

Home zones (draft)

Creating accessible home zones', the Dings Bristol

Working in partnership



**Birkin Street before:
separate pavements and roads**



**Birkin Street after:
shared surface**

The development of a home zone in the Dings created an opportunity to make sure the streets were redesigned to be accessible to those with disabilities. Bristol City Council officers invited members of Bristol Physical Access Chain (BPAC), the Council's advisory group on disabled access to undertake a review of early phases of the scheme. This led to the suggested design being altered and refined.

Disability groups represented on BPAC include:

- Wheel chair users
- Blind and partially sighted groups
- People with restricted mobility
- Deaf and hard of hearing

The Dings home zone design team sought the advice of both the Council's Walking and Cycling team and the Strategic Access Officer. Their guidance helped shape the streetscape with minimal use of bollards and other obstacles that could impair pedestrian movement. The type of surface treatment and the gradient of shared surface was also addressed through the design.

Areas highlighted and addressed through the design were:

- Surface treatment of gateways to clearly distinguish the home zone from non home zone streets
- Improved street lighting
- Gradients of shared surface shallow and accessible
- Location of planters in areas of shared surface chosen carefully to encourage safe slower driving whilst minimising obstacles for blind, visually impaired and people with restricted mobility

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The context

The main focus of home zones is to create safer traffic calmed streets and sociable spaces. A home zone project team must involve a large number of partners but accessibility issues can still be easily overlooked if there has not been direct involvement from disabled residents and disability groups. Existing disability groups should be invited to participate in the process and have an opportunity to review plans and give feedback. Extra effort to contact and involve residents with disabilities should also be made. In the Dings homes zones BPAC were involved at both design and construction stages ensuring continued consideration was given to accessibility requirements.

Experiencing the home zone

Members of BPAC visited the Dings home zone to inspect the completed first phase. Experiencing the shared surface for the first time, guide dog owners were interested to find out how their dogs would guide them through the space without a traditional kerb line that the dogs are trained to follow. The dogs negotiated the shared space with ease by following the perimeter boundary of garden walls as a substitute for kerbs. Car drivers travelling through the Dings home zone whilst the blind BPAC members were there responded by driving slowly and waiting for a safe opportunity before passing by.

The guide dog owners commented positively on the even surface of the new block-paving shared space. Text art consisting of metal roundels set into the ground did not cause any difficulty for wheelchair, guide dog users or others walking over them. Community travel workers in the Dings worked with the guide dogs for the blind to gain experience of negotiating surfaces blindfolded with a guide dog and using a white cane.

Art set flush with paving



Separate pavement and road give way to shared surface



home zones and shared space

The response to home zones and shared space from disability groups

Many disability groups broadly welcome the concept of safer streets that restrict the impact of heavy traffic. In principle the Joint Committee on Mobility of Blind and Partially Sighted People (JCMBPS) fully supports the aim to reduce the dominance of vehicles, reduce traffic speed and make the streets a safer place. The JCMBPS 2005 report on shared space comments “For blind, deafblind and partially sighted people a safe and accessible pedestrian environment is fundamental to independent mobility”.

Particular support is given to:

- Narrowing the carriageway / increasing the size of pavements
- Rationalisation of street furniture
- Improved lighting
- Provision of seating at regular points.

There are areas for debate arising from certain aspects of the shared space principles. The major concerns appear to be the potential dangers of:

- Reducing or removing any demarcation between surfaces used by cars and other vehicles and pedestrian areas (uncertainty about how to travel through)
- Removal of controlled crossing points (loss of safe crossing points)
- Mixed use with pedestrians and cyclists (fear of collision)
- The effect on wayfinding for blind and partially sighted people (loss of traditional guides such as kerbs)

Useful links and reading

Department of transport mobility and access unit

http://www.dft.gov.uk/stellent/groups/dft_about/documents/page/dft_mobility_redirects_page.hcsp

JMU Access Partnership

www.jmuaccess.org.uk

Shared space in the public realm – policy statement 2005. Joint Committee on Mobility of Blind and Partially Sighted People (JCMBPS)

Accessible by design

Addressing concerns

The recent development of home zones in the UK means there are many examples (both good and bad) that can be used to see how they affect disabled residents and travellers, whether in positive or negative ways. Many key areas of concern can be addressed by innovative design; for example the creation of wayfinding markings and crossing points for blind and partially sighted people could be incorporated into home zones using subtle textured paving or studs without reinforcing the notion of separate highway and pavement.

Conclusions

In order to create home zones or shared space that meet the needs of disabled residents and travellers it is essential to involve them at the design stage and then regularly throughout development and construction. It is helpful for designers and engineers working on a project to experience streets from the perspective of disabled people.



The introduction of uncertainty by changing parking layouts and introducing planting to the street disrupts sight lines and encourages drivers to proceed slowly. Disability groups remain concerned that the removal of pavements as dedicated walkways could be confusing for blind people with parked cars in unfamiliar places causing an obstacle. Blind visitors to the Dings found that this was not a concern.



Good Practice

- Involve disability groups through the design process
- Communicate the aims of the project to disability groups
- Consider a site visit to other relevant project areas for residents and disability groups
- Arrange an early review with disability groups after construction work has begun
- Have designers and engineers try to navigate the street with a simulated impairment
- Refer to and implement where possible advice from publications and resources produced by disability groups on different needs and requirements.