

Shared Surface Street Design Research Project

The Issues: Report of Focus Groups



Moving forward together



Guide Dogs

Contents

Acknowledgements	4
Foreword	5
Executive Summary	8
1. The Shared Surface Street Design Research Project	13
2. Policy Context	15
3. Focus Groups	18
4. Summary of Key Findings	35
5. Conclusions and Next Steps in the Research Project	37

Appendices

1. The Shared Space Concept	38
2. Guide Dog and Long Cane Mobility – an Introduction	40
3. Description of Focus Group Locations	42

Front cover photograph: Newbury town centre. This shows a shared surface scheme where there is no kerb to demarcate footway and carriageway. Vehicles and pedestrians share the same surface.

All photographs are described for the benefit of blind and partially-sighted people who are accessing this report.

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Foreword

How many of us reading this report would ask our loved ones to go somewhere in a town centre that was unsafe? I suspect very few could honestly answer in the affirmative. How many of us think it is fair that a loved one should be deprived of going somewhere in town because they are afraid of being run over by moving traffic? I believe we would be up in arms at the prospect. Yet in this report, that is exactly what blind and partially-sighted people are telling us they have experienced in those places where traffic and people share the same thoroughfare – a so called shared surface.

At a time when legislation has been enacted to ensure the safety of our citizens, this report has unveiled a number of town centre design schemes that appear to achieve just the opposite.

At the heart of the issue is the need to distinguish between Shared Space and shared surfaces. The former can be successful in meeting everyone's needs provided that physical 'clues' including kerbs and tactile surfaces are retained. The latter is generally taken to mean the removal of all delineation between areas traditionally used by vehicles or pedestrians. This results in an environment that is both frightening and dangerous; not only for people with reduced vision (and about one million people in the UK are registered or eligible to be registered as blind or partially-sighted) but also for many other disabled and older people.

I confess to having a personal interest in these shared surface designs. As a registered blind person I require consistency of street design features to get around. This report, frighteningly, demonstrates a total lack of such consistency. It clearly brings out into the open an argument that must be aired for the benefit of all – must we choose aesthetics over safety?

I hope that the report acts as a catalyst for this debate to begin. I suspect the solution will be that inclusively designed town centres can be accessible and beautiful to all.



Tom Pey
Director of Public Policy and Development
Guide Dogs

“The Joint Committee on Mobility for Disabled People will only support shared surface schemes which make suitable and safe provision for people with mobility, visual and hearing impairments. Meeting the needs of some groups of disabled people at the expense of others is unacceptable. Developments must be fully inclusive, whether people’s impairments are physical or sensory. Nothing less will do.”

Joe Hennessy OBE, Chair of Joint Committee on Mobility for Disabled People

“The British Council of Disabled People (BCODP) will only support Shared Space schemes that meet the needs of all disabled people. BCODP does not believe that schemes where there is no difference in the surface between the road and the pavement, and which rely on drivers and pedestrians making ‘eye contact’, can possibly meet the needs of blind and partially-sighted people. BCODP would however welcome the opportunity to contribute to the development of general guidance on the design of Shared Space schemes that are fully inclusive of the access needs of all disabled people.”

Janet Seymour Kirk, Deputy Chair, British Council of Disabled People

“The Royal National Institute for Deaf People is very concerned about the consequences of shared surface schemes and their possible impact on deaf and hard of hearing people who may be unable to hear vehicles approaching, and need to focus on companions rather than their environment in order to be able to communicate. A shared surface could remove the relative safety that deaf and hard of hearing people enjoy. RNID would welcome the chance to contribute to discussions about street design to ensure that for deaf and hard of hearing people Shared Spaces are, above all, safe spaces.”

Brian Lamb OBE, Director of Communications, Royal National Institute for Deaf People

“Whether ambulant disabled or wheelchair-using, people with arthritis are likely to feel vulnerable in shared surface areas where cyclists and others may be travelling at speed. Without the physical ability to navigate such spaces deftly, people with arthritis are at a level of risk which, as with people with sensory impairments, may reduce their confidence in travelling to such an extent they will in effect be excluded.”

Neil Betteridge, Chief Executive, Arthritis Care

“It is entirely to miss the point of the disability movement’s endeavours during the past 35 years to suggest that the inclusion of some sections of our community inevitably means the exclusion of others.

Any such suggestions abysmally fail to understand the concept of Inclusive Design which the disability movement has so carefully fostered; clearly if design solutions fail to accommodate the needs of any particular group(s) in favour of another, they cannot be deemed as ‘inclusive’.

We need look no further than to the origins of tactile paving to recognise the long-standing unity of purpose that exists amongst disabled people. Many years have passed since blind and partially-sighted people conceded the essential presence of a kerb edge at street crossings so as to enable wheelchair users to cross safely and, in contributing to that same compromise, wheelchair users accepted the added bumpy-ride which comes with the enhanced guidance delivered by tactile paving – a compromise which illustrates that for all disabled people ‘inclusion’ cannot be achieved at the cost of another’s exclusion.

So: think again those who may seek to excuse the shortcomings of their design solutions by playing off mobility against sensory interest groups...”

Peter Lainson, UK Institute of Inclusive Design; former Chair of the RADAR Access Committee; and former Chair of the Access Committee for England

Executive Summary

Background

Several local authorities in the UK have redesigned town centres and high streets using the concept of Shared Space, or are in the process of doing so. Shared Space, which is also being adopted in some mainland European countries, aims to create shared 'social' areas for all users – in some cases through the creation of a shared surface for drivers, cyclists and pedestrians.

The Guide Dogs for the Blind Association (Guide Dogs) supports some of the ideas behind the Shared Space concept, with streets that are attractively designed and 'people-friendly'. However, there are major concerns over shared surfaces.

Guide Dogs believes that everyone should have equal access to places, services and transport. Streets must be safe and inclusive for all users. We are concerned that shared surfaces will dissuade or even prevent blind and partially-sighted people, and other disabled people, from using town centres and high streets.

We have been contacted by anxious blind people raising their concerns about shared surfaces. One guide dog owner experienced a potentially life-threatening incident in a town centre, and there have been several other near misses.

Guide Dogs has undertaken research to gather blind and partially-sighted people's first-hand experiences of shared surfaces, and assess the level of concern. We conducted ten focus groups among 67 people with visual impairments and other disabilities, who live in towns in the UK where there are shared surfaces. Guide Dogs has also conducted focus groups in the Netherlands¹ which established that blind and partially-sighted people experience significant difficulties with shared surfaces.

Our concerns with shared surfaces

Shared surfaces often have no clear demarcation between the footway and carriageway. Guide Dogs is concerned that the removal of the kerb edge puts the safety and security of blind and partially-sighted people seriously at risk, and undermines their confidence, independence and mobility.

Many blind and partially-sighted people travel independently using a mobility aid (a long cane or a guide dog) and/or their remaining vision. The kerb edge, or other tactile demarcation between footway and carriageway, is a fundamental 'clue' for orientation within the street environment. Without a kerb or tactile demarcation, this becomes very difficult.

In addition, the shared surface approach proposes that users of the streets negotiate priority and movement through "eye contact"² – which puts blind and partially-sighted people at an immediate disadvantage.

¹ A report on focus groups carried out in the Netherlands is available on the Guide Dogs website www.guidedogs.org.uk/sharedsurfaces. For further information on this report please contact Gill Kenyon at Guide Dogs' head office. Tel: 0118 983 8359. Email: sharedsurfaces@guidedogs.org.uk

² Draft Manual for Streets, Department for Transport & Department for Communities and Local Government, 2006

We are concerned that blind and partially-sighted people, and other vulnerable groups, will become increasingly excluded from shared surface areas, or be exposed to extremely hazardous situations when using them. Our concerns are shared by other organisations represented on the Joint Committee on Mobility of Blind and Partially Sighted People, including the Royal National Institute of the Blind (RNIB), St Dunstons, the National Federation of Blind People (NFB), the National League of Blind and Disabled People, the National Association of Local Societies of Visually-Impaired People (NALSVI), the Social Care Association, the Circle of Guide Dog Owners, and Assistance Dogs UK.

The key findings of our research

The findings from our focus groups clearly show that blind and partially-sighted people feel their safety is being put at risk by the introduction of shared surface areas for drivers, cyclists and pedestrians in town centres. This confirms the findings from the focus groups held in the Netherlands.

The overwhelming majority was opposed to the implementation of shared surface areas, reporting concerns about the increased risks to their safety, reduced confidence and independence, and their lack of involvement in the consultation process.

"Towns will become no-go areas for us, won't they?"

Guide dog owner, Coventry

1. Safety issues: accidents and hazardous situations

Participants in our focus groups reported a series of instances where they had been in danger or felt unsafe using shared surface areas, including:

- nearly stepping out in front of a bus;
- getting knocked over by cyclists;
- being intimidated by traffic passing close by; and
- finding it extremely difficult to cross carriageways safely.

These experiences were primarily a result of:

- the lack of demarcation between 'safe' and 'unsafe' areas, with the removal of the distinction between 'footway' and 'carriageway';
- difficulty in locating and using crossing points, due to the removal of signal controlled crossings; and
- street design or the use of materials that make it hard for blind and partially-sighted people to orientate themselves.

“I had to be pulled back because I was standing in the road, thinking it was part of the kerb.”

Guide dog owner, Dundee

“A cyclist actually ran into me and knocked me flying. I fell down, and he said ‘next time you’ll get out of the way, won’t you’.”

Guide dog owner, Hull

2. Reduced confidence and increased anxiety

Our research shows that the problems and associated risks with using shared surfaces in town centres are undermining the confidence and mobility of blind and partially-sighted people.

“I don’t enjoy going into town any more... I’m stressed before getting there.”

Blind person, Lowestoft

“Although I have some sight, I go home absolutely exhausted due to the sheer concentration and tension.”

Woman who uses a symbol cane, Dundee

3. Avoidance of shared surface areas

Many of the blind and partially-sighted people in our focus groups said they tended to avoid town centres with shared surface areas, to the detriment of their independence, freedom and quality of life.

“I keep away from this area – I stay away.”

Guide dog owner, Coventry

“It is actually limiting what I feel I want to do independently...”

Guide dog owner, mother with young children, Leamington

4. Concerns of other disabled people

Several disability organisations, including the Joint Committee on Mobility for Disabled People, the British Council of Disabled People, Arthritis Care, and the Royal National Institute for Deaf People, have expressed concerns about shared surfaces.

In addition to researching the experiences and concerns of blind and partially-sighted people, we held pan-disability focus groups which confirmed that other disabled people – including people with hearing impairments and learning disabilities – have concerns about shared surfaces. While wheelchair users and people with mobility impairments appreciate level surfaces, they also highlighted the need for safe areas away from traffic.

5. Inadequate consultation at the planning stage

The findings of our research indicate that there has been insufficient consultation between local authorities and blind and partially-sighted people and people with other disabilities. There were some examples of good practice in consultation processes, but most people feel their needs and opinions have been ignored, and that local authority officers do not have sufficient awareness of visual impairment issues.

“It knocks your confidence when you go to meetings and get ignored.”

Guide dog owner, Coventry

“At every meeting we said ‘we must have audible crossings’, but the response we got was: ‘We can’t do that, it’s not part of the project’.”

Blind person, Hull

Finding a solution for all

This initial report is not designed to provide immediate solutions to the concerns identified within it. The next stage of our research project will involve detailed research into potential solutions, and the findings will be published in a second report.

However, participants in our focus groups did make a number of recommendations to improve the safety and accessibility of Shared Space areas for vulnerable groups, including:

- the creation (or reinstatement) of a footway with a kerb, regular dropped kerbs for wheelchair users, and properly-laid tactile paving; or
- at least, a clear delineation between the ‘carriageway’/vehicle area and the ‘footway’/pedestrian-only area, through tactile and colour/tone contrast;
- tactile information to indicate when pedestrians are entering and leaving a shared surface area;
- separate pedestrian areas and cycle lanes;
- controlled crossings with audible and tactile signals;
- the installation of guardrails at potential danger points; and
- universal consistency of design features.

A key issue is the need to distinguish between the Shared Space approach and shared surfaces. Our concerns are with shared surfaces, and the Shared Space approach does not necessarily mean a shared surface.

Where a Shared Space approach is adopted which retains a footway and kerb with appropriate dropped kerbs and tactile paving, there is unlikely to be an issue for blind and partially-sighted people. If any other experimental form of delineation between 'pedestrian area' and carriageway is proposed this must be demonstrably suitable for blind and partially-sighted people, and other disabled people, before implementation. The consideration of designs in the next stage of our research project will contribute to this process. However, the responsibility for ensuring that experimental designs are thoroughly tested through user trials rests with those responsible for the proposal.

Guide Dogs is commencing a programme that will develop and test designs for Shared Spaces that could meet the requirements of people with visual impairments and people with other disabilities.

At the same time, Guide Dogs will undertake a programme of consultation and awareness-raising with local authorities, urban design architects and town planners.

Meaningful consultation with blind and partially-sighted people, and people with other disabilities, must take place for the Shared Space approach to work as intended. Site notices and local newspapers are not accessible to blind and partially-sighted people; talking newspapers, local radio and direct contact must also be used.

It is essential that the Disability Discrimination Act and current Government policy messages on inclusive design, social inclusion and meaningful community involvement are taken into account when Shared Space areas are designed.

1. The Shared Surface Street Design Research Project

1.1 Background to the Research Project

During the last year or so several local authorities in the UK have redesigned town centre high streets, following the concept of 'Shared Space'. Appendix 1 of this report, written by Ben Hamilton-Baillie, urban design and transport consultant, gives more information on this concept, which aims to reduce the dominance of vehicles and make high streets more people-friendly. We would support these aims, but the implementation is a matter for concern³. The implementation of the Shared Space approach proposes that users of streets negotiate priority and movement through "eye contact"⁴. This raises obvious issues for blind and partially-sighted people.

Shared Space is described as "a concept, a multi-disciplinary and interactive process with an active input from the relevant citizens and their lobby organisations"⁵. This again is supported. Our concerns relate to the design implementation of this concept where it takes the form of a shared surface.

The main concern of The Guide Dogs for the Blind Association and other organisations represented on the Joint Committee on Mobility of Blind and Partially Sighted People (JCMBPS) is the removal of the separation between vehicles and pedestrians, mainly through the removal of the traditional footway and kerb, and replacement with a shared surface. This is a feature of many of the streetscape designs which have followed the Shared Space concept.

The reason that shared surfaces cause so much difficulty to blind and partially-sighted people relates to the way in which they navigate in the street environment. To aid understanding of this an introduction to mobility and orientation is included in Appendix 2. In summary, many blind and partially-sighted people travel independently using a mobility aid (a long cane or a guide dog) and/or their remaining vision. The kerb edge, or other tactile demarcation between footway and carriageway, is fundamental for orientation, both for guide dog users and long cane users. Guide dogs and their owners, and long cane users, are trained to use the kerb edge as the key orientation clue in the street environment.

1.2 Research Objectives

In response to the issues raised Guide Dogs is undertaking research to:

- identify the concerns of blind and partially-sighted people in relation to the use of shared surfaces in the public realm;
- make recommendations on how these concerns can be addressed;
- develop design principles, techniques and standards that provide for the requirements of blind and partially-sighted people, and fulfil the Shared Space concept in so far as it conditions drivers and other road users; and
- ensure we take into account the requirements of other disabled people.

³Joint Committee on Mobility of Blind and Partially Sighted People Policy Statement: Shared Space in the Public Realm, 2005

⁴Draft Manual for Streets, Department for Transport & Department for Communities and Local Government, 2006

⁵Shared Space: Room for everyone - www.shared-space.org

1.3 Links to Related Research Projects: Home Zones

In parallel with this research project on shared surfaces in town and city centres, research is also being carried out into the implications of Home Zones, where a shared surface may be implemented in a residential street. This research, commissioned by the Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee, is being carried out by JMU Access Partnership, the Royal National Institute of the Blind and the Transport Research Laboratory. Links have been established between the two research projects.

1.4 Research Project Methodology

The research project methodology includes the following work programme elements:

- i) An advisory group of key Government and professional representatives to guide the research process;
- ii) A literature review;
- iii) Exploring the use of shared surfaces in the Netherlands and the experiences of blind and partially-sighted people there⁶;
- iv) Investigating the issues in the UK through:
 - identifying a sample of towns in the UK which have implemented aspects of shared surfaces,
 - focus groups of local blind and partially-sighted people in these areas, and
 - pan-disability focus groups in selected areas;
- v) Consultation with a range of national disability organisations;
- vi) Consultation with local authorities; and
- vii) Development and testing of design principles.

⁶A report on focus groups carried out in the Netherlands is available on the Guide Dogs website www.guidedogs.org.uk/sharedsurfaces. For further information on this report please contact Gill Kenyon at Guide Dogs' head office. Tel: 0118 983 8359. Email: sharedsurfaces@guidedogs.org.uk

2. Policy Context

Prior to the implementation of a Shared Space scheme, which may include shared surfaces, local authorities must take into consideration relevant Government policy and key good practice publications.

Some key messages and influences are briefly discussed within this section, including the principles of accessibility, social inclusion, inclusive design and community involvement. This policy context is provided as a basis against which we can begin to consider whether these principles have been followed in the implementation of the shared surface design.

2.1 Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 2005 and Disability Equality Duty

Local authorities should be aware of the implications of the DDA 2005 in two respects: non-discriminatory requirements in relation to public functions, and the duty to promote disability equality.

Non-discriminatory requirements in relation to public functions:

Part 3 of the DDA 1995 prohibited discrimination in connection with the provision of goods, facilities and services to the public, and in relation to premises. The DDA 2005 amended Part 3 in such a way that the same underlying principles would apply to the exercise by a public authority of their statutory functions, including highways and planning functions.

Broadly speaking, public authorities must make adjustments to the way in which they carry out their functions to ensure that disabled people are not discriminated against by the way in which those functions are carried out. This legislation now ensures that all the activities of public authorities are covered.

The duty to promote disability equality:

The Statutory Code of Practice on the Duty to Promote Disability Equality, published by the Disability Rights Commission, 2006, states that:

'The general duty requires public authorities to adopt a pro-active approach mainstreaming disability equality into all decisions and activities' (paragraph 1.13).

Most public bodies, including local authorities, also have to meet the specific duty regulations which require authorities to produce and publish a Disability Equality Scheme, to implement action on aspects of the Scheme and to report on it (paragraph 3.4).

The Disability Equality Scheme is a framework to assist authorities in planning, delivering, evaluating and reporting on their activities to ensure compliance with the general duty.

Both duties require the active involvement of disabled people in the decision-making process and in the delivery by local authorities of the functions and services for which they are responsible.

2.2 Accessibility Principles – Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee (DPTAC)

DPTAC was established under the Transport Act 1985 to advise the Government on the transport needs of disabled people.

DPTAC has identified four overarching principles on which it bases advice to Government, other organisations and disabled people:

- accessibility for disabled people is a condition of any investment;
- accessibility for disabled people must be a mainstream activity;
- users should be involved in determining accessibility; and
- achieving accessibility for disabled people is the responsibility of the provider.

2.3 Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE)

CABE's Inclusive Environment Group provides expert advice on how to put inclusive design at the heart of Government and industry decision-making, and promotes inclusion as a vital objective of good architecture and urban design.

Inclusive Design (CABE 2006)

Inclusive design is about creating places that everyone can use. The way places are designed affects our ability to move, see, hear and communicate effectively. Inclusive design aims to remove barriers that create undue effort and separation. It enables everyone to participate equally, confidently and independently in everyday activities.

Inclusive design:

- places people at the heart of the design process;
- acknowledges human diversity and difference;
- offers choice where a single design solution cannot accommodate all users;
- provides for flexibility in use; and
- provides buildings and environments that are convenient, equitable and enjoyable to use by everyone.

2.4 Social Inclusion – Planning Policy Statement (PPS) 1: Delivering Sustainable Development (2005)

“Good design should...create an environment where everyone can access and benefit from the full range of opportunities available to members of society...” (paragraph 35).

Community involvement – PPS1

“An inclusive approach should be taken to ensure that different groups have the opportunity to participate and are not disadvantaged in the process. Identifying and understanding the needs of groups who find it difficult to engage with the planning system is critical to achieving sustainable development objectives” (paragraph 42).

2.5 Key Good Practice Guidance Documents

‘Inclusive Projects’ (Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee, 2003) stresses the need to commit to and integrate inclusive design principles at all stages of the project briefing process.

‘Planning and Access for Disabled People’ (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, 2003) defines an inclusive environment as one that can be used by everyone regardless of age, gender or disability.

The key good practice document promoting inclusive design in the street environment is ‘Inclusive Mobility’ (Department for Transport, 2002).

2.6 Policy in Practice

The questions that local authorities need to ask themselves in respect of streetscape design are:

- **Have these principles been followed in shared surface schemes?**
- **Do shared surface schemes promote disability equality?**
- **Is accessibility for disabled people a condition of investment in these street schemes?**
- **Do shared surfaces contribute to places that everyone can use?**

It appears that current Government policy messages on inclusive design, social inclusion and meaningful community involvement are not being considered when implementing shared surface designs. Furthermore, the creation of shared surface areas in town centres, where the safety of blind and partially-sighted people is at risk, and where they now feel afraid to visit, is not in keeping with the Disability Discrimination Act, and the duty that requires public bodies to promote equality for disabled people.

3. Focus Groups

This report constitutes part iv) of the work programme (see section 1.4), the aim of which is to establish, through focus groups, the experiences of blind and partially-sighted people and other people with disabilities in town and city centre areas with regard to shared surfaces; and to record their concerns. It sets out the findings from ten focus groups held in the UK.

3.1 Objectives

This is a qualitative study, the main aims of which are:

- To establish the key issues in the street environment which affect people's ability to move around safely and independently.
- To explore the participants' experience of shared surface street design schemes.
Within this:
 - i) to establish any design features or layouts that help them move around in these areas
 - ii) to identify any problems and coping strategies.
- To identify whether shared surfaces is a priority issue.
- To explore whether participants had been involved in any consultation and, if so, whether they considered their views had any effect.

3.2 Methods

Between March and June 2006 ten focus groups were conducted in England, Wales and Scotland⁷.

Seven of the focus groups were comprised of people with a visual impairment (VI); three of them were pan-disability groups (PD).

The locations for the focus groups were chosen to include:

- the widest geographical spread possible;
- a range of large cities and smaller towns;
- areas identified as having some shared surfaces development – initially through a literature review, reports from Guide Dogs District Teams and contacts from residents, followed by site visits.

The focus groups were held in:

- Ashford, Kent (VI)
- Coventry, West Midlands (two groups: one VI, one PD)
- Dundee, Scotland (VI)
- Hull, East Yorkshire (VI)
- Leamington, Warwickshire (VI)
- London (PD)
- Lowestoft, Suffolk (VI)
- Newbury, Berkshire (PD)
- Newport, South Wales (VI)

⁷No area in Northern Ireland was identified as having a shared surface during preparation for the focus groups.

A short description of the areas is in Appendix 3.

A total of 67 participants took part in the ten focus groups. In addition, at several of the focus groups there were observers who were rehabilitation workers, mobility instructors or access officers.

In the focus groups of people with a visual impairment there were a total of 48 participants.

- 30 had some residual vision; 18 had none.
- 33 were guide dog owners; five used a long cane; one participant with both sight and hearing loss used a red/white cane and had access to a guide/communicator twice a week; others used a symbol cane or no mobility aid. (Several of the guide dog owners also used a long cane regularly when not taking their dog with them.) One participant had walking difficulties as well as vision loss.

In the pan-disability focus groups there was a total of 19 people across three focus groups.

- Seven people were wheelchair users, of which one also had a vision impairment.
- Two people had walking difficulties.
- Two people had hearing impairments.
- One person had both vision and hearing impairment.
- Seven people were blind or partially-sighted, of which four were guide dog owners and three were cane users.
- One participant represented the views of older people with a learning disability, through his employment. This participant also had a hearing impairment himself.

The focus groups were facilitated by Guide Dogs staff. A script was developed to use as a prompt for the discussions. The discussions centred on the following key issues:

- the street environment,
- features which help or hinder mobility in the street environment,
- shared surface street design, and
- local consultation.

Throughout this report a brief description of persons quoted is provided next to the quotation. 'Blind person' is used only to distinguish the person from 'guide dog owner', to clarify that the former does not use a guide dog as their mobility aid.

3.3 Focus Group Findings

3.3.1 The participants: independent mobility

Almost all of the 67 participants regularly went out independently, although several qualified this by saying they were less likely to go out alone at night. The reasons given were either related to their vision being less at night or general security issues, or a mixture of both. One visually-impaired woman did not go out independently, and one participant with both sight and hearing loss had access to a guide/communicator twice a week.

3.3.2 Issues in the street environment

At all focus groups, participants were asked about the street environment generally before the issue of shared surfaces was introduced. This was to try to separate general issues from those that specifically related to shared surfaces.

There were many issues of importance within the street environment that impacted on the participants' capacity to navigate around. The issues raised did not include any surprise items, and were in line with the Guide Dogs Safer Streets study⁸. These included:

- obstructions, such as 'A' boards, on footways,
- vehicles parked on footways,
- cyclists riding on footways and shared paths,
- lack of suitable controlled crossings for pedestrians,
- lack of guardrails and barriers,
- lack of colour contrast,
- inadequate signage.

These issues are reported separately⁹.

3.3.3 Shared surfaces

A shared surface was explained to the participants as an area where the traditional separation between pedestrians and vehicles, through a footway and kerb, may be removed or decreased. In some areas there may be a footway area but there may not be a full kerb defining the edge of the footway.

Most of the participants were able to identify areas where there were shared surfaces. The one exception to this was in London where some participants found it difficult to identify shared surface areas.

3.3.4 Shared surface concerns

The key concerns raised by blind and partially-sighted people were a lack of demarcation to show which was a safe 'footway' area and which was a traffic area; lack of orientation clues; and difficulty identifying where a shared surface started and ended. Participants were very concerned:

“How will it ever work for a totally blind person, with no shoreline to follow anymore? You've got to know where you are to work the dog!”

Guide dog owner, Lowestoft

⁸ www.guidedogs.org.uk/saferstreets

⁹ For further information on the focus group findings on general issues in the street environment, please contact Gill Kenyon at Guide Dogs' Head Office. Tel: 0118 983 8359. Email: sharedsurfaces@guidedogs.org.uk

“Blind people cannot live in an open space, it's totally and utterly impossible!”

Blind person, Lowestoft



Photograph 1: Lowestoft town centre shared surface area. A blind person and her guide dog are in an open space without kerbs and other orientation clues. Traffic passes close by.



Photograph 2: Lowestoft town centre. The lack of a kerb between the footway and the carriageway has led to a guide dog with her owner walking off the footway into the pathway of traffic.

- **Separation from traffic**

In most of the town and city centres studied, there were separate areas for pedestrians, but these were not clearly demarcated for blind and partially-sighted people.

In Newbury, participants felt that the level surface made it difficult to tell where the footway ended and the carriageway began.



Photograph 3: Newbury town centre. A long cane user is walking across the shared surface area. A bus and a cyclist are close by.

This view was echoed by participants in Hull and Lowestoft:

“There is no distinction between the road and the pavement – this doesn’t consider blind and partially-sighted people.”

Blind person, Hull

“As there are no pavement edges on Suffolk Road (Lowestoft), buses and traffic come really close to pedestrians which can be very intimidating for blind and partially-sighted people.”

Partially-sighted person, Lowestoft

In Leamington there are shared surfaces at the approach and exit to a shopping parade:

“When leaving the shopping area it is easy to just drift into the road.”

Guide dog owner, Leamington

In Dundee city centre participants talked about two areas of shared surface. One was coming from a pedestrianised area onto carriageways, the other was in the centre of a main pedestrianised area which buses and service vehicles frequently use. Participants were concerned at the lack of warning when coming from a pedestrianised area into a shared area:

“Although I have what sight I have, it does not stop me going home absolutely exhausted due to the sheer concentration and tension.”

A woman who uses a symbol cane, Dundee



Photograph 4: Dundee city centre shared surface area. There is minimal demarcation between the footway and the carriageway. There is also a lack of orientation clues, including kerbs.

In Coventry, the Millennium Square shared surface area is at the approach to Pool Meadow bus station:

“There is nothing there to help you know where you are. I rely on the dog a lot. The dog gets confused because of the flush surface.”

Guide dog owner, Coventry

“I didn’t know this area but had to get to the bus station. I approached from Hayle Street and arrived as a bus was crossing and heard it then realised that I was in the road. I went the wrong way – it was really dangerous.”

Guide dog owner, Coventry



Photograph 5: Coventry shared surface area. A blind woman with her guide dog approaches the shared surface. There is minimal visual or tactile contrast. Buses pass through this area at frequent intervals.

One participant in Coventry commented:

“It affects kids too – there’s nothing to stop them running onto the road.”

People who did not have a visual impairment also expressed concern in the Coventry group:

“I cycle. There is no cycle lane to tell you where to go. Buses are everywhere. It is confusing and there is no kerb to indicate where to stop.”

Hearing impaired person, Coventry

A representative of an organisation of adults with learning disabilities said of the shared surface area in Coventry: “We have volunteers to help with clients. The clients would feel confused in this area”.

A wheelchair user in London stated that if he had to move around at night on a level surface where a car could come up at any time, he would find it very intimidating. He described the footway as a “refuge”. He tended to move close to a building to take a break and assess his situation. “If there was no pavement, where would the refuge be?” he asked. “Have I not got a right to stand still or sit still somewhere in my wheelchair and put my mind into neutral?”

“To me, a shared surface is a potential death trap. If you are elderly or you don’t move quickly you are fair game.”

Woman with walking difficulties, London

Participants in London commented on the concept of shared surface as “no-one owning the road”, but added with reference to cars:

“I know who thinks they own the road and it’s not me! There is going to be no question about that.”

Woman with a hearing impairment, London

In Newport, participants identified an area located within the pedestrianised space as shared surface. Several participants with some residual sight did not find this area a problem as the ‘carriageway’, though level with the ‘footway area’, is a contrasting colour and lined by bollards. Those with no, or very little, sight found the area more difficult as there is no tactile difference and the bollards are far enough apart to walk through:

“I find this area unnerving. I am very careful now as a bus may be coming.”

Guide dog owner, Newport

In Ashford an area is pedestrianised for most of the day, with only a few motorised vehicles permitted, such as delivery vans:

“The gate (that prevents traffic during the day) is open at night when I come out of the pub. You get boy racers; they are unpredictable.”

Guide dog owner, Ashford

Cyclists are allowed to use the area during the day. Participants here considered the cyclists more of a problem than vehicles as they cannot be heard:

“There shouldn’t be cycles on the pavement. It should be a truly pedestrianised area – no cars, no cycles.”

Guide dog owner, Ashford

Concerns about cyclists were raised in all focus groups, either within the discussion on shared surfaces or as a general concern about the pedestrian environment. This included the inappropriate positioning of cycle racks.



Photograph 6: Newbury town centre. A long cane user is about to walk into cycle racks as he attempts to navigate the streetscape.

The lack of bells on bikes was mentioned in several groups. In Newbury, participants mentioned problems with young cyclists using shared surfaces as a “playground”.



Photograph 7: Newbury town centre. A wheelchair user is in the centre of the shared surface. A young cyclist passes close by.

In Hull, one participant had been injured by colliding with a cyclist:

“A cyclist actually ran into me and knocked me flying. I fell down and he said ‘next time you’ll get out of the way won’t you’.”

Guide dog owner, Hull

A participant from Newport described a similar accident:

“I got smacked by a bike. I had a busted lip, damaged tooth and bleeding nose. He raced away.”

Partially-sighted person, Newport

• Crossing carriageways

Where areas had shared level surfaces, participants noted that most disabled people continued to keep to the ‘pedestrian’ side and use crossing points. However, there was insufficient demarcation to enable blind and partially-sighted people to keep to the pedestrian side and to cross the carriageway safely.

In the Coventry shared surface area there are crossings at the approach to the bus station, which sighted participants use, but blind people tend to find them difficult:

“There are two crossings in the area but you take your chances as they are not easy to find.”

Guide dog owner, Coventry

In Dundee, participants commented on the wide openness of the pedestrianised area as it leads onto the shared surface, which makes it more difficult to negotiate. Blind and partially-sighted people often did not know where they were positioning themselves for the crossing.



Photograph 8: Dundee city centre. The lack of a kerb makes it difficult for blind and partially-sighted people to get into position to cross the carriageway.

In Lowestoft, participants were concerned that a pelican crossing had been removed as part of the redevelopment. As well as providing a crossing place, the pelican crossing had also helped with orientation. This was now lost:

“I can’t cross Gordon Road alone any more, I have to get sighted assistance.”

Blind person, Lowestoft

The participants in Hull were angry at the fact that signal controlled crossings were removed and zebra crossings installed instead:

“A red light is giving an order, whereas now it is just a matter of ‘please stop’ – and we are relying on their good citizenship to let us cross. There is no actual red light to say ‘look, you’ve got to stay there while this red light is on and this person crosses’.”

Blind person, Hull

“There are no pelican crossings on Newland Avenue, and zebras are not ideal. You stand there and drivers get frustrated and wave you on. You’re not given enough time to cross, it’s not fair, it’s frightening.”

Guide dog owner, Hull

“The only thing you can do is listen and hope for the best.”

Blind person, Hull

• Street design issues

In several areas participants noted that the street furniture and items such as café tables often restricted access to the building line. As there is often no outer shoreline (normally a kerb), using the building line for guidance is important.

Lack of contrast between street furniture and the background environment was mentioned in several areas. In Hull and Lowestoft there is stainless steel street furniture:

“It’s really high shiny steel and the sunlight reflects back which is really quite painful. These flashing lights give me migraine attacks and my vision almost goes.”

Partially-sighted person, Hull



Photograph 9: Stainless steel street furniture in Hull’s ‘Home Zone’ area.

In Hull participants referred to a ‘Home Zone’ where there is a weave design in the carriageway with no tactile demarcations, making it very difficult to determine whether one is on the footway or carriageway. They also commented that shiny studs have been put in the ground that are not level with the footway. Guide dogs find these difficult to walk on. The dog tends to try to avoid some of them, weaving rather than walking in a straight line. It was also noted that there is very fine and loose gravel, which the dogs do not like. The shiny effect of the footway when wet was also raised as a concern in Hull.

In Newport, participants commented on the curved ‘carriageway’ area which was not demarcated by a tactile surface or kerb, but had bollards along it. Guide dog owners found it difficult to follow this curved carriageway as guide dogs are taught to walk in a straight line.

A participant in Ashford had fallen over the gutter and another had twisted their ankle in the drain that runs along the length of the High Street.

3.3.5 Avoiding shared surface areas

In several focus groups participants reported avoiding shared surface areas.

Most participants in Leamington avoid the shared surface areas leading to the pedestrianised shopping parade even though this makes for a longer journey. If they want to go to a shop in the area they need to do a detour that involves crossing two roads, but this is preferred. Participants also noted that since this pedestrian area is a route through the town which avoids the main road, it is now assumed that not many pedestrians use the main road – but blind and partially-sighted people still have to.

Avoiding the shared surface area was also commented on in Coventry and Lowestoft:

“I keep away from this area – I stay away.”

Guide dog owner, Coventry

“I do a big loop to avoid the area.”

Guide dog owner, Coventry

“I do it (go to the town centre) but I don’t like it; I’d avoid if it possible, it never used to be like that.”

Guide dog owner, Lowestoft

3.3.6 Effect on confidence

Several participants spoke about feeling less confident. One participant in Leamington, a mother with young children, described herself as ‘very independent’ but encountering shared surfaces had reduced her confidence in visiting friends in other towns:

“It is actually limiting what I feel I want to do independently. Like when I go to stay with a friend who is another guide dog owner and we go around town and I don’t know the area – I am incredibly nervous about doing new journeys and I have actually started to say no. I used to be quite happy to follow the kerb, but now there may not be one.”

Guide dog owner, mother, Leamington

A participant commented on the effect of the changes in Dundee:

“I used to live in Edinburgh and I moved back to Dundee (my home town) about two years ago. One of the reasons I came back was that I thought getting around Dundee city centre was brilliant and it was easy to do. It has changed! I have no sight at all and use a guide dog, and used to think I was very mobile and independent, but the last two years have been a challenge for me in the city centre. I really hate it now and just feel frustrated because I don’t have the freedom and independence I thought I would when I came up here. I have three visually-impaired children, they have about 15 per cent vision. When we’re out together I feel responsible for them, but at times I think I am relying on them to help me get around.”

Guide dog owner, mother, Dundee

Participants in several areas commented on their reduced confidence:

“I don’t enjoy going into town anymore... I’m stressed before getting there.”

Blind person, Lowestoft

“It is something you have to think about all the time because wherever you are going shared surfaces are coming up.”

Guide dog owner, Leamington

3.3.7 Priority issue

All focus groups were asked whether shared surface design was a priority issue in light of all the concerns raised when discussing the street environment. All the blind and partially-sighted participants and most of the participants with other disabilities considered that this was a very high priority:

“Towns will become no-go areas for us won’t they?”

Guide dog owner, Coventry

3.4 Suggestions to Help Improve Shared Surface Areas

Participants were asked for examples of good practice features that helped them move around in shared surface areas. They struggled to find such examples, but commented on what they would like.

The favoured suggestion from a majority of participants was to have clear separation of pedestrians from vehicles, or complete pedestrianisation including no cyclists.

Blind and partially-sighted people wanted to keep (or reinstate) a footway with a kerb, regular dropped kerbs for wheelchair users, and properly laid tactile paving. Where this is not possible, the following ideas were suggested:

- Signs for pedestrians and drivers and tactile information to clearly tell them when they are entering and leaving a shared surface area.
- Separate cycle lanes.
- Distinction between the carriageway/vehicle area and the footway/pedestrian only area. This should be tactile and contrasting in colour/tone. Several options were suggested:
 - i) Contrasting textured and coloured surfaces – these would have to be sufficient for blind and partially-sighted people to detect.
 - ii) Lines of tactile surfacing running down the footway edge. These must be more than a stride wide to ensure people cannot step straight over them. This was discussed in the pan-disability focus group in Newbury, and the wheelchair users did not see it as a problem because they would only come into contact with the lines when they needed to cross.
 - iii) Tactile surfacing to be ‘audible’ against a cane, and colour/tone contrasted.

- Different surface patterns which participants in some areas are able to use as guidance. This was mentioned by a participant in Leamington in reference to a market square in Stratford-upon-Avon, and by a participant in Ashford:

“Definition is there with cobbles – I can follow the different surfaces and stay on the pavement.”

Long cane user, Ashford

However, participants also felt the paving materials should be usable by all.

- Consistency in design and layout of tactile surfaces, which was stressed by several participants:

“There’s enough to think about getting from A to B without having to work out what system is in place.”

Blind person, Hull

- Yellow lines, which participants mentioned were used to add definition in some areas, often in response to a problem, and were liked by many.
- A hard carriageway surface, which makes vehicles sound louder.
- Access to the building line through a reduction in obstructions and careful location of street furniture.
- Colour contrast of street furniture.
- Well lit areas.
- Controlled crossings, with tactile paving, a rotating cone and audible bleeps.
- Guardrails at dangerous areas where people could walk into the carriageway (participants were fighting proposals to remove guardrails in Lowestoft and Leamington):

“There’s no point in bollards; they are too far apart. We need rails like there were before.”

Guide dog owner, Coventry

- Audible information and talking signs. REACT phase 1 is already launched and phase 2 is in progress in Newbury, and participants thought this was successful. In Hull participants said the council had promised REACT talking signs but these were not yet implemented.
- Having audible information where temporary works or advertising displays are placed on circulation routes, to assist with keeping people on the right track.
- Having street wardens to police the cyclists and skateboarders.
- Having lamp posts that can be counted, which assisted some participants with locating the bus stop.
- Education of traffic engineers as to the needs of blind and partially-sighted people, especially regarding controlled crossings.
- Awareness-raising of the requirements of disabled people, for instance in schools.

3.5 Consultation

In most of the focus groups some of the members had been involved in, or at least were aware of, local consultations. The exceptions to this were in Ashford and Dundee where none of the participants was aware of any consultations held by the local authority. After attending the focus group meeting, participants in Ashford said they would like to get more involved.

In Newport it was felt that the council was good at contacting the local access group, but this group only included one staff representative of blind and partially-sighted people, who could not attend every meeting. As a result of discussions at the focus group two people, a blind person and a partially-sighted person, intended to join the access group.

Participants in most focus groups had been involved in consultations, often as part of the local access group. However the general view was that they were told what was going to be done rather than asked what they wanted:

“Everything was ‘we are doing this, we are going to do that’. We argued against it – but they took no notice.”

Blind person, Hull

“I went to one meeting and they didn’t listen to us – they just didn’t listen. It is always statistics and more statistics.”

Guide dog owner, Hull

“We are just part of the tick box.”

Wheelchair user, Newbury

“It knocks your confidence when you go to meetings and get ignored.”

Guide dog owner, Coventry

Several participants commented that they felt that their council had preconceived ideas before consulting, and were reluctant to change some aspects of their plans:

“We spent many weeks discussing what would be best, and at every meeting we said we must have audible crossings, but the response we got was ‘We can’t do that, it’s not part of our project’.”

Blind person, Hull

“When it comes to comments, finance seems to dictate what actually happens.”

Blind person, Newbury

Most participants said that they would like to be consulted at the beginning of the design process, right the way through to implementation, and also to be involved in follow-up discussions about what works and what does not:

“The council is not proactive enough in bringing us together, we have a vast amount of knowledge round the table, people giving their free time.”

Wheelchair user, Newbury

One participant felt that the council in Hull did not understand the issues for blind and partially-sighted people, but found the issues for wheelchair users easier to understand.

In Lowestoft the groups representing blind and partially-sighted people were not consulted on phase one of the development, but had become involved at a later stage. In phase one the council had consulted the local disability group and had thought this was sufficient:

“There is a lot of ignorance regarding visual impairment. A lot of elderly people with sight loss still have a lot of useful sight. If they are taken as standard, the totally blind are forgotten.”

Guide dog owner, Lowestoft

In Coventry, several blind participants talked about the inaccessibility of consultations. Unless tactile plans or models are provided they have to rely on someone describing the plans. They noted this was improving and that officers were beginning to bring models to meetings. While participants in Coventry had been involved in consultations on the Shared Space proposal, they did not fully realise what was being proposed in terms of flush surfaces and removal of kerbs until it was in development.

In Leamington one participant had been very involved in consultations with the council, and he felt the council had been proactive in advertising proposals and meetings in the Talking Newspaper. Most participants said they had not previously been involved because they had not realised how much the proposals would affect them, but they intended to get involved now.

Lack of feedback on proposals was a key issue for most participants. Only one participant felt that he had received full feedback:

“I had full feedback on what they were planning to do, to the extent that they explained where they weren't able to take up my requests, but most of the explanation was just in terms of the funding that wasn't available – they didn't seem to be based on a practice or a policy.”

Guide dog owner, Leamington.

Most participants were concerned at the lack of feedback, and the lack of value placed on the time taken to put forward their views:

“I feel used when we don't get feedback.”

Wheelchair user, Coventry

4. Summary of Key Findings

The research findings show that in many instances blind and partially-sighted people are avoiding town centres with shared surface areas, to the detriment of their independence, freedom and quality of life. Research and monitoring of street schemes must take into account those people who no longer feel able to use the area.

4.1 Safety Issues: Accidents and Hazardous Situations

Participants in our focus groups reported a series of safety concerns with regard to shared surface areas in town centres, including:

- nearly stepping out into the path of a bus;
- being knocked over by cyclists;
- being intimidated by traffic passing close by; and
- being unable to cross carriageways safely.

These experiences were primarily a result of:

- lack of demarcation between 'safe' and 'unsafe' areas as the distinctions between 'footway' and 'carriageway' areas were not apparent;
- difficulty in locating, and the inability to use, crossing points, due to the removal of signal controlled crossings; and
- inappropriate street design, such as the use of materials and carriageway designs that negatively affect orientation.

4.2 Confidence and Independence

Our research shows that the problems and associated risks with using shared surfaces in town centres are undermining the confidence and independent mobility of blind and partially-sighted people.

4.3 Avoidance of Shared Surface Areas

The research findings show that blind and partially-sighted people are avoiding shared surface areas, and are often making lengthy detours in order to keep away from these areas.

4.4 Concerns of Other Disabled People

In addition to the concerns of blind and partially-sighted people our research has revealed that other disabled people, including people with hearing impairments and learning disabilities, may have concerns about shared surfaces. While wheelchair users and people with mobility impairments appreciated level surfaces, they also highlighted the need for safe areas away from traffic.

4.5 Inadequate Consultation

The research findings also indicate that there has been inadequate meaningful consultation between local authorities and blind and partially-sighted people and other disabled people. Although there are some examples of good practice with regard to consultation processes, people feel that their needs and opinions have been largely ignored by many local authorities, and blind and partially-sighted people believe that local authority officers do not have sufficient awareness of visual impairment issues.

Most participants were concerned at the lack of feedback, and the lack of value placed on the time taken to put forward their views.

In summary, the overwhelming majority of participants in the focus groups was opposed to the implementation of shared surface areas in town and city centres. Their concerns centred on increased risks to their safety, reduced confidence and independence, and lack of involvement in the consultation process. The result is the increasing exclusion of blind and partially-sighted people, and other vulnerable groups in society, from shared surface areas, or their subjection to extremely hazardous situations when using these areas.

5. Conclusions and Next Steps in the Research Project

Streets must be designed to promote the inclusion and safe, independent mobility of blind and partially-sighted people, and other disabled people.

Shared Space street design schemes are being implemented in town centres around the UK. Typically, these involve shared surfaces between pedestrians, bicycles and vehicles. Blind and partially-sighted people are finding it extremely difficult to move around safely and independently within these environments, when the traditional 'clues' used by guide dog owners and other blind people – such as footways, kerbs and tactile paving – are removed. Our research has shown that the implementation of shared surface design is putting blind and partially-sighted people at risk.

The key issues are:

- Safety
- Reduced confidence and independence
- Avoidance of town centres
- Inadequate consultation.

Based on the findings of the focus groups, The Guide Dogs for the Blind Association will campaign for the thorough testing and evaluation of experimental street designs, prior to implementation. The key message is that the safety and independence of blind and partially-sighted people, and other disabled people, must not be put at risk.

At the same time, Guide Dogs will campaign for local authorities to carry out meaningful consultation with disabled people, including blind and partially-sighted people, and ensure their involvement at every stage from conception and design to implementation and monitoring. Consultation processes which rely on notices on site and in local newspapers are not accessible to people with visual impairment. Instead, local authorities should use talking newspapers, local radio and direct contact with blind and partially-sighted people.

Guide Dogs will also be raising awareness of the Royal Town Planning Institute's Planning Aid scheme. Planning Aid provides free, independent and professional town planning advice and support to communities and individuals who cannot afford to pay planning consultancy fees. It complements the work of local planning authorities, but is wholly independent of them. Planning Aid aims to engage communities positively in the planning process to help them manage changes to their neighbourhood areas.

Guide Dogs is commencing a programme to develop and test design features for areas wishing to follow the Shared Space approach, while meeting the requirements of blind and partially-sighted people and people with other disabilities. Safety issues will be of paramount importance, as will consistency in design features.

Appendix 1

The Shared Space Concept

Ben Hamilton-Baillie

'Shared Space' is a relatively new term, used to describe an emerging approach to urban design, traffic engineering and road safety in Europe and, increasingly, in North America. It was coined in 2003 following a research project that identified a common thread in the approach of a number of countries to how to reduce the adverse impacts of traffic in towns. The concept has developed further in Denmark, Northern Holland, Sweden and Northern Spain than elsewhere in Europe, although the French programme 'Ville plus sûre' adopts many of the key principles and is evident in countless towns and villages across France. Its adoption in the UK is very recent, and there are, to date, very few examples on the ground of projects that consciously define themselves as 'Shared Space'.

However, Shared Space could also be seen as the default mode for significant areas of the public realm. It was the *status quo ante* for most streets and public spaces before the introduction of segregation during the 20th century. Visit any Italian hill town, such as Siena, or most smaller Mediterranean settlements, and Shared Space will be evident in any traditional streetscapes where modern traffic engineering has yet to have an impact. Even today in the UK, almost all car parks, courtyards, mews developments, market places, village squares, campsites and country lanes involve the informal sharing of space for different uses and by different modes of movement. From this perspective, Shared Space is nothing new.

At the heart of Shared Space is the concept of integration. This contrasts with the principle of segregation, the idea of separating different functions and different users within the urban landscape. The idea of segregation can be traced back to the urban visions of Le Corbusier in the 1930s, and was formalised into Government policy following the Buchanan Report – 'Traffic in Towns', published in 1963. Pedestrianised precincts, underpasses, over-bridges, barriers and controlled crossings are all manifestations of the principle of segregation, which continues to underpin most conventional traffic engineering schemes in the UK.

Shared Space remains, for most people in the UK, a hypothetical concept, full of uncertainties and unpredictable outcomes. It is often confused with other concepts, such as pedestrian zones, shared surfaces, traffic calming, 'Home Zones' and the like. To date, most schemes are at an early stage of design. Established precedents exist in a few locations, where conventional traffic engineering solutions have been replaced by simpler, more integrated, solutions.

The lack of adequate and appropriate solutions to current circumstances is reflected in growing public dissatisfaction with the *status quo*. Numerous public agencies and Government advisory bodies draw attention to the problems associated with an increasingly cluttered and chaotic public realm. Shared Space represents the most significant new philosophy to challenge the principle of segregation.

Shared Space is not, ultimately, defined by the design or configuration of the built environment. Design and detailing are important, but only as a catalyst to changing the way in which people interact within the public realm. At such an early stage in its development, there is a daunting learning curve ahead of all those involved in the design, management and use of our streets and public spaces. Moving away from established practice requires determination, careful thought and observation, and the courage to explore and refine new solutions. The input of blind and partially-sighted people into this process at this early stage will be vital as a new philosophy for the design of the public realm evolves.

Ben Hamilton-Baillie

Hamilton-Baillie Associates (Transport, traffic and urban design consultancy)

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Appendix 2

Guide Dog and Long Cane Mobility – an Introduction

The Royal National Institute of the Blind statistics indicate that there are about two million people in the UK who define themselves as having a sight problem or seeing difficulty; this can range from being unable to see a friend across the street or read newsprint even with the aid of their glasses, to being registered as blind. Many people with sight problems travel independently using either their remaining vision and/or a mobility aid (a cane or a guide dog).

Cane mobility

It is estimated that there are approximately 140,000 people in the UK who use a white cane. There are different types of white canes: a symbol cane, to indicate to other people that the holder has a sight problem; a guide cane, which is held diagonally across the body, and affords some protection against obstacles; and a long cane, which is held out in front and moved from side to side to find and locate objectives such as landmarks and clues, and to identify obstacles in a person's path.

People use a range of landmarks (fixed objects in the environment) and clues (which can help but may not always be there) to orientate themselves in the environment and navigate around it. These landmarks and clues could be tactile (felt by the feet or the cane), auditory, visual or olfactory. For example:

- Tactile – kerbs, building lines, slopes/gradients, tactile paving at crossings, surface texture under foot.
- Auditory – traffic, 'sound shadows' (of bus stops etc), controlled crossings, sounds of shops (automatic doors, music etc), REACT talking sign systems.
- Visual – contrast between the grass and carriageway, yellow and white lines on the carriageway, contrasting tactile paving, colours of shop fronts, fixation points (skyline).
- Olfactory – smell of the florist, fish and chip shop, etc.

The level of vision (if any) and the person's individual abilities will determine which landmarks and clues they use.

As an example, the description of a route for a totally blind long cane user may include some of the following details:

- come out of the house and turn right;
- follow the footway, using the grass edge as a guide to keep straight;
- when you get to the down kerb, indent to the right to find the tactile paving and cross the carriageway;
- on the up kerb turn left and when you feel the slope down, stop, listen for traffic and cross the car park entrance;
- listen for the sound shadow of the bus stop, and the bleeping pelican crossing then head left to find the tactile paving and the control box, then cross over the pelican crossing;
- continue the straight line and listen for the record shop; the fish and chip shop is twenty paces further on, just past a metal grid which you will feel with the cane – you should smell it!

Role of the guide dog

The Guide Dogs for the Blind Association currently supports about 5,000 guide dog partnerships in the UK. The role of the guide dog is to guide its visually-impaired owner in a 'straight line', unless directed otherwise, avoiding any obstacles in the way. The owner gives encouragement and commands and informs the dog of the direction to go in. The guide dog is trained to stop at steps and kerbs, find doors, carriageway crossings and places that are visited frequently. The guide dog will lead its owner across the carriageway but it is up to the owner to determine where and when to cross safely.

The guide dog can be made familiar with locating objectives (e.g. the bus stop or shop) through the help of a sighted person, and being given positive rewards when it finds it on future occasions. Over a period of time the guide dog will learn the common routes that the owner takes. However, the owner needs to be aware of their environment to assist the dog and inform it which way to go. Such awareness includes the use of environmental clues such as sounds and smells and landmarks such as kerb edges, ends of building lines, enclosed areas etc.

Orientation methods used by a long cane user:

- Following the inner shore line (shops, garden frontages etc) using the cane (tactile).
- Following the outer shore line (commonly the kerb) using the cane (tactile).
- Using the kerb edge to locate carriageway junctions.
- Using the kerb edge to orientate/maintain the straight line.
- Using tactile paving to orientate safe/safer carriageway crossing points.
- Using building line 'ends' to provide clues to the next carriageway.
- Using traffic flow to indicate the straight line of travel.
- Using other sound clues as well as smell and auditory information.

Orientation methods used by a guide dog owner:

- Using the approach and location of the kerb edge to plan routes – a route would involve planning from kerb to kerb until required to turn (i.e. 4th down kerb turn right; 2nd up kerb turn left; 25 paces on right is the supermarket).
- Using the location of the kerb edge to orientate/check the straight line of travel.
- Using sound clues ('sound shadows') to aid the location of an objective.
- Using other sound clues to aid orientation i.e. travel of traffic.
- Use of tactile paving to indicate safe/safer crossing points.
- Following the behaviour of the dog to recognise certain locations in the environment.

Both mobility aids require the blind or partially-sighted traveller to stay orientated within the immediate environment in order to remain safe and to achieve desired objectives. If the foundations of orientation techniques are removed then safety is compromised.

Appendix 3

Description of Focus Group Locations

The locations chosen for the focus groups were based on the following criteria:

- To include the widest geographic spread possible;
- To cover a range of cities and smaller towns;
- To focus on areas identified as having some shared surfaces, initially through the literature review, reports from Guide Dogs District Teams and contacts from residents, followed by site visits.

The locations selected display a range of shared surface use, including pedestrianised areas with limited shared surfaces to more substantial shared surface implementation.

The following brief descriptions are not intended to be comprehensive assessments of the areas, but merely to provide background to the reports of the focus groups. It is not intended to indicate that the streetscape in these areas is any better or worse than in other UK cities and towns.

Ashford, Kent

The town centre has a pedestrian zone with vehicle access during the day restricted to permit holders. Vehicles can access the area in the evening. Cyclists use the pedestrian zone.

Most of the area is a level surface with no kerbs. There is little demarcation between the footway and the carriageway. In some parts of the area a metal grid runs along the footway; in others there is a drainage gully. There is some visual contrast between the carriageway and footway in some parts, but this is not consistent throughout the town.

The key concerns raised by participants were the presence of cyclists using the area and the access by vehicles in the evenings.

There is a proposal for redevelopment in Ashford which is intended to include shared surfaces.

Coventry, West Midlands

The shared surface area is located near to a pedestrian shopping precinct and is bordered by the triangle of Pool Meadow bus station, Sainsbury's store, and Millennium Place.

Buses use this area to access the bus station. Participants reported regular and frequent buses. The surface is level throughout the area. There is some visual demarcation between the pedestrian area and the carriageway but this is not sufficient for blind and partially-sighted people. Silver bollards and planters have been placed along the pedestrian edge.

The 'road' from Millennium Place to Sainsbury's (the main area of concern for participants) is all one level and has no controlled crossing.

There is a pelican controlled crossing between the bus station and Sainsbury's store, but blind and partially-sighted participants reported difficulties in locating it as there is only a small amount of tactile paving.

Dundee, Scotland

Focus group participants identified two shared surface areas in the city centre. Much of the city centre is pedestrianised. Previously the city centre had two pedestrianised areas separated by a traditional carriageway with restricted access for buses and service vehicles. The carriageway had footways and kerbs and a controlled crossing point. This changed to a shared surface area several years ago, when kerbs and the controlled crossing were removed.

The larger area of shared surface is within the main shopping area encompassing Commercial Street and High Street/Murraygate. This is a 'pedestrian zone' but there is access for buses at any time, taxis in the evenings and all day Sunday, and blue badge holders Monday to Saturday 4pm to 11am and all day Sunday. Delivery vehicles also use the area.

The whole of this area is at one level. There is some visual contrast between the footway area and carriageway but this is not consistent or continuous.

The second shared surface area is Bank Street/Reform Street, again adjacent to a pedestrian zone and open to one-way traffic. The junction between these two carriageways has flat rounded kerbs but double yellow lines help distinguish the edge for those with some sight.

Hull, East Yorkshire

Participants identified an area of shared surface in Newland Avenue (HU5 postcode area – not city centre). Some participants were also aware of a 'Home Zone' in Albany Street, Kingston Upon Hull.

Newland Avenue is described as a 'road safety demonstration project, opened October 2005'. Along the main carriageway there is a footway with a kerb. Some of the side roads leading off the main carriageway have extended raised traffic tables with tactile paving which does not extend the full width of the 'flush surface'.

At regular intervals along Newland Avenue there are uncontrolled crossing points. Participants' main concern was the lack of controlled pedestrian crossings with audible bleeper signals.

Leamington Spa, Warwickshire

Participants identified a shared surface area at the approach to the pedestrianised shopping parade in Leamington. This area has a level surface with no delineated footway. The shared surface is a small area which vehicles can access at the approach to the pedestrianised area. Participants noted that on leaving the pedestrian shopping parade through the shared surface area there is no detectable delineation from the main carriageway.

Most participants avoid this shared surface area even though it involves a longer journey.

In addition, participants mentioned areas where there was no demarcation between the footway and carriageway and where raised tables at street entrances made the footway flush with the carriageway, and noted there was insufficient tactile paving.

Yellow lines have been used to provide a visual contrast at the 'kerb edge' in some parts of the town.

London

There are several areas of London with aspects of shared surfaces but participants found it more difficult to identify a shared surface area here than in other focus groups. One that was familiar to some of the participants was at Seven Dials, Covent Garden.

Shared surfaces have been present here for several years. Some narrow side streets have no footways or kerbs but have wooden bollards separating carriageway from footway. There are zebra crossings but some have insufficient tactile paving at the dropped kerb. A strip of white paint in front of the buff tactile paving provides extra visual contrast.

At Seven Dials itself (where seven streets all lead into a circular area) the carriageways are mostly cobbled and footways are flagged. The crossing points at each of the seven streets are flush with little or no tactile paving.

Lowestoft, Suffolk

Participants identified a shared surface area in the centre of the main shopping area known as the 'Waveney Sunrise Scheme'. There is some visual contrast in the main shared area where the carriageway is dark grey, and footway is a lighter shade.

The railway station is at the southern end of the precinct and to reach it pedestrians have to cross Suffolk Road. Heavy traffic uses this narrow carriageway (including lorries) and participants were concerned that there are no barriers here and very little tactile paving. We were informed that in September 2006 this carriageway is intended to become closed to traffic.

One of the key concerns raised by participants was the difficulty they have locating and using the uncontrolled pedestrian crossings since the controlled pelican crossings were removed.

Further redevelopment involving shared surfaces is proposed in Lowestoft. Several participants were involved in consultations on this in addition to raising concerns about the scheme already implemented.

Newbury, Berkshire

Shared surfaces have been introduced in the main high street area. The footway and kerb have been removed and there is a level surface with a granite flush kerb. Most of this area is described as 'pedestrianised' between 10.00 am and 6.00 pm, but buses can access it throughout the day. Participants expressed particular concern at the removal of a controlled crossing, replaced with an uncontrolled crossing.

The carriageway is narrowed at either end of Northbrook Street and a 20mph speed limit operates. Street furniture and 'clutter' has been reduced. The lampposts have been relocated closer to the building line as an interim measure and plans are in place to install them on buildings.

The REACT talking sign system has been introduced, which participants welcomed. REACT phase 1 is already launched, and phase 2 is in progress, and participants thought this was useful.

Newport, South Wales

Most of the city centre is a 'pedestrianised area' with restricted vehicle access. A bus route runs through one part of it. This was highlighted as a concern by focus group participants.

The 'carriageway' running through the area is marked by bollards and, in some parts, by sloping edges. The bollards are black or dark green, and some have a gold band around the top. There is some visual contrast between the carriageway and pedestrian areas but this is not consistent throughout.

In the area where buses have access, some participants with no sight, or very little residual vision, found it difficult to distinguish between the carriageway and pedestrian area as there is no tactile difference and the bollards are placed far enough apart to walk between. Participants with some sight were able to distinguish the carriageway.

Participants described the carriageway as 'meandering'. Guide dog owners found it difficult to follow this curved carriageway as guide dogs are taught to walk in a straight line.

Notes

To obtain this report in alternative formats (Braille, large print, audio or electronic format), please contact Gill Kenyon at Guide Dogs' head office

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