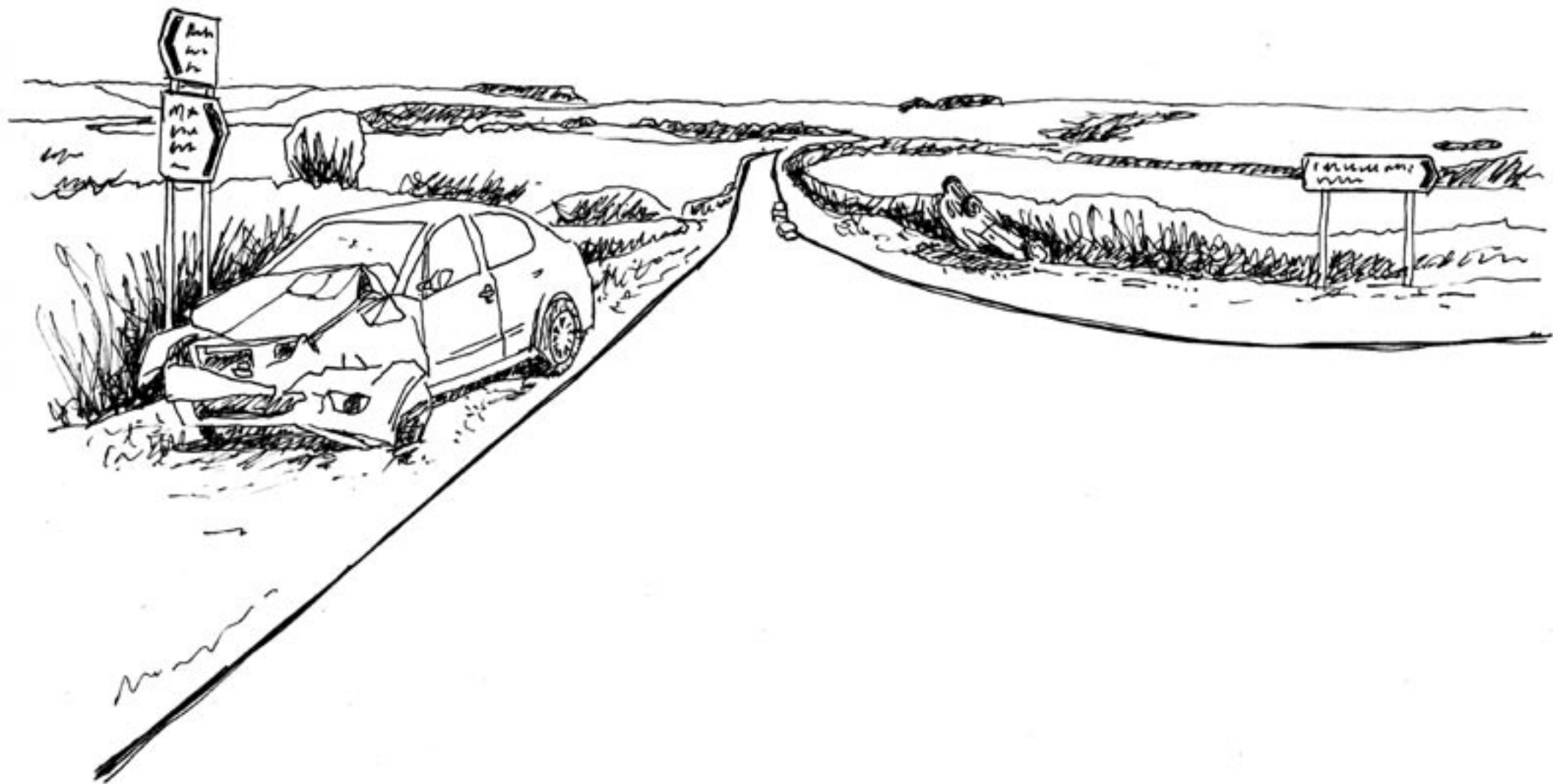
Finishing Line

A large banner with accompanying flags is moved to different locations over a period of time. The mobility of the structure takes regular commuters by surprise, demonstrating that no matter how well you know the road, things can change. The driver has the impression that there is an event going on, perhaps with runners or cyclists, so slows down accordingly.



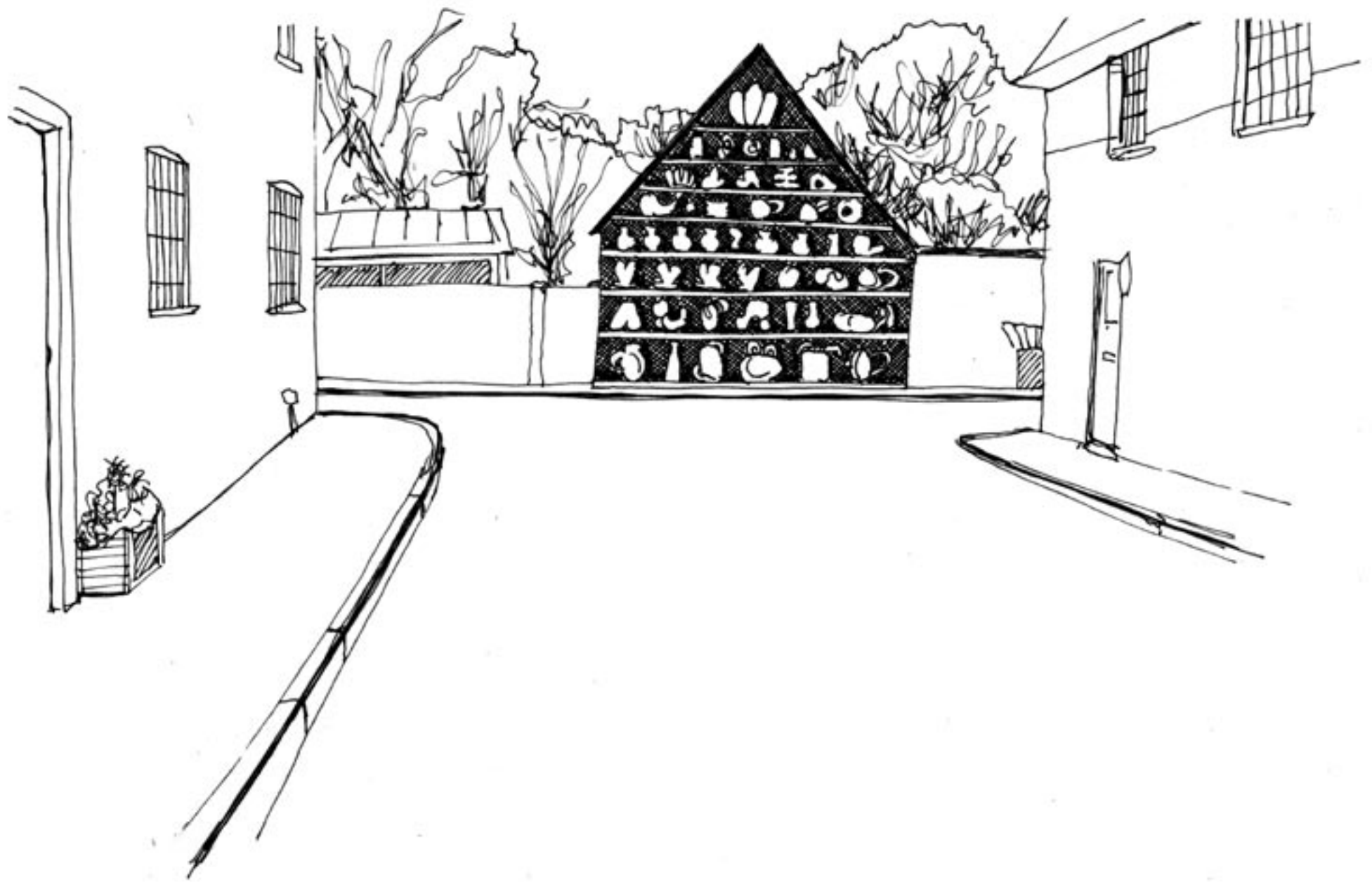
Ghosts

I have noticed over the last few years in London that people have placed bicycles painted white in locations where one of their loved ones have been killed in a road incident. In a similar vein, this work places, over the period of a month, crashed cars, motorbikes and bicycles in the locations where there have been fatalities over the last ten years. This as a cathartic exercise, an exorcism, which allows the road to move forward with no future accidents. This is a high profile intervention, drawing considerable press attention, offering a platform to discuss and inform the public of the route's aspirations.



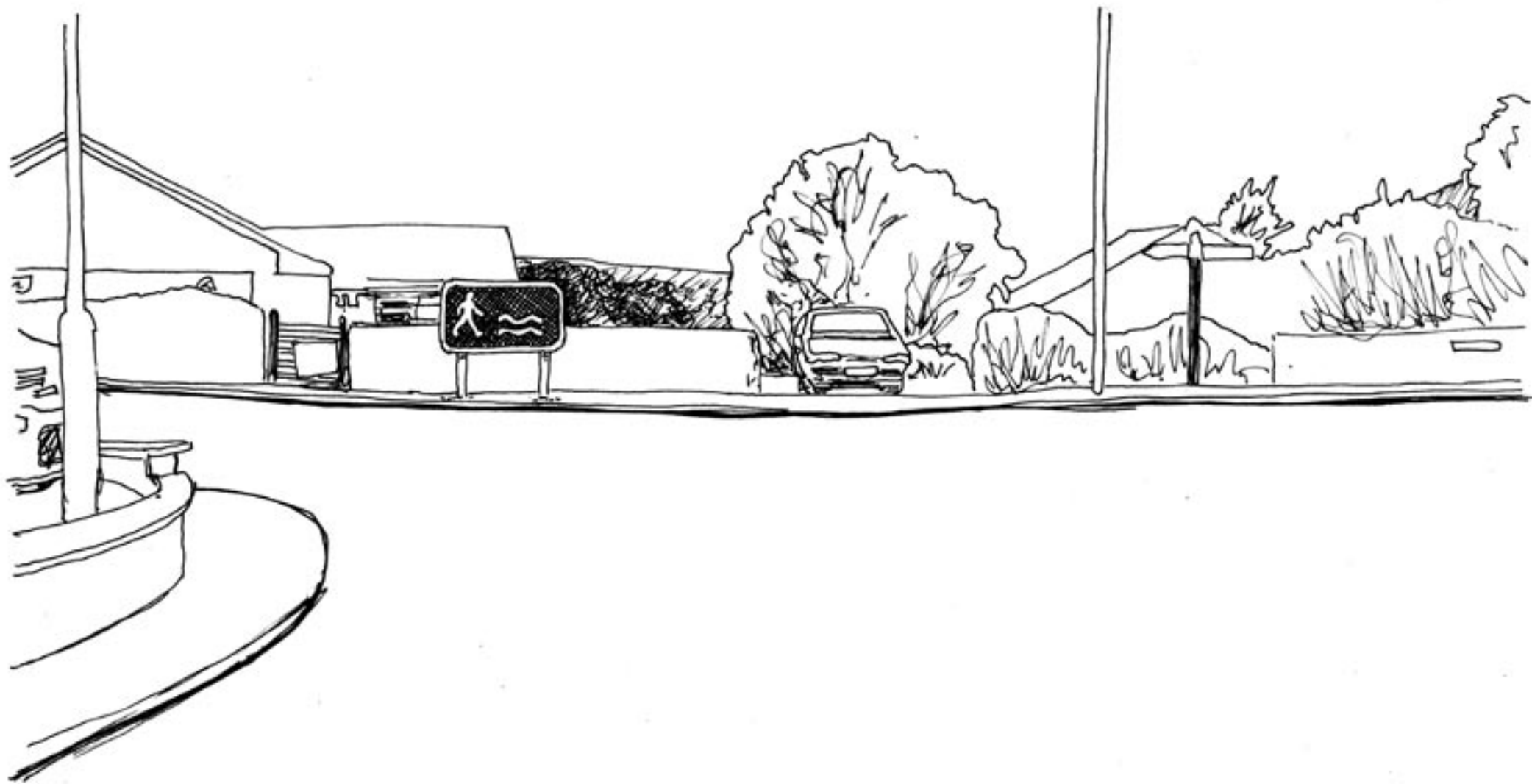
Fragile End

Cars need to slow down at this sharp corner in Abbotsbury, but visitors to the area are distracted by the large amount of signs at this junction and do not consider that they are entering the centre of a small village. Fragile End restructures the end of the building to become a display cabinet/window for craft artifacts made in the area. The delicate quality of the objects and the glass causes the drivers to automatically slow down and makes the drivers aware that there is a different quality of public space around the corner. The display case provides a highly visible platform for showing local and regional talent.



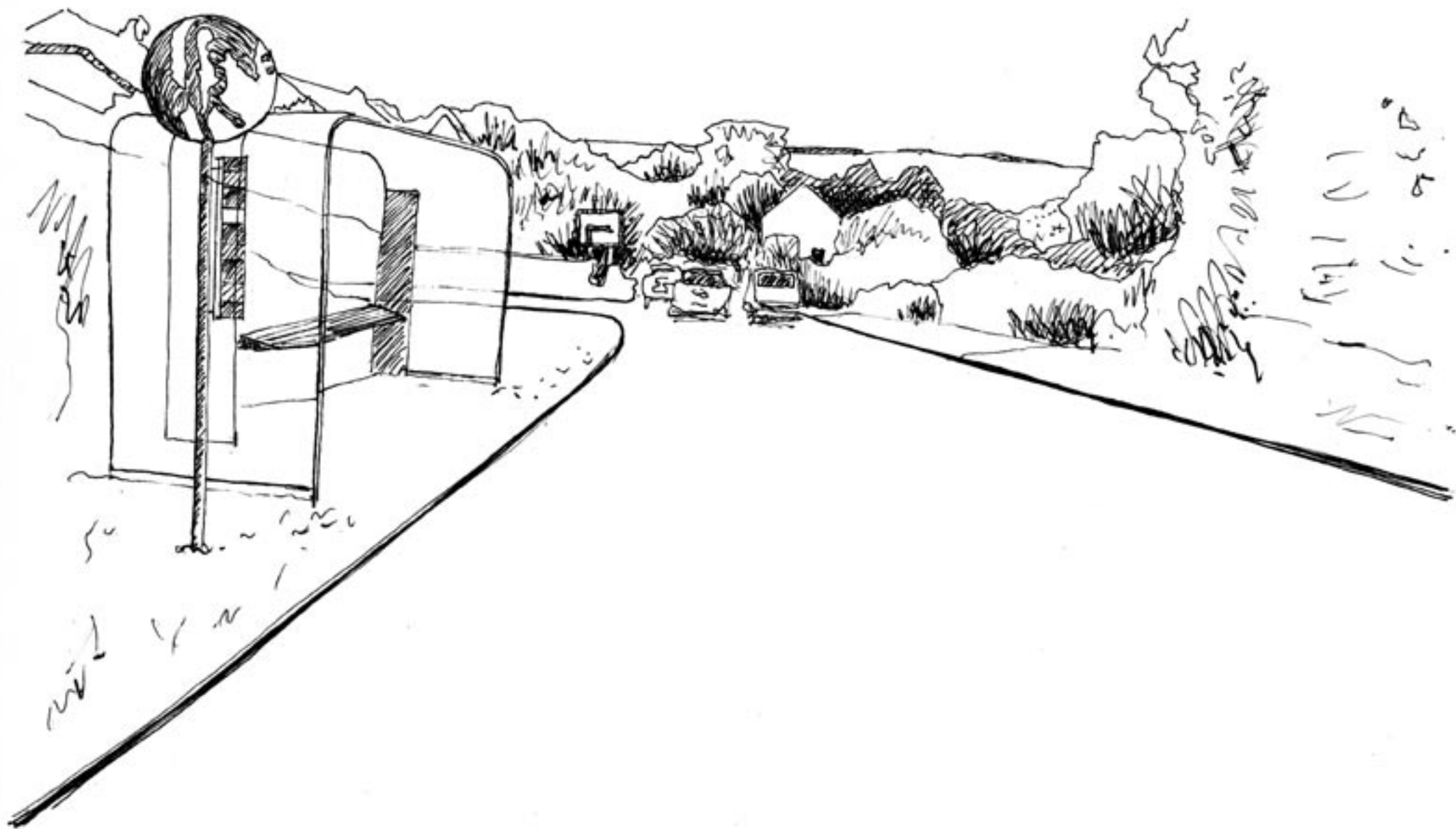
Positive Signs

Every attempt should be made to ensure all signage communicates a positive message. Rather than forbidding an action, it should be offering something. This example reconfigures the existing, 'no access to the sea' sign to one that indicates that walkers can reach the sea, implying the vehicles will not be able to access the sea.



Jurassic Busstops

The Coast Road length could be divided in geological times spanning the Mesozoic era. Each bus stop would show the earth as it would be in that time, whether it was the Triassic, Jurassic or Cretaceous periods. Each bus stop could be named: Anisian, Ladinian, Carnian, Norian, Rhaetian, Sinemurian, Pliensbachian, Toarcian, Aalenian, Bajocian, Bathonian, Callovian, Oxfordian, Kimmeridgian, Tithonian, Maastrichtian, Campanian, Santonian, Coniacian, Turonian, Cenomanian, Albian, Aptian, Barremian, Hauterivian, Valanginian and Berriasian. Each mile would represent 11,250,000 years.



2030
10/1/14

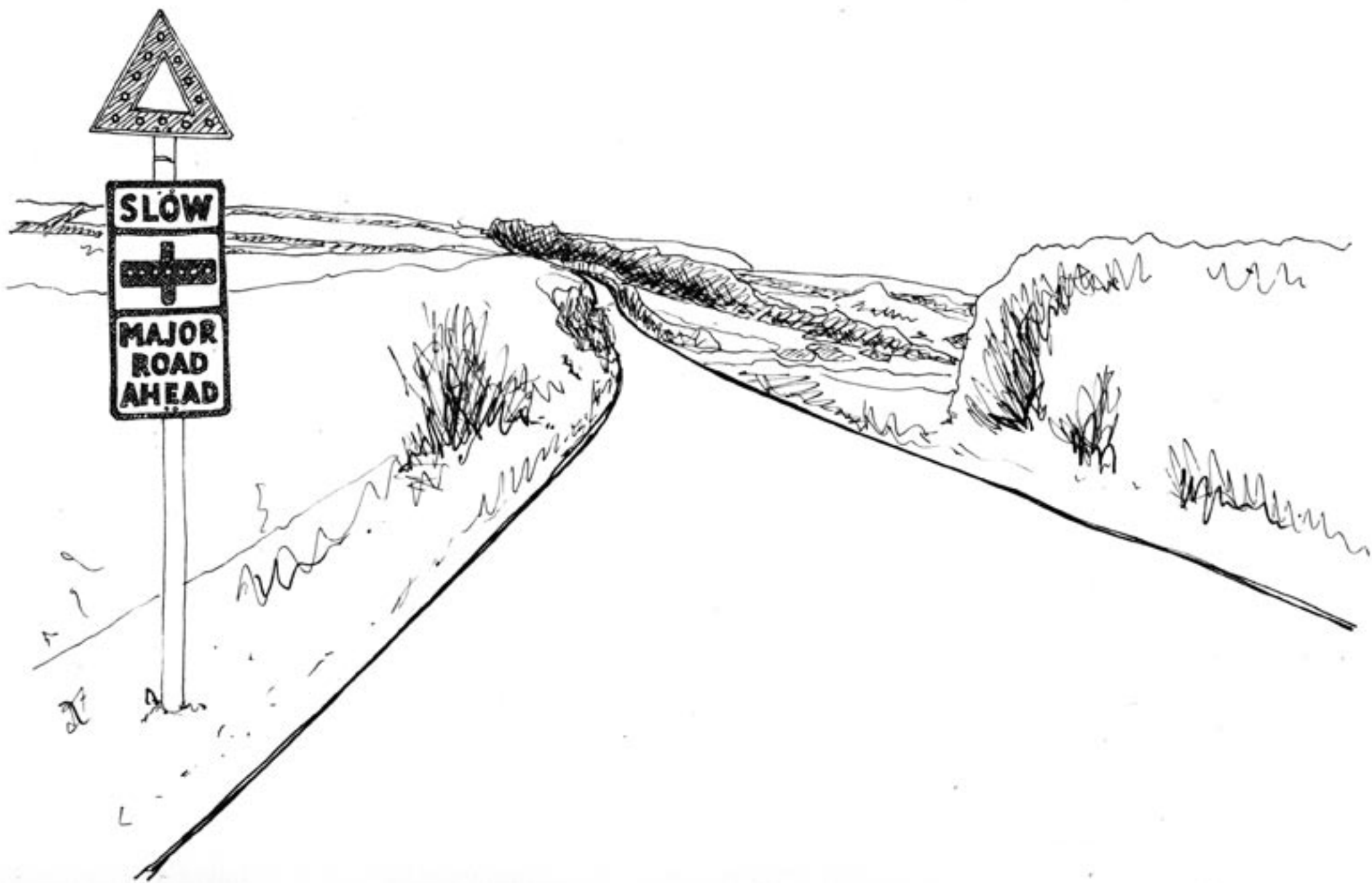
Sketch of the bus stop

Sketch of the bus stop

Sketch of the bus stop

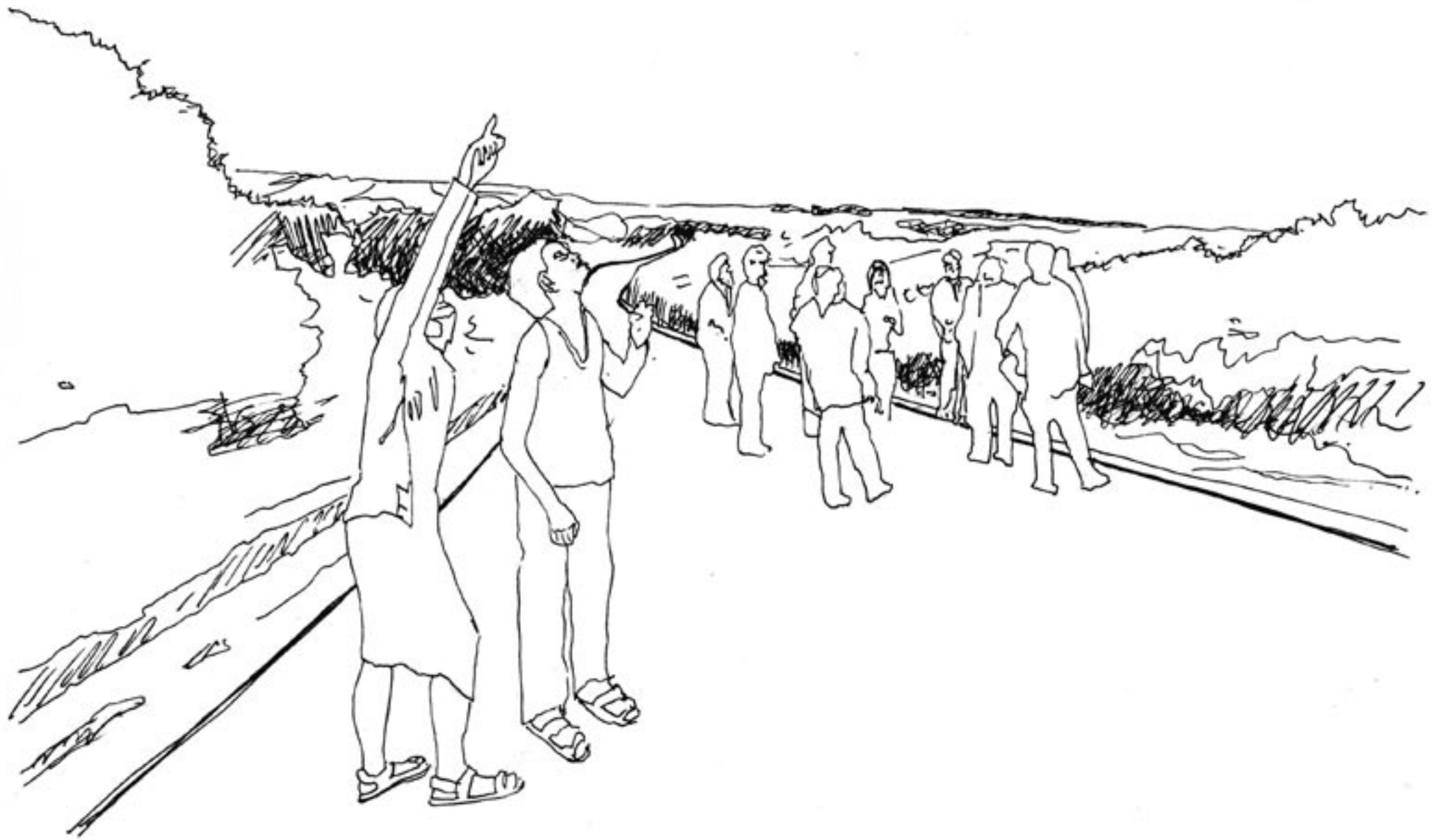
Old School Signs

Changing the existing essential roads signs to their pre-Worboys Report equivalents introduces a subtly different visual language to the streetscape, suggesting implicitly an early era when there was less traffic and cars moved more slowly. The Worboys committee delivered its report in 1963. The recommendations marked the biggest change in British traffic sign design bringing it in line with the European system using symbols, without supplementary wording, to warn or order drivers.



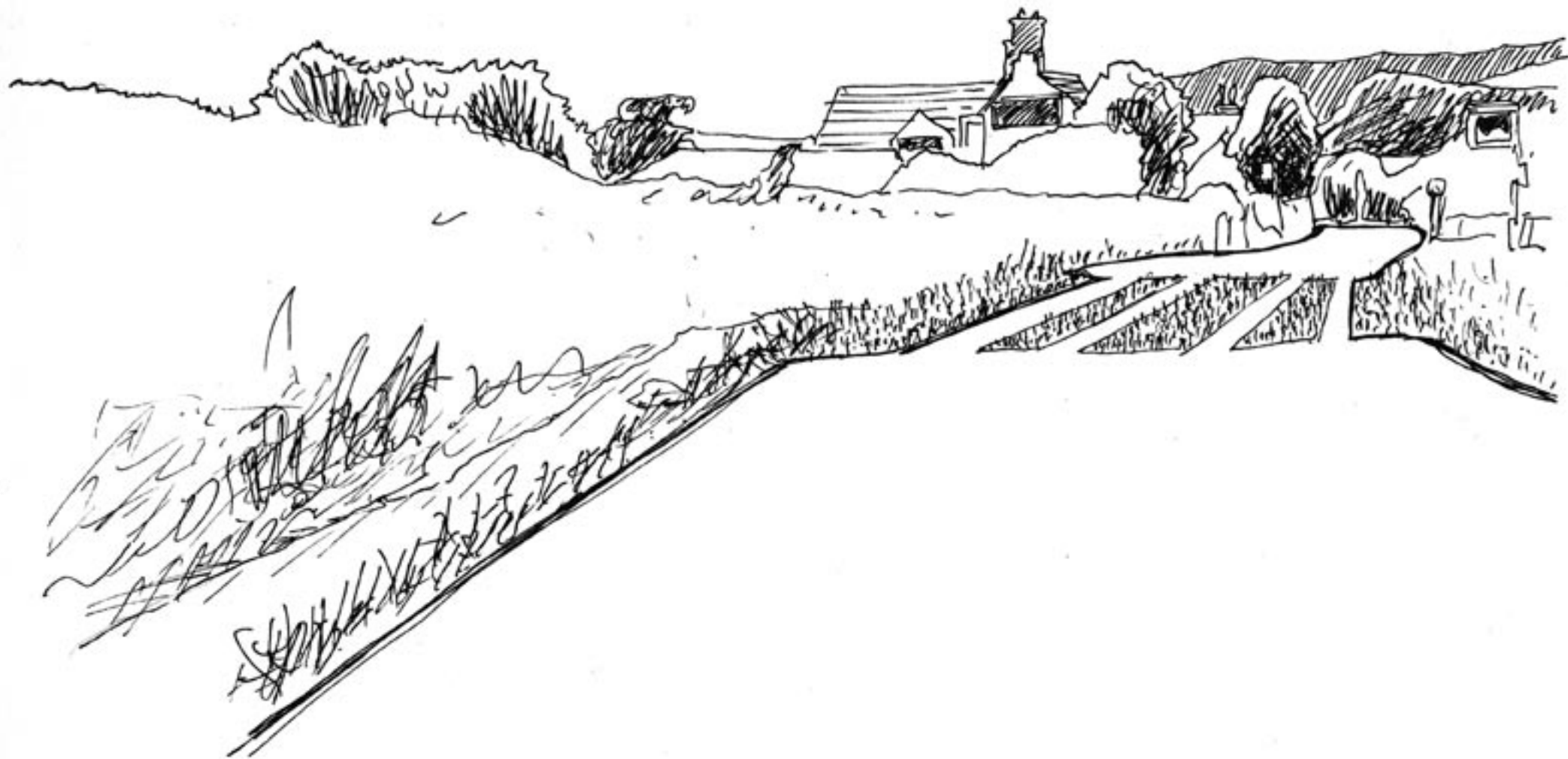
Quiet tours

The road is temporarily closed to all traffic, including bicycles, to allow people to walk along the road listening to the birds, animals, the wind and even the sea. People are discouraged from speaking, so they can contemplate their landscape. The experience is akin to meditation.



Grass entry

Hardy grass is planted within a tough honeycomb paving system at the entry to each village. Cars slow down to align with the track which runs through the grass paving. This clearly demarks the open roads from the village roads.



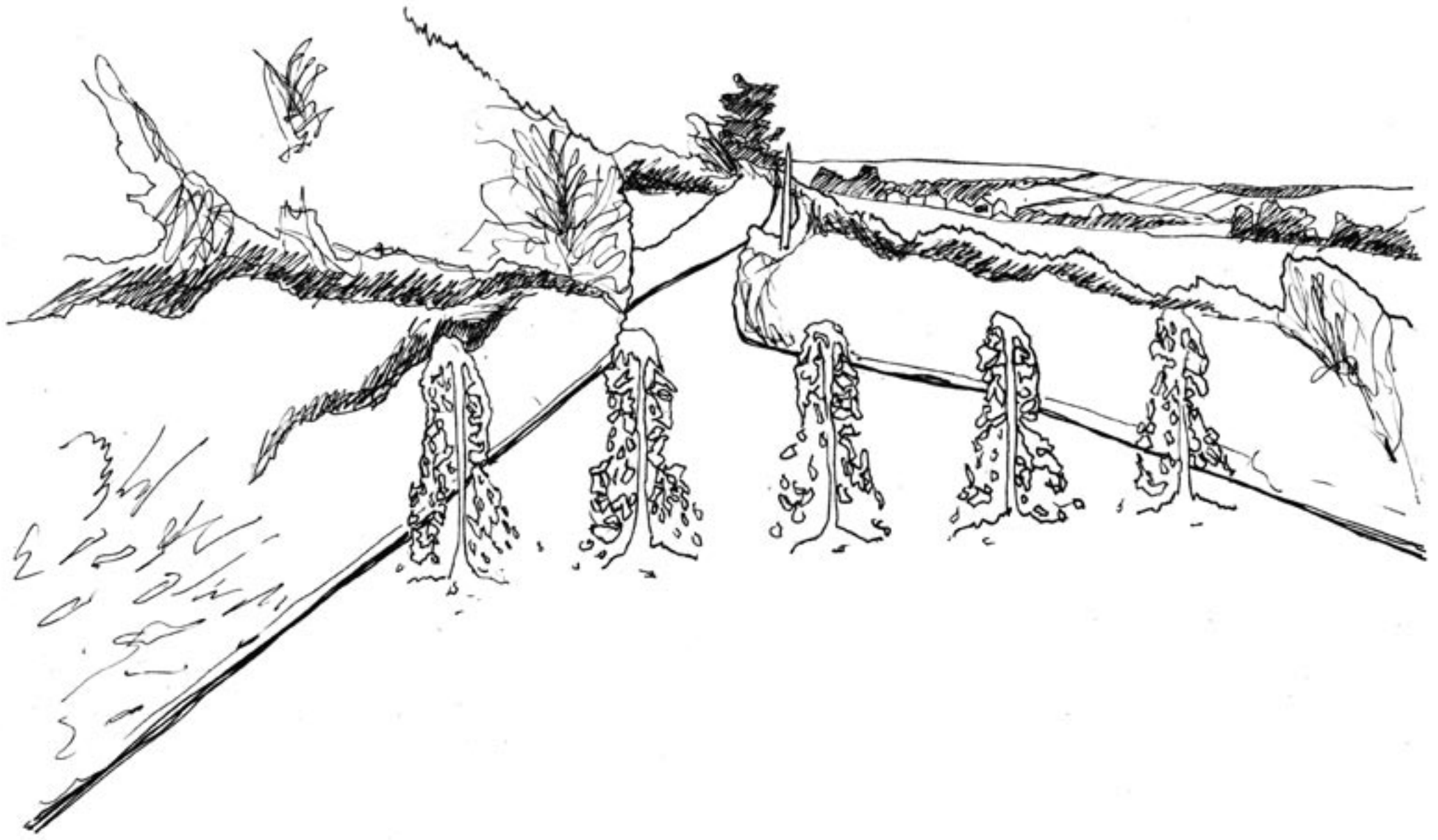
Fording

Reintroducing water overflow systems across roads near the entrances to villages would slow traffic as cars negotiate the crossings, again demarking open roads from village roads.



Road Fountain

Using a sensor system that only activates as cars pass, this fountain system takes water from a stream passing underneath the road to provide a water feature that surprises the driver and cleans the cars.



Handwritten text in the bottom left corner, possibly a signature or date, including the number '3'.

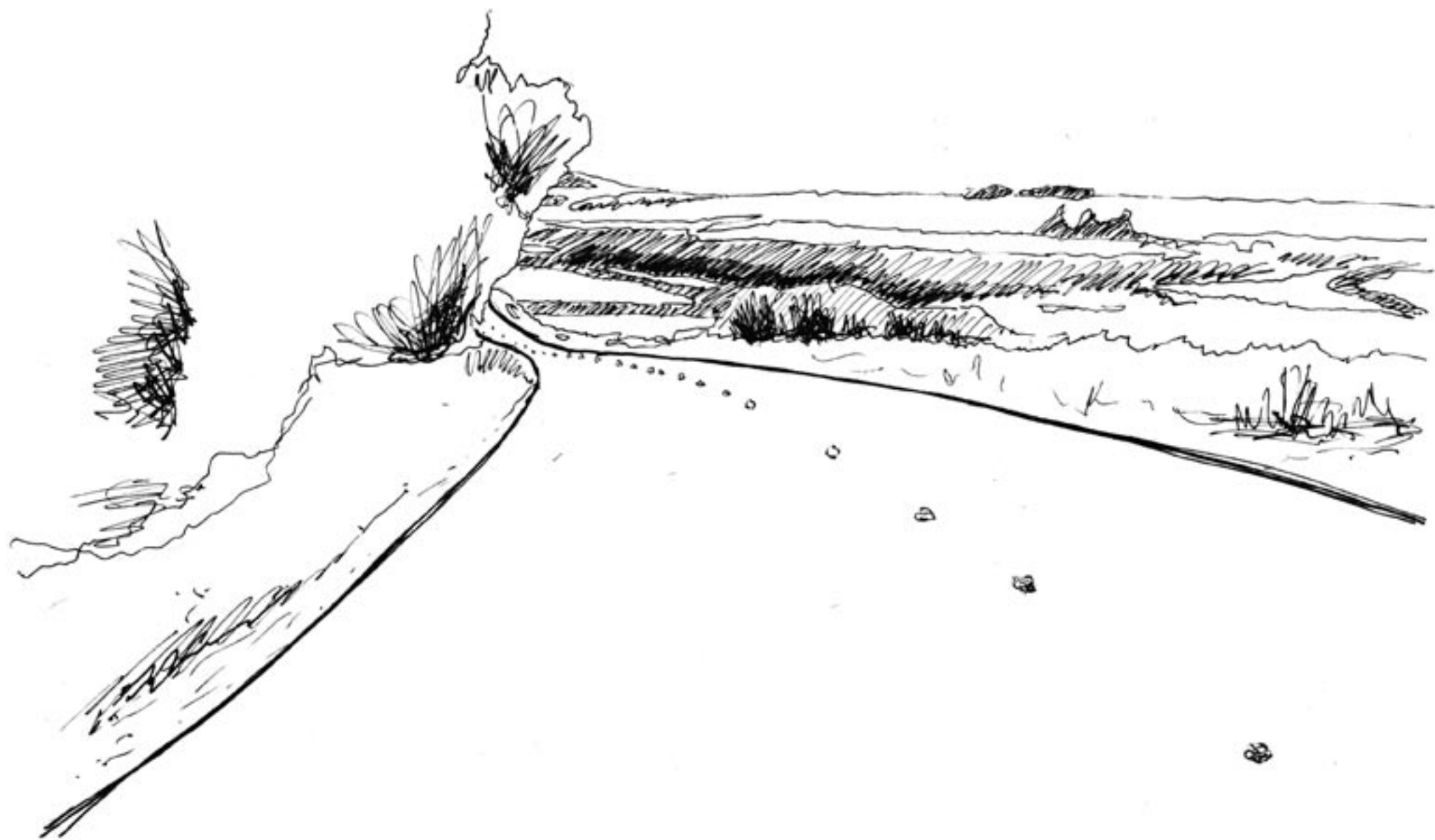
Hidden Backs

In some cases it is necessary to keep large signs. These signs are ugly from the front and are even less appealing from the back, presenting a huge swathe of grey to any passerby. A photograph of the view blocked by the sign is applied to the rear of the sign obscuring its mass and creating odd optical illusions confusing image and reality.



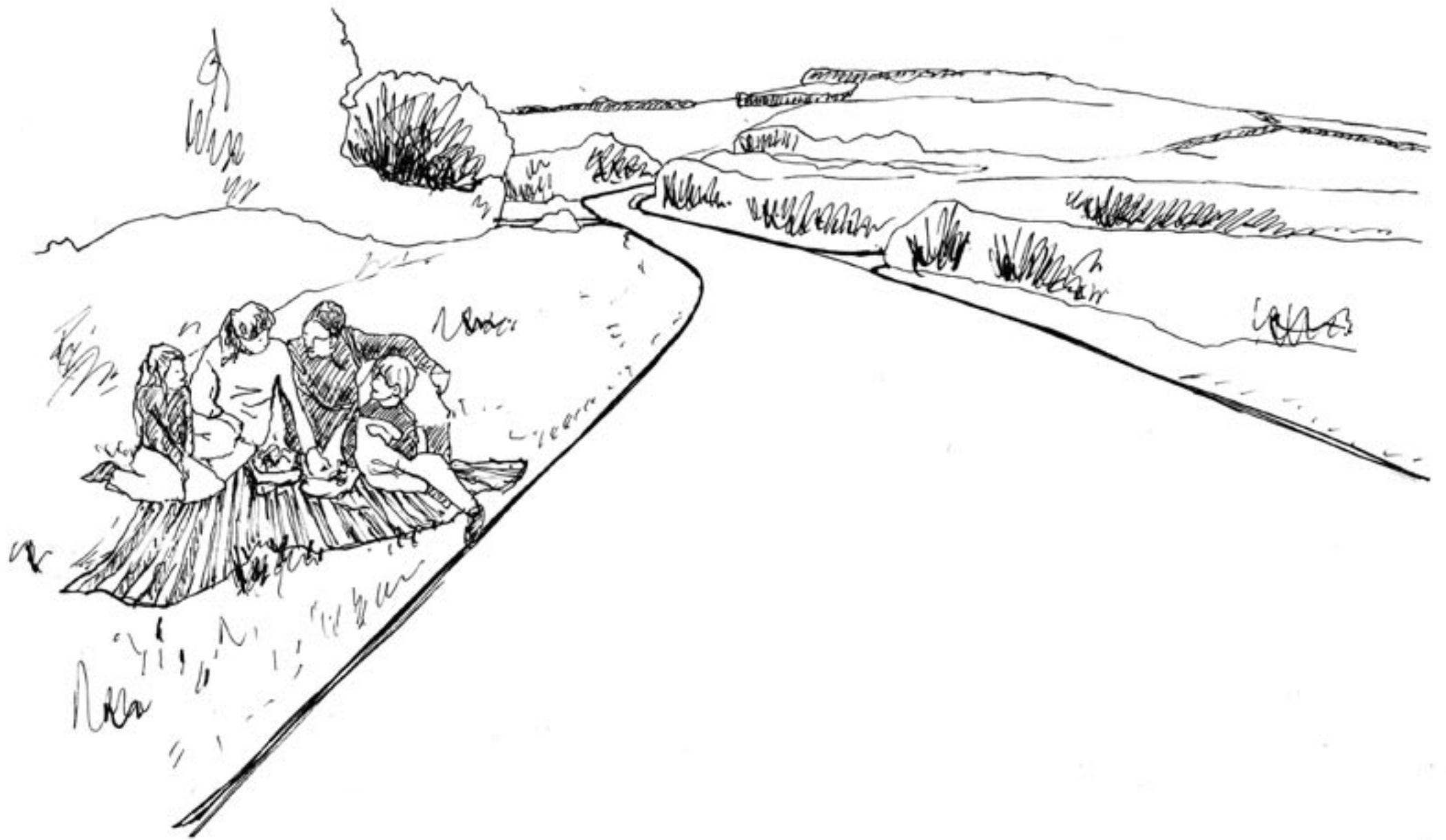
Only at Night

At certain turns in the road it still is deemed necessary to demarcate the centre of the road. As these points cat's eyes, possibly the solar powered variety, are used to provide added security in the evening whilst being almost invisible during the day.



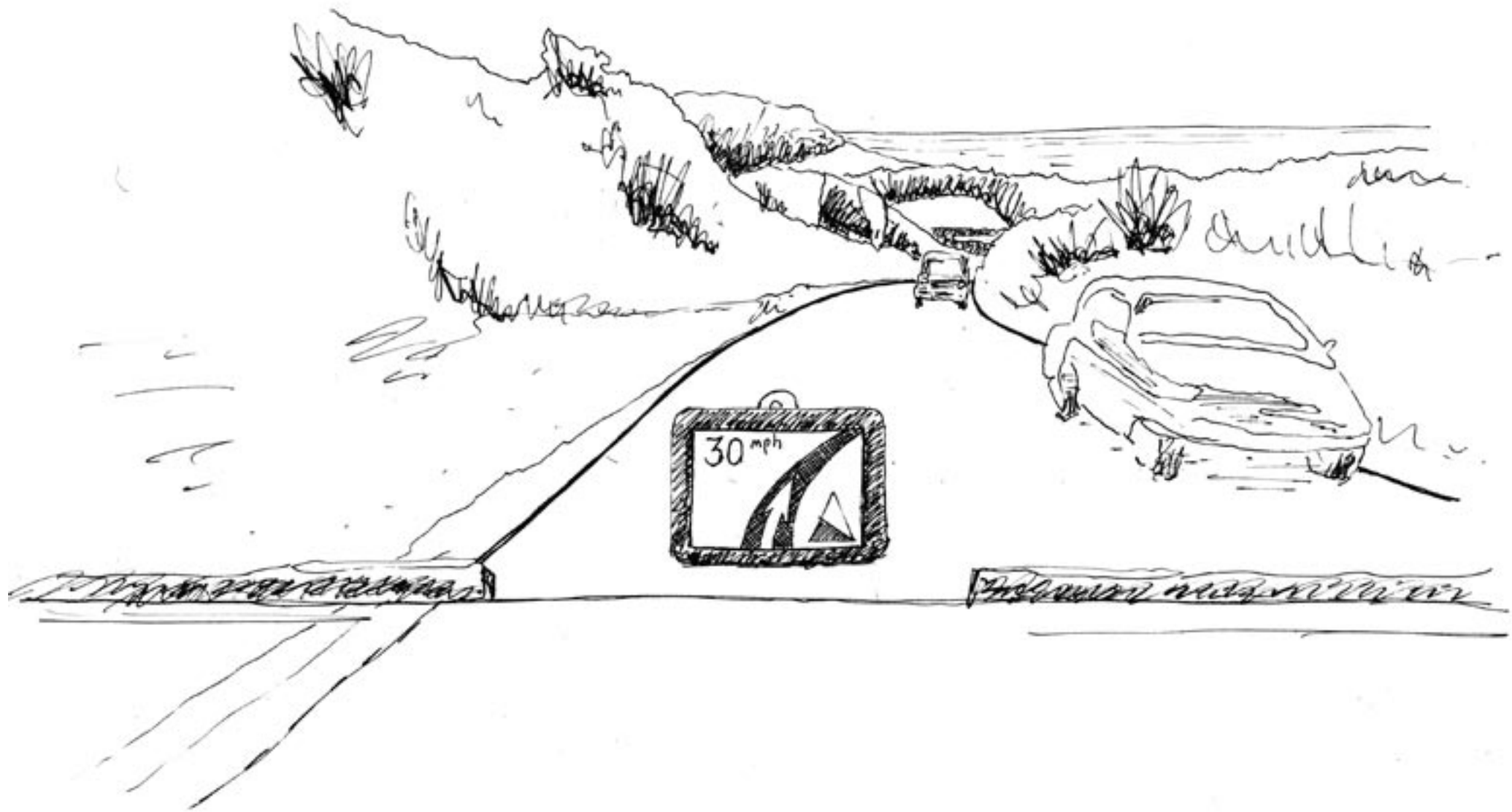
Roadside Picnic

Any human activity on the road side slows traffic. A sculpture is produced showing a family eating a picnic. This sculpture is moved along the route, turning up in new places each week.



No signs

Within a few years all cars will be equipped with GPS. With this equipment installed signs will become redundant. Perhaps it would be cheaper for the government to insist that all cars have GPS, giving grants if necessary, rather than constantly renewing road signs.



Project partners

Dorset County Council

Dorset Design and Heritage Forum

West Dorset District Council

Dorset Community Action

Dorset Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Partnership

Arts Council England

Public Art South West

Jurassic Coast World Heritage Site

Willis Newson arts consultancy