

Inclusive Transport Strategy: Achieving Equal Access for Disabled People Implications for Low Volume Shared Surface Streets



Exhibition Road, London – a busy level surface street

On 25th July 2018 the Department for Transport (DfT) published a new policy paper entitled **'The Inclusive Transport Strategy: achieving equal access for disabled people'**.

This strategy builds on the 2017 consultation on a draft Accessibility Action Plan and sets out how the DfT will deliver changes to our transport networks, both through Government interventions and working in partnership with industry and others.

Much of the document is concerned with the accessibility of different modes of transport, but one of the Government statements in the paper is a request that Local Authorities ***"pause the development of shared space schemes which incorporate a level surface while the DfT review and update guidance"***.

Alongside this, there is also a temporary withdrawal of the Government's guidance document on the topic, Local Transport Note 1/11: Shared Space (LTN 1/11). The policy paper can be viewed [here](#).

From our extensive engagement with these issues, as explored below, we believe that this decision taken by Government is in response to concerns over the usability and safety of major streets with level surfaces, such as Exhibition Road in London, but could be inferred – wrongly in our view – as applying to quiet residential streets.

What is shared space?

In recent years, informed by Government documents such as Manual for Streets, the need to achieve a better balance between the 'movement' (by all modes) and 'place' functions of highways has increasingly become accepted by the profession, decision-makers and the public.

This balancing of the movement and place functions of our highway and transport networks is a key area for consideration by Highways and Transportation professionals and is a complex area. Through its involvement with documents like Manual for Streets, and working alongside the Chartered Institution of Highways and Transportation (CIHT), PJA has worked collaboratively with Government and others to develop guidance in this area over several years.

The concept of 'Shared Space' should be seen against this general move towards more people-focused streets. However, there is much disagreement and controversy over the precise meaning of the term. LTN 1/11 defines it as:

"Shared space: A street or place designed to improve pedestrian movement and comfort by reducing the dominance of motor vehicles and enabling all users to share the space rather than follow the clearly defined rules implied by more conventional designs".

'Shared space' should in our view be seen as a design approach rather than a particular set of attributes, which seeks to change the way streets operate, primarily through lower traffic speeds and encouraging drivers to behave more accommodatingly

towards pedestrians. LTN 1/11 focused particularly on shared space in high street environments, but many of its principles apply in other settings.

Some schemes that have been termed 'shared space' omit kerbs which separate the street into a carriageway and footway. LTN 1/11 uses the term 'level surface' for this type of design and defines it thus:

"Level surface: A street surface with no level difference to segregate pedestrians from vehicular traffic".

Although popular with many people, Shared Space as a concept has attracted significant opposition from groups representing disabled people. This has particularly come from the visually impaired, who have stated that they can find streets difficult and dangerous when there is no separation from traffic and without formal crossings.

PJA participated in the preparation of the CIHT's 'Creating better streets: Inclusive and accessible places' review (January 2018), which sought to learn lessons from a number of schemes of this type. The review was prepared alongside a Steering Group which included Lord Holmes of Richmond MBE, a visually-impaired peer who has campaigned against shared spaces, and Keith Richards Chair of the Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee (DPTAC).

It is hoped that the recommendations (largely to Government) that this review made, if put into place, will help make our streets into the safe, inclusive environments that we need them to be.

The review worked to the principle that street design needs to meet the requirements of all users so that inclusive environments are created. This golden thread, enshrined in the requirements of the Equality Act 2010, must flow through the entire design, construction, operation and maintenance process.

One of the key findings of the review was that 'shared space' is an unhelpful term as it is vague and tends to be associated with several preconceived ideas. Instead the review suggested the terms:

- **Pedestrian prioritised streets** – where traffic flows and speeds are low and where drivers and riders feel they should give priority to pedestrians, and where pedestrians feel comfortable in accepting that priority; and
- **Informal Streets** – streets which carry higher volumes of traffic and where the absence or reduction of formal traffic control measures, particularly at junctions, means that traffic does not dominate non-vehicular users.

Notwithstanding CIHT's call for a move away from the term 'shared space' it has been used by Government in the Inclusive Transport Strategy.



Pedestrian Prioritised Street (Brighton)



Informal Street (Poynton)

What does this mean for the profession?

The temporary withdrawal of LTN 1/11 and request that Local Authorities pause the development of shared space schemes which incorporate a level surface has the potential to result in some confusion amongst authorities and built environment professionals. This is particularly the case for what have been termed 'shared surface' streets on new developments, but which could also now be called 'pedestrian prioritised' streets.



Quiet Shared Surface Street (Upton, Northampton)

Indeed, it could also be said to conflict with the new National Planning Policy Framework published on the same day as the Integrated Transport Strategy. NPPF Paragraph 110 states:

"within this context, applications for development should:

- a Give priority to pedestrian and cycle movements, both within the scheme and with neighbourhood areas...*
- b Address the needs of people with disabilities and reduced mobility in relation to all modes of transport*
- c Create places that are safe, secure and attractive – which minimise the scope for conflicts between pedestrians, cyclists and vehicles, avoid unnecessary street clutter, and respond to local character and design standards...*

NPPF Section 8: Promoting health and safe communities' paragraph 92 also states that planning policies and decisions should "plan positively for the provision and use of shared spaces". Whilst this is using a different definition of shared space it still results in significant ambiguity and uncertainty which is surely not what was intended.

PJA believe that in appropriate contexts shared surface/pedestrian prioritised streets in new developments can be designed appropriately to robustly meet the requirements set out in NPPF paragraph 110.

Shared surface low traffic streets have been successfully used in residential developments in the UK for many decades. They were recommended in the first edition of the Government's 'Design Bulletin 32: Residential Roads and Footpaths' (DB32),

published in 1977 and were retained in the 2nd edition published in 1992.

That later document included a review of the shared surface streets that had been built by 1992 and found that:

"...the intimate scale and attractive landscape character of the surroundings provided were highly regarded by residents. These roads were found to be safe and convenient for pedestrians and drivers."

It went on:

"A subsequent study of local accident records for shared surface culs-de-sac in schemes that had been designed after the first edition of this bulletin was published, and for culs-de-sac roads with footways in a larger sample of earlier developments, found that no accidents at all had been reported on the shared surface roads. This study suggested that the use of shared surfaces will not produce any increase in reported injury accidents."

DB32 assumed that each dwelling would generate one vehicle journey per dwelling in the peak hour and therefore the 50-dwelling limit on shared surface streets would equate to around 50 vehicles per hour.

In the early 2000s, the concept of 'Home Zones' became established in the UK. Based on the successful 'woonerf' streets in the Netherlands, Home Zones are low volume residential streets that have a social as well as a traffic function. In design terms they are often little different to the shared surface streets as envisaged by DB32 but are backed by statutory legislation in the Transport Act 2000, which permits local authorities to designate streets as Home Zones and erect the appropriate traffic sign.



Home Zone (South Lynn Millennium Village, Kings Lynn)

DfT Circular 02/2006 'The Quiet Lanes and Home Zones (England) Regulations' was published to support the designation of Home Zones under the Transport Act 2000 and recommends that:

"Within a designated Home Zone, traffic flows should be low: no more than about 100 motor vehicles in the afternoon peak hour is recommended, with little or no through traffic. Vehicle speeds should be kept to low levels appropriate to the mix of activities being undertaken by different users in the Home Zone."

One of the primary aims of Home Zones was to create places that encourage children's play, and in fact the initial campaign to bring in the enabling legislation was led by the Children's Play Council. Research by Mike Biddulph of Cardiff University¹ found that residents, including children, spent more time socialising in a home zone street than in a nearby comparable traffic calmed street.



A street designed for play (Van Gogh Walk, Lambeth)

Home Zones and shared surface streets are acknowledged as a valid typology in the current Department for Transport's guidance on residential streets, Manual for Streets (MfS), which states:

"Shared surface schemes work best in relatively calm traffic environments. The key aims are to:

- *encourage low vehicle speeds;*
- *create an environment in which pedestrians can walk, or stop and chat, without feeling intimidated by motor traffic;*
- *make it easier for people to move around; and*
- *promote social interaction."*

MfS goes on to acknowledge that shared surfaces can be a problem for some disabled people and that it is important that their needs are met, but this does not mean that shared surface streets should not be provided. MfS again states that shared surface streets are likely to work well when peak traffic flows are below 100 vehicles per hour.

Manual for Streets has not been withdrawn by Department for Transport as part of the Inclusive Transport Strategy.

What next?

Through our role on the CIHT Urban Design Panel, PJA hopes over the coming weeks to seek clarification from DfT on the types of scheme that are covered by the request for a pause.

In the meantime, we believe that there is a strong case for continuing to promote and provide shared surface/pedestrian prioritised streets where traffic volumes are low, particularly in new residential developments.

This type of design has been in recommended Government guidance for over 50 years and has been applied extensively throughout the country. It is recommended in Manual for Streets, which remains in force as Government guidance.

We understand very well the concerns of visually impaired people when faced with the challenges of navigating and crossing busy level surface streets such as Exhibition Road. We have been working closely with CIHT and Government to find solutions to these problems. However, this type of design is rare and is not typical of residential low volume streets, which we strongly believe are fully compatible with national policy.

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¹ Biddulph, Mike. (2012). Street Design and Street Use: Comparing Traffic Calmed and Home Zone Streets. Journal of Urban Design. 17. 213-232. 10.1080/13574809.2012.666206.