

## The home zones movement in the UK: history, progress and prospects

### Introduction

This paper examines the evolution in the UK of the home zone concept over the last 10 years or so. It outlines the background and history of the idea and its links to the Dutch woonerf model. It traces the development of the UK Government's engagement with home zones, and the evolution of wider public and policy interest in the concept. It presents opinion and research into the design and implementation of home zone schemes in England, Scotland and Wales, with a focus on the impact of schemes on the lives of children and young people. And it looks at the extent to which schemes have, or have not, followed the legal and design principles of their Continental counterparts.

The paper concludes by exploring some social and cultural perspectives on the attitudes and behaviour of people in streets, drawing on some ideas from risk management. The paper argues that the future of shared street space depends on moving away from the idea of absolute safety. Instead we need to embrace the view that in streets, as elsewhere, a little unpredictability is essential.

### What is a home zone?

The online encyclopedia Wikipedia defines a home zone as:

“A street in which, unlike in most streets, the needs of car drivers are secondary to the needs of users of the street as a whole. It is a space designed to be shared by pedestrians, playing children, bicyclists, and low-speed motor vehicles” (Wikipedia 2005).

This Wikipedia entry states that the term is more-or-less the English-language equivalent of the Dutch word woonerf.

The definition on the UK Department for Transport's website, though broadly similar, refers explicitly to residential streets, and gives slightly less prominence to the needs of other users of the street space compared to drivers:

“Home Zones are residential streets in which the road space is shared between drivers of motor vehicles and other road users, with the wider needs of residents (including people who walk and cycle, and children) in mind. The aim is to change the way that streets are used and to improve quality of life, by making them places for people, not just for traffic” (Department for Transport 2005).

### A short history of home zones in the UK

The term 'home zone' was first coined by the road safety advocates CI Howarth and Barbara Preston in the early 1990s, to describe their proposal for residential streets in which “child pedestrians should have priority and any driver who injures a child should be presumed negligent” (Preston 1995). For them, a home zone was defined solely by a change in the legal status of child pedestrians. Alongside this proposal, which was never adopted, some local authorities and housing bodies in the 1970s, 1980s and early 1990s introduced street designs that were inspired by, and to a lesser or greater extent consciously followed, the woonerf model of level carriageways and shared surfaces (Biddulph 2001). The phrase 'home zone' gained ground in the late 1990s with its adoption and promotion as an English-language equivalent of the Dutch 'woonerf', signifying changed function, legal changes and a distinctive approach to design, in a campaign led by the non-governmental organisations the Children's Play Council and Transport 2000 (Children's Play Council 1997).

Alongside the lobbying work by these and other organisations and individuals, the home zone concept was taken up and promoted by some active and enthusiastic neighbourhood and residents' groups. Perhaps the most prominent and certainly the most creative was The Methleys, a community in Leeds that famously laid grass over one street and put on a 'village fete' over the August Bank holiday weekend in 1996. The

Methleys subsequently became one of the Government's pilot schemes (see below) and one of the first completed home zones.

The UK home zones campaign took inspiration from the Dutch woonerf model and designs in other European countries, and trips were organised to see Dutch and German home zones. One trip in 1999, organised by Transport 2000, was documented in a video called *At Home in my Street: Exploring home zones in the Netherlands and Germany* that was then made available to campaigners and communities.

Home zones were quickly taken up by policy makers and politicians, a process that was arguably helped by the change in political and transport policy climate after Labour's victory in the 1997 general election. In 1999 the Government announced a modest pilot programme. There was no new funding for schemes, but local authorities were invited to submit proposals for schemes that would then be evaluated in detail. Nine projects were selected, eight in England and one in Wales. TRL (Transport Research Laboratory) was chosen to evaluate the schemes in a research project with a budget of around £500,000 (700,000 euros). The evaluation gathered 'before' and 'after' information from each scheme on traffic speeds and volumes, accidents and the attitudes and views of children and adults. The results of four evaluations have been published and are discussed below.

One of the aims of the pilot programme was to use the experience of the pilots to shape the future development of the home zone model and to answer questions about funding, design and legislation. However political support for home zones grew to the extent that before the pilot programme was even half-finished, Government launched a new £30 million funding programme in England, and the English and Scottish parliaments took the first steps in giving home zones a legal basis.

The Home Zones Challenge was announced by Prime Minister Tony Blair in April 2001. Local authorities in England were invited to bid for funding for home zone schemes, and 61 schemes were selected, receiving an average of around £500,000 (700,000 euros) per scheme. All but two schemes were taken forward, and at the time of writing most, though not all, have been finished. Details of the schemes, and the programme as a whole, are given on the website [www.homezoneschallenge.com](http://www.homezoneschallenge.com), a site which is supported by Jacobs Babtie, the technical and management consultancy that managed the programme for the Department for Transport.

The challenge schemes tended to be larger and more ambitious in design than the pilots. This was partly because of the comparative luxury of dedicated funding. But ideas about home zones also evolved in the intervening 2-3 year period, with more experience amongst those involved in projects and more guidance available to shape schemes.

In addition to the pilot and challenge schemes, a small number of home zones have been developed independently by local authorities, housing bodies or other agencies. Information on some of these schemes is given on the website [www.homezonenews.org.uk](http://www.homezonenews.org.uk), a site managed by the Children's Play Council. The Children's Play Council also produces *Home Zone News*, a newsletter with features, news and updates for those involved in home zones in the UK; copies are available to download from the website.

Unlike the Dutch woonerf there are no legal requirements around design. Government and other agencies have produced good practice guidance to support the development of home zones, including Biddulph (2001) and Institute of Highway Incorporated Engineers (2002), and a video, *Home Zones: The UK experience*. The Department for Transport has also produced good practice guidance leaflets on planning and design (DfT 2001) and public participation (DfT 2002). A good practice guide is being produced by Jacobs Babtie based on the experiences of the challenge projects.

## Progress

It is relatively early in the life of home zones in the UK: less than 10 years since the term 'home zone' first gained prominence, and around 5 years since work started on the first schemes. The streetscapes that have emerged so far are arguably less radical on average than those in the Netherlands, Germany or other European countries, and few schemes have succeeded in creating spaces between houses that look as if they are genuinely designed for social rather than car use.

There are probably around 80-100 schemes in the UK that have been called home zones, although there is no central database and the application of the term is a matter of debate in some schemes, in the absence of a clear legal definition. Nearly all are in England and nearly all have involved changing the design and layout of existing streets, sometimes called retrofitting. They are spread across all regions, and most are in poorer areas. Their size varies from perhaps 40 houses to over 700 houses in some new developments. Costs have also varied widely. In the case of the Government's Home Zones Challenge the average funding received from the programme was around £500,000 or 700,000 euros, though many projects also raised funds from other sources. In nearly all projects, the lead agency has been the local authority highways or transportation department. Projects in existing streets have spent much time and resources on engaging and involving local residents through the process, as well as emergency services, highways maintenance services, refuse collection services and other stakeholders, and many have formed project teams and partnerships to do this.

In the absence of strict design guidelines from Government, the physical design of schemes has varied more widely than with comparable streets in the Netherlands or Germany. Designs tend to lie somewhere along a continuum from - at one end - a woonerf-style treatment involving level carriageways, shared surfaces and heavy use of visual and physical elements that break up drivers' sight lines, to - at the other - fairly conventional traffic calming, though with higher quality materials and greater use of soft landscaping than is usual in the UK. Illustrations 1 - 4 show images of four home zones: Northmoor in Manchester, Morice Town in Plymouth, Radcliffe Road in Southampton and Deptford Green in the London Borough of Greenwich. Two, Northmoor and Morice Town, have won design awards.



*Illustration 1: Northmoor, Manchester  
(photo: Northmoor Urban Arts Project)*



*Illustration 2: Morice Town, Plymouth  
(photo credit not available)*



*Illustration 3: Radcliffe Road, Southampton  
(photo: Mark Ellison)*



*Illustration 4: Deptford Green, London Borough of Greenwich  
(photo: Tim Gill)*

As already stated, Government has given local authorities in England and Wales the powers to designate home zones in law under the Transport Act 2000, and the Scottish Executive has followed suit. However the term 'home zone' is not fully defined in statute. Unlike some other European countries, in the UK there is no change in the status of road users in home zones compared to conventional streets: in other words, no 'pedestrian priority.' Instead, the regulations, when they come into force, will allow a local authority to define 'use orders' and 'speed orders' for streets designated as a home zone. Use orders "will legitimise activities other than passage" while speed orders "will allow authorities to set a specified speed for the road and authorise them to take measures to achieve vehicle speeds below that specified" (DfT 2004). Designation allows local authorities to put up home zone signs broadly similar to those in use in other European countries (see illustration 5).



Illustration 5: the UK's home zone sign

As part of the preparation of this paper, I carried out some additional research on the nature and UK home zones and their impact on children and young people. This involved sending a brief questionnaire to key contacts from home zone schemes across the UK, typically local authority highway professionals involved in the scheme. 41 replies were received, representing around half of UK home zones. Table 1 below summarises replies on three issues: extent of shared surface streetscapes, mean vehicle speeds and use of home zones legislation.

Table 1: Key features of UK home zones

<b>Proportion of shared surface</b>	<b>Low &lt; 33%</b>	<b>Medium 33-67%</b>	<b>High &gt;67%</b>	<b>Don't know</b>	
<b>No. of schemes (total: 41)</b>	9	11	20	1	
<b>Mean speed mph</b>	<b>&lt;10</b>	<b>10-15</b>	<b>15-20</b>	<b>20+</b>	<b>Don't know</b>
<b>Mean speed km/h</b>	<b>&lt;17</b>	<b>17-25</b>	<b>25-34</b>	<b>34+</b>	
<b>No. of schemes (total: 41)</b>	4	15	15	2	5
<b>Legal designation?</b>	<b>All</b>	<b>Yes/some</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Don't know</b>	<b>Not app</b>
<b>No. of schemes (total: 41)</b>	15	11	11	2	2

Table 1 supports the view that UK home zones are somewhat less radical in their approach than the Dutch woonerf. Use of woonerf-style shared surface roads is significantly less than universal. Meanwhile average vehicle speeds in many schemes are above 15 mph or 25 km/h and in a few cases over 20 mph or 34 km/h, probably faster than in most woonerven and almost certainly too fast for safe appropriation and use of street space. Home zone designation in law, in itself a less clear legal measure than in some other countries, is only notionally connected to design. Some schemes that have been called 'home zones' by their creators have no legal designation, while others with the designation are more similar in appearance to conventional traffic calming schemes than to shared surface streets.

### Evaluation of schemes

Home zones in the UK are proving to be popular and to have a significant impact on the lives of residents, including children and young people. As already stated, the home zone schemes that have been most

"A city friendly to children is a city friendly to all"

closely evaluated are those from the pilot programme launched in 1999. Of the nine schemes in this programme, evaluations have been completed and published for four (as at August 2005). Summary evaluations are available to download from the website of TRL (Transport Research Laboratory) at [www.trl.co.uk](http://www.trl.co.uk).

The TRL evaluations show consistent and substantial support from residents for the measures introduced in their streets (Layfield et al 2003, Tilly et al 2005, Layfield et al 2005, Webster et al 2005). Residents tended to welcome the changes and to feel the schemes had made their streets more attractive and safer. All four evaluations also found that traffic speeds and volumes had gone down after implementing schemes. Given this, it is not surprising that the evaluations also tended to find evidence that accidents and crashes had declined, though in all nine schemes accident rates were already low.

The TRL evaluations give a more mixed picture of the impact of the schemes on the lives of children and young people. The strongest evidence of improved opportunities for street play comes from the Methleys in Leeds. Here:

“The proportion of children who said that they played in the street increased in the ‘after’ survey [...] Over two-thirds of the adults interviewed thought that the home zone had made it safer for children when walking or cycling and just over half thought that children should play in the street now that it was a home zone” (Layfield et al 2003).

These findings suggest that what was already a child-friendly street space had become more so. Indeed most children in the Methleys played in the streets before the changes, in part because few of the houses have back gardens and there is no public green space nearby. In Northmoor, Manchester, 40% of residents surveyed felt that motorists were more considerate to children playing after the scheme than before, while 8% felt motorists were less considerate (Tilly et al 2005). However there was little change in residents’ views about the safety of children playing in the street. The scheme at Magor in Monmouthshire showed little impact on children and young people (Layfield et al 2005), although this scheme was unusual in that it covered the central core of the village (including around 20 shops and also a church, restaurants and public houses) as well as around 60 residential houses. The scheme at Cavell Way in Sittingbourne – a comparatively low-cost project (£145,000 or around 200,000 euros) covering just one cul-de-sac, also showed little impact on children and young people (Webster et al 2005).

Obviously, it would be premature to draw too many conclusions from the findings of the four published TRL evaluations, both because they reflect a small minority of UK home zone schemes and because, as already noted, these early projects may well differ significantly from more recent schemes. However they remain the schemes whose impact is being monitored most closely and robustly. So their findings, and those of the remaining evaluations, will be very valuable.

As part of the research described above on the nature and impact of UK home zones, I asked key contacts for their views on the difference their schemes had made to children and young people. The findings, summarised in Table 2, reinforce the view that home zones are helping to make streets more child-friendly through improving children’s independent mobility and/or opening up the street as a play space. Although they represent a reasonable sample of UK schemes, these findings should be treated with caution, because they are based on the opinion of one individual from each scheme, not on independent evidence or observation.

Table 2: Impact of homes on children and young people

<b>Impact on children's outdoor activity</b>	<b>increased</b>	<b>same</b>	<b>decreased</b>	<b>don't know</b>
<b>No. of schemes (total: 41)</b>	21	9	0	11

Alongside the TRL evaluation and my survey, there is 'softer' evidence that home zones are improving the lives of residents and supporting public policy objectives around such issues as crime and community cohesion. In one case the statistics are striking: annual levels of recorded crime in the Morice Town, Plymouth home zone have fallen by 90%, from around 90 before the scheme to nine after its completion (Adrian Trim, personal communication). There is also some evidence of economic benefits, in the form of rising house price values (Barrell 2005).

### **Government policy**

Home zones have been supported by governments in England, Scotland and Wales, not just through the legal and fiscal measures described above but also in the development of policy in transport, planning and urban design. Arguably this support has yet to feed fully through to practice on the ground. Evidence from the challenge projects and other more recent schemes suggests that many local authorities are being slow to update their local policies and guidance. Moreover home zones do not yet feature prominently in the large new house-building projects that are being taken forward in England in both growth areas and regeneration areas.

### **Prospects**

#### **Practical lessons from the UK experience**

Home zones raise some key questions about the process of designing residential streets. Those involved with schemes have struggled with how to ensure all possible stakeholders are involved, and to keep them engaged as design and construction proceeds. Project champions have had to learn how to deal with reluctant residents, obstructive emergency services, dogmatic safety auditors and difficult planners, while at the same time learning new skills and revisiting their own professional knowledge base. Much of this is to be expected, given the novelty of the idea and its move away from conventional wisdom about who and what streets are for. Questions about effective designs – such as home zones in new developments, the possibility of low-cost home zones through 'deregulation' of highway law and the linked idea of 'shared space' streets in shopping areas or other parts of the road hierarchy (Hamilton-Baillie 2004) - and about the effectiveness and implications of legal measures remain to be answered.

One other important unanswered question thrown up by UK practice is who should lead a home zone project. As already stated, nearly all schemes so far have been led by highway engineers, usually as part of a project team. But although technical expertise in streets is vital to the success of a project many, including some highways engineers themselves, doubt that these professionals have the range of skills and competences that a home zone project leader requires (Barrell 2005). For some, the emerging discipline of urban design may provide a better starting point for the project management of home zone schemes. And parallel questions about leadership have also been raised at the level of Government Departments (Ben Hamilton-Baillie, personal communication).

#### **The social, cultural and psychological significance of home zones**

Home zones offer a real-life context for exploring some critical debates about modern urban living: debates about car-dependence, the meaning of 'community' and 'safety', social values, the relationship between local government and residents and the balance (some would say tension) between public and private space and between individual and collective well being.

One issue has, in one form or another, raised its head in nearly all projects: the values and attitudes about children and what these imply about the nature of childhood. Those involved in projects report mixed, sometimes contradictory views about whether or not it is acceptable or 'safe' for children and young people to be out in the street on their own. This mirrors wider attitudes: Valentine (2004) talks of "a binary conceptualisation of children as both vulnerable and in need of protection, yet also potentially menacing and dangerous". Vulnerability and danger are both linked to risk: the former the risk of a child coming to harm,

and the latter the risk of a child harming others. And the default response to both – by parents and decision makers – has been to remove children from public space: in other words, to try to eliminate the risk. Yet we know from risk management that risks are rarely eliminated without other risks springing up in their place (Graham and Wiener 1995). In the case of children in streets, what we risk is a decline in, on the one hand, their physical and mental health and, on the other, their acquisition of the kinds of practical life-skills that are best – perhaps only - acquired through daily, unsupervised activity and interactions. Although, as outlined above, there is some evidence that home zones are opening up streets for children, it appears that the impact is modest, and has not always been accompanied by a shift in parental or community attitudes to children out of doors.

I believe that the best response to the dominant influence of these twin risks – child-as-victim and child-as-villain - is to build a shared vision of the street as a domain where minor adverse events – upsets, injuries, conflicts – are not seen as a cause for concern but as evidence of healthy human activity, so long as they are manageable and kept to an acceptable level. This more balanced approach to risk would still prioritise the reduction of traffic speed in streets, given the unequivocal link between speed and injury severity (Ashton and Mackay 1979). But it would also explicitly aim to create the social and cultural context in which children's presence in streets is seen as a sign of a healthy neighbourhood, and their occasional mishaps and misadventures are accepted as an inevitable part of a rich childhood.

## References

- Ashton S J and Mackay G M, 1979. *Some characteristics of the population who suffer trauma as pedestrians when hit by cars and some resulting implications*. [Paper given at 4th International Research Council on the Biomechanics of Impact (IRCOBI) International Conference, Göthenborg.]
- Barrell, J, 2005. *Home Zones Challenge – Overview*. [Presentation to Department of Transport event 7 July 2005.]
- Biddulph, M, 2001. *Home zones: A planning and design handbook*. Bristol: Policy Press.
- Children's Play Council, 1997. *Home Zones: reclaiming residential streets*. London: National Children's Bureau.
- Department for Transport, 2001. *Home zones - planning and design (Traffic Advisory Leaflet 10/01)*. London: Department for Transport.
- Department for Transport, 2002. *Home zones – public participation (Traffic Advisory Leaflet 8/02)*. London: Department for Transport.
- Department for Transport, 2004. *Consultation Document on Quiet Lanes and Home Zones: Draft Regulations and Statutory Guidance for England*. London: Department for Transport.
- Department for Transport, 2005. *Home Zones* [online]. London: Department for Transport. Available from: [www.dft.gov.uk/stellent/groups/dft\\_susttravel/documents/divisionhomepage/031337.hcsp](http://www.dft.gov.uk/stellent/groups/dft_susttravel/documents/divisionhomepage/031337.hcsp) [Accessed 4 August 2005].
- Graham J and Wiener J, eds. 1995. *Risk versus Risk: Tradeoffs in protecting health and the environment*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.
- Hamilton-Baillie, B, 2004. Urban Design: Why Don't We Do It in the Road? Modifying Traffic Behaviour through Legible Urban Design. *Journal of Urban Technology*, 11 (1), 43-62.
- Institute of Highway Incorporated Engineers, 2002. *Home Zone Design Guidelines*. London: Institute of Highway Incorporated Engineers.
- Layfield R, Chinn L and Nicholls D, 2003. *Pilot home zone schemes: Evaluation of The Methleys, Leeds (TRL 586)*. Wokingham: TRL.
- Layfield R, Webster D, and Buttress S, 2005. *Pilot home zone schemes: Evaluation of Magor Village, Monmouthshire (TRL 633)*. Wokingham: TRL.
- Preston B, 1995. Cost effective ways to make walking safer for children and adolescents. *Injury Prevention*, 1, 187-190.
- Tilly A, Webster D, and Buttress S. 2005. *Pilot home zone schemes: Evaluation of Northmoor, Manchester (TRL 625)*. Wokingham: TRL.
- Valentine, G, 2004. *Public Space and the Culture of Childhood*. Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Webster D, Tilly A, and Buttress S, 2005. *Pilot home zone schemes: Evaluation of Cavell Way, Sittingbourne (TRL 626)*. Wokingham: TRL.
- Wikipedia 2005. *Home zones* [online]. Available from: [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Home\\_zone](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Home_zone) [Accessed 5 August 2005].

## Resources

### Websites

[www.homezoneschallenge.com](http://www.homezoneschallenge.com)

[www.homezonenews.org.uk](http://www.homezonenews.org.uk)

[www.trl.co.uk](http://www.trl.co.uk)

### Videos

*At Home in my Street: Exploring home zones in the Netherlands and Germany*  
*Home Zones: The UK experience*

Tim Gill

9 August 2005