



Lands Improvement



Delivering people friendly streets

How developers and design teams can all take small steps forward to delivering people friendly streets

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Where we are now

The difference in the liveability of a place between one where the road network is designed to facilitate ease and speed of car movement and one where people are put first is enormous. If we get the streets wrong, then all other placemaking aspirations will be working at a huge handicap.

Whilst design guidance exists which should in theory enable the delivery of people friendly streets, the reality is very different. There are numerous reasons for this, but some of these blockers include:

- Use of outdated design standards / no flexibility.
- Set up and outlook of local authorities:
 - Lack of resource – understandably it is often easiest just to follow existing standards and tick them off rather than explore better.
 - Planning team v adoptions team conflicts.
 - Outsourced urban design teams.
 - Siloed approach to decisions / lack of integration.
 - Skewed assessments of risk v reward / accountability v incentives.
- Perceived costs – maintenance / time.
- Fear of change / unknown.
- A one size fits all approach.
- Lack of public transport / integrating beyond the red line.
- Car culture / public awareness.
- Skills gap.

Recognising these blockers is essential, but just because they exist, does not mean they cannot be overcome or that better solutions can't be delivered.

The below sets out ideas, from strategic to tactical, that could help developers and their teams on their journey to delivering better places.

This note summarises the findings of a private roundtable who set out to answer how we can better deliver people-friendly streets (and places) in the immediate future **within** the existing policy environment.



Participants:

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Project vision

- Agree your vision from the start, working alongside all key stakeholders.
- Align your project to the strategic outcomes of the council in its Local Plan and Local Transport Plan. Has it declared a climate emergency? Does it have emissions targets? Health targets? Lock these outcomes into the development's vision.
- On larger schemes hold a 'Visioning Workshop' with the local authority leadership team, ideally the chief executive, senior councillors, planners and senior highways director. Take the same group on visits to similar vision-led developments. There is no substitute for feeling and experiencing the possible.
- This vision should set key outcomes for the development (measures of success).
- Ensure that the vision is formally 'adopted'.

Highways vision

- The holistic project vision will switch the emphasis within street design (and Highways teams) to delivering the project vision.
- Agree with Highways that you are using a vision-led approach, either decide and provide or vision and validate.
- Jointly desired Highways outcomes can flow from this vision and enable a move from bottom up tick the box design.
- On larger sites, a design code for streets could be produced and agreed from the outset, setting the foundation for all future applications and delivery.

Motivations

Understand the Highways team's key motivations. Is maintenance cost number one? Adherence to local standards? Bad experiences? Time and resource? React, strategise and design accordingly.

Early and honest engagement with officers is key.

Make it easy for officers:

- Provide visualisations, for example street design A v street design B with holistic and objective pros and cons.
- Bring street widths to life - overlay with examples of known national highway width.
- Present clear evidence.

Undertake **design workshops** with officers - try to co-design - rather than back and forth.

Conduct **Movement models**, not expensive traffic models.

Join the dots - health, wellbeing, climate, biodiversity, community cohesion etc.

Call a **Design Review Panel** if needed.

Be **Persistent!**

Even if you were unable to secure an agreed vision, or if the project is already underway without one, there are still many things that can be done. However, it will be necessary to make individual arguments for each component of people friendly places using third party evidence and guides.

The following sets out a number of ideas that will have a beneficial impact. Not all will be possible, but including some of these will nudge things in the right direction, and that is definitely better than not doing it.

Highways Design

The below interventions are broadly in order of impact. We would suggest assessing these (and other interventions) for likelihood of succeeding (and effort and time involved) to help pinpoint priority areas:

1. Adopt 20mph for all streets - design for this.
2. Design connected grids, not a spine and cul-de-sac approach.
3. Design in Copenhagen crossings (easy to retrofit to planning at any stage).
4. Explore downgrading the streets as much as possible. Do you really need a primary street or spine road?
5. Create an internal traffic model, which includes walking and cycling and not just vehicle movements and use for decision making.
6. Work with transport consultants to allow tracking on both sides of the street.
7. Parking:
 - Nudge parking quantum down slightly (e.g. 2.5 to 1.9).
 - Agree as much unallocated parking as possible to provide flexibility in house types and to optimise frontages.
 - Use peripheral parking in concentrated clusters (car barns/courtyards) and tight mews parking.
 - Try to avoid perpendicular in-curtilage parking. Use on street parallel if needs must and end on end parking at the side of semi-detached homes.
8. Challenge visibility splays.
9. Use variable street widths in street design.
10. Don't use road markings.

Quick (ish) wins for creating people friendly streets

11. Use granite banding in the centre of asphalt or on the edges in key areas.
12. Use Dutch entrance kerbs to enable direct access over level cycle paths and pavements.
13. Use soft, narrow edge lanes, instead of multiple private drives.
14. Think about simplicity and cost reduction, for example:
 - Thinking carefully about cost / benefits of materials, and impact on maintenance.
 - Provide research where necessary to help ease understandable reticence.
 - Utilising cross sections with a single sloping highway that drains into a swale on one side only.
15. Try to enable direct access to drives, avoiding a secondary road.
16. If you must have large radii, design them into a Copenhagen crossing so the impact is limited.
17. Don't do a road safety audit.
18. Adoption from kerb to kerb with commuted sums for enhanced materials in pedestrian environment.

Other design and delivery factors

It's not just the highways design that will create people friendly streets. If there is not a mix of uses or meaningful destinations, then the benefit of good street design is drastically reduced:

- Incorporate an interesting, active playful environment throughout. Deliver active places, meeting spaces, communing spaces and resting places.
- Co-locate shops, commercial businesses and other amenity together and ideally near the school.
- Don't overlook the role of employment in this. Look at Poundbury's businesses and ask yourself what would work for me.
- Involve a car club – able to replace 20 private spaces with one car club space.
- Think about public transport from the start – where are the existing services, how to best extend?
- Make the most of your S106 contributions:
 - Chase on the delivery of S106 projects post agreement.
 - Link the contributions to a joint transport review group (developer and local authority) who have authority to spend monies as best needed.
 - Rather than an upfront cash payment which gets lost in the system, are there other innovative structures that could be employed?

Summary

We all agree that the big wins lie in policy change. However, there are huge differences that can be made within the existing constraints through a combination of strategising, collaboration, prioritisation, compromise, creativity and persistence.

We recognise that developers and designers need practical assistance to help with all of the above. Toolkits are sorely needed to provide assistance for selling the case and persuading others of the benefits, and shouldn't be recreated from scratch on a project by project basis. The industry needs to work together to make all our places people focused.

Your armoury

In your armoury to advocate for people-friendly streets:

- Active Travel England
 - Manual for Streets
 - Streets for a Healthy Life - Homes England
 - Transport Review Groups
 - COMOUK car club [research](#)
 - The story of Poundbury and Derwenthorpe urban extensions
 - The NPPF paragraph 131 calling for tree lined streets
 - The National Model Design Code and associated area-wide design codes
 - Surrey's new [Healthy Streets](#) design code
 - Sport England's [Active Design guidance](#)
- References to vision-led (vision and validate) transport planning in [Decarbonising Transport](#) (p158), National Highways '[planning for the future Oct 2023](#) p10' and the Strategic Road Network Circular 02/2013 update.



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