

Living Streets

Policy Briefing 01/09

Naked Streets



Living Streets is the national charity that stands up for pedestrians. With our supporters we work to create safe, attractive and enjoyable streets, where people want to walk.

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Background and Summary

Living Streets is the national charity that stands up for pedestrians. With our supporters we work to create safe, attractive and enjoyable streets, where people want to walk.

The naked streets concept, also known as “shared space”, is a very promising approach to both pedestrian safety and improving the vitality of an area. Naked street schemes place importance on how drivers make decisions about their behaviour, recognising the importance of how they perceive their surroundings. It’s a significant departure from attempts to control behaviour through interventions like road humps, or engineering pedestrians out of our streetscape through subways or guardrail.

Although the UK has a good road safety record for people in cars, when it comes to pedestrians the picture is less positive. Compared to other European countries our record is poor and, despite progress in recent years, children on foot are particularly vulnerable. The unacceptable number of pedestrians being killed or seriously injured on our streets needs to be taken as a wake up call. Rather than being satisfied by the status quo, we must look for improvements to the way we design and manage our streets. We need to examine ways to encourage and enable more people to make walking their natural choice for short journeys, and to tackle the unacceptable number of pedestrians killed or seriously injured on our streets.

We believe that schemes which use naked streets principles have great potential to make our streets safer and more people-friendly, by changing the behaviour of all road users for the better. However these schemes must be well designed and implemented, and involve thorough consultation with local interest groups as well as ongoing monitoring and evaluation of impact to ensure that the scheme brings positive results. Improving safety and ensuring accessibility must be at the heart of schemes.

This policy paper sets out Living Streets’ position on naked streets, acting in our role as the national charity that stands up for pedestrians. We explain the concepts in the **glossary** in part 2, set out our best practice ideas for implementing naked streets schemes in part 3, and finally set out our **recommendations** in part 4. As with all issues concerning our streets, we expect to develop policy further in this area as experience is gained and new projects are tested.

Living Streets has been working for the past 80 years to make our streets safer for those on foot, and to make the physical environment support and encourage walking. This paper is based on those same values, embracing new ideas to create safe, attractive and enjoyable streets across the UK.

Introduction: towards sharing

Raised pavements for pedestrians, separated from the carriageway by kerbs, have existed since before Roman times, but only became widespread in our towns and cities in the 19th century. They were a useful means to avoid the mud on the main carriageway, but the rise in volume of other forms of traffic in subsequent years soon changed the pavement's role from "muck avoidance" to more of a "safe haven" from traffic. This altered purpose was enshrined in law in the 1835 Highways Act, which created an offence if anybody should:

"wilfully ride upon any footpath or causeway by the side of any road made or set apart for the use or accommodation of foot-passengers, or shall wilfully lead or drive any carriage of any description upon any such footpath or causeway."¹

As motor traffic increased in both speed and volume in the 20th century, the physical separation of pedestrians and motor cars became more commonplace, in an effort to stem the rising tide of casualties. Traffic lights, guardrail, staggered crossings, a proliferation of road signs scattered over the pavement: all measures put in place with pedestrian safety in mind, but all in practice making the car the undisputed king of the road. Not only does this separation inconvenience pedestrians, but it also conditions drivers to forget about their surroundings, leaving themselves unprepared for the unanticipated.

Nevertheless, in most cases pedestrians still have every right to use any part of the carriageway – we (for we are all pedestrians) have simply been designed out of our neighbourhoods by the car-centric planning policies of the twentieth century. In many cases, of course, the "traditional" pavement and carriageway are entirely appropriate as they are. But there are situations where blurring this divide can bring both road safety benefits and deliver a streetscape that prioritises pedestrians. This concept is known as **shared space** or a **naked street**.

¹ Section 72 of Highways Act 1835

Glossary

There is potential for confusion around the phrases used in describing these concepts. This glossary provides some helpful definitions.

Naked Streets, or Shared Space

A street or public space where vehicle movement and other activities are combined through informal social protocols, negotiation and design solutions rather than through formal regulations and controls

The concept can have many different incarnations, but the underlying principles are aimed at balancing the need for traffic movement and social uses of public spaces. A key principle is that excessive road regulations ('prescriptions' below) cause motorists to be less considerate to other road users. One of shared space's most famous pioneers, the late Hans Monderman, explained:

"We're losing our capacity for socially responsible behaviour ...the greater the number of prescriptions, the more people's sense of personal responsibility dwindles.²

When these prescriptions are reduced, drivers are compelled to pay far more attention to their surroundings. They look out for pedestrians and cyclists, and negotiate their chosen route by interaction rather than relying on the tunnel vision that traffic lights, road signs and markings, and guard railing can all induce. It sounds radical, but one of its chief benefits is to reduce overall danger on our streets, by making users more aware of the risks and therefore more responsible to each others' needs. In fact, following a redesign of Kensington High Street in London, inspired by naked street ideas of reduced street clutter and improved sightlines, overall casualties were reduced by 47 per cent – with a 63 % reduction in pedestrian casualties³.

Shared Surface

An undefined area of paving used for a number of different activities including the movement and parking of vehicles. Sometimes employed as one component in the creation of a naked street.

Use of shared surfaces is one specific technique *sometimes* used in naked street schemes:

"In a street with a shared surface, the (kerb) demarcation is absent and pedestrians and vehicles share the same surface... in the absence of a formal carriageway, the intention is that motorists entering the area will tend to drive more cautiously and negotiate the right of way with pedestrians on a more conciliatory level."⁴

² From an interview with Der Spiegel's Matthias Schulz, 16th November 2006

³ <http://www.rudi.net/pages/10083>

⁴ Manual for Streets, DFT 2007

In our daily lives, most of us will have already experienced shared surfaces. From supermarket car parks to traditional mews streets, from post-war cul-de-sacs to semi-pedestrianised shopping streets, the idea of different users sharing the same surface is by no means new. Smaller examples of shared surfaces are also becoming more prevalent. For example, wide crossings over a road where a “raised table” allows pedestrians to cross from one side to the other at the same level as the pavement; this simultaneously acts as a traffic cushion.

It is important to emphasise that naked street principles do not necessarily involve shared surfaces, and many successful naked street schemes do not employ shared surfaces. A ‘Home Zone’ may have traditional pavements and carriageway, with the two separated by a kerb, but is still inspired by the naked street philosophy of encouraging cars to behave as guests in pedestrian space. Likewise, the remodelling of Kensington High Street did not involve removing the kerbs and traffic signals. Instead it focused on removing guardrail and other street clutter, enabling pedestrians to cross the street wherever they like. This changed relationship between street users epitomises the key qualities of naked streets.

Shared Use

An unsegregated route used by cyclists, pedestrians and wheelchair users

Whilst shared use routes do involve different types of users on the same surface, they differ from the wider concept of shared space in two important respects:

- Firstly, motor vehicles are not involved. On shared use paths pedestrians and wheelchair and mobility scooter users, are sharing that space only with cyclists.
- Secondly, **shared use** is about movement: that is, getting from A to B along defined linear routes. This is in contrast to **shared space**, which is generally implemented in specific ‘destinations’ – for example on high streets, public squares, or important town centre crossroads.

A major example of a shared use route is the Bristol to Bath Railway Path – and indeed much of the National Cycle Network. However, shared use can be found on a smaller scale in virtually every local authority throughout the UK.

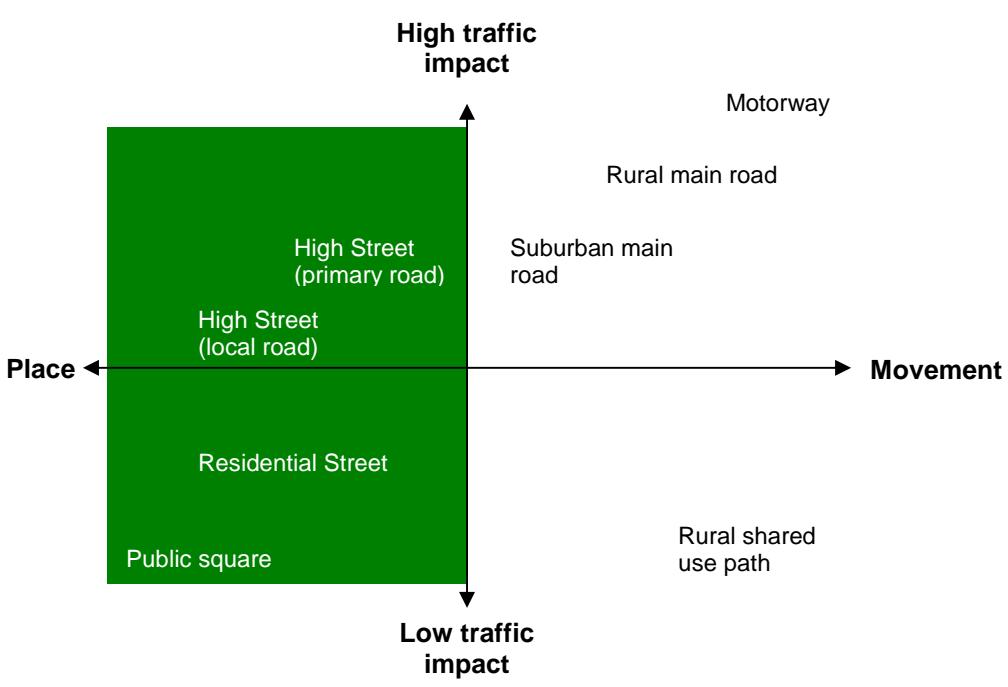
Shared use is not the focus of this paper. For more information about shared facilities for pedestrians and cyclists, please visit our website.

Implementing naked streets

“Movement and Place”

The naked streets approach is not a specific set of designs, but an underlying set of principles. Depending on the context, different responses will be appropriate. However it is essential that urban planners and transport engineers work together closely, to ensure that traffic management concerns *never* overwhelm the need for our streets and public spaces to be primarily **places for people**. A useful starting point is to establish where the location lies on a movement/place matrix.

Section 2.4 of the 2007 *Manual for Streets* (MfS), Government guidance for new streets and public spaces, explains the movement/place matrix. High streets, for example, typically have a medium to high place function⁵, with a low need to prioritise movement as a function. In this diagram, we have added a variable for the impact traffic has on an area – whether due to its speed or volume.



Movement / place / traffic impact matrix

For each site considered for a new scheme, we would recommend that designers pinpoint where it most properly sits on the diagram. For example, motorways have both high traffic and movement functions, and accordingly are designed with the safe and swift movement of vehicles in mind. On the other hand a public square might have no traffic but a high place function, and requires a wholly different design approach to that of a motorway. High streets clearly fall in the middle of this spectrum. They may have a movement function, and in many cases a high volume of motor traffic, but they are also destinations in themselves: this should be reflected in their design.

⁵ Chapter 2 of Manual for Streets, Dept. for Transport 2007

Living Streets believes that all locations with a higher than medium place rating (the green shaded area in the diagram) should be as accessible and welcoming to pedestrians as possible – i.e. some form of naked street or pedestrianisation should be seriously considered. In other locations we expect the provision for pedestrians to be appropriate to the situation. Pavements on suburban main roads should be wide, clutter-free, and smooth, with dropped kerbs and appropriate tactile paving at points where pedestrians are likely to cross.

Guardrails, street clutter and staggered crossing points have absolutely no place on residential and shopping streets. Designers should establish where pedestrian desire lines lie, and plan spaces to ensure that crossings follow the most convenient and direct routes possible. In situations where guardrail has become prevalent, we instead encourage an approach to safety based on reducing speeds rather than inconveniencing pedestrians. With this in mind we are pleased to see the publication of Local Transport Note 1/08, *Traffic Management and Streetscape*, which provides excellent “de-cluttering” advice to planners and traffic engineers.

Consultation

Consultation with the local community is essential, right from the beginning of the process. Rather than present the public with a list of options, designers should engage with the people that walk the neighbourhood daily and discover what they *really* want their streets to be like. Living Streets can facilitate such work via our *Community Street Audits*. The radical transformation of the Heathway in Dagenham, East London, (pictured) is just one example of how a Living Streets Community Street Audit inspired measures to open up a previously underperforming high street for all to enjoy.



Dagenham Heathway redesigned using naked streets principles

It is also important to consult with groups representing older people, children, and those with disabilities, as well as having an awareness of differences due to gender, social class or ethnicity. Often compromises can be reached through open discussion. However a diversity of needs means that sometimes it is difficult to meet the wishes of all concerned. For example while tactile paving and raised kerbs are useful to those

with visual impairments, they can cause problems for wheelchair users and people who have difficulty walking.⁶ Within this context, public bodies will also need to fulfil their duties to promote gender, race and disability equality, particularly their duties under the Disability Discrimination Act. Guidance such as *Inclusive Mobility* or the work of organisations like the Women's Design Service or access consultants can help both with consulting different groups and designing for different needs.

Naked street environments create both reduced traffic speeds and greater awareness of drivers, at the same time as creating a more pedestrian-friendly and pleasant area for the vast majority of users. However, there is a real need for evaluation and research into what makes a successful naked street scheme, and how different groups can benefit from such schemes.

⁶ Research has recently been completed on surfaces and alternatives to kerbs and their use by disabled people at University College London (PAMELA)

Living Streets recommendations

Policy framework

We welcomed the Manual for Streets upon its publication in 2007. However, it currently focuses only on “lightly trafficked residential streets” – and is aimed more at new developments than existing streets. There is huge potential for expanding its remit: residents of traffic-heavy streets deserve to enjoy the same good practice as those in new, quieter developments. **Manual for Streets should be promoted as a design tool for all streets, and local councils should consider the redesign of existing streets using these principles.**

A default urban speed limit of 20 mph should be implemented throughout England, Scotland and Wales, with exceptions for important arterial roads only. This would greatly reduce pedestrian and cyclist casualties and also reinforce the idea that our streets are for *people*, not just traffic. Having 20 mph as a starting point for urban design will also make it easier to consider new naked street schemes: traffic moving at more civilised speeds can be integrated more easily with other road users.

A shared surface can be a signifier to drivers about the kind of place through which they are driving, and can provide an aesthetically pleasing design solution. However, Living Streets recognises that shared surfaces can lead to some people, particularly blind and visually impaired people, feeling unsure about their safety and feeling that some streets are inaccessible. In our view further research is required to evaluate what would be appropriate in terms of ensuring everyone feels safe in such schemes, and whether this can be achieved at all. **We therefore call for Government investment in further research on the subject.**

There are already existing schemes involving a shared surface, as set out in the glossary. There are also different levels of shared surface, from a purely uniform surface with no demarcation, to those with small steps and demarcation between road and pavement providing tactile clues. We need to understand better what works for different users and whether the needs of all users can be adequately addressed in the implementation of shared surface schemes. We call on designers to exercise caution in making proposals to implement purely uniform shared surfaces when considering naked street schemes, unless they have the explicit support of the local community and groups representing those with disabilities. Local Authorities should also ensure that they comply with disability and equality legislation and that streets are designed and engineered with accessibility in mind.

Many counter-arguments to naked street ideas focus on the perceived dangers of blurring the distinction between space for motor traffic and other road users. We believe that this is partly a cultural matter: the UK’s current civil liability framework disproportionately favours the motorist in the event of a collision with a pedestrian. Most other European countries have an insurance liability methodology wherein the burden of proof falls on the driver to prove that s/he is NOT liable in the event of a collision with a vulnerable road user. Therefore in order to encourage drivers to pay far more attention to the behaviour of pedestrians – and help to create confidence in the safety of naked streets – **driver liability should be adopted in the UK.**

Naked streets design

We cannot, and should not, be too prescriptive, because each individual location will need to be assessed according to the local characteristics. However, here we set out some general aims that schemes should meet.

There are areas where the volume of pedestrians is so great that full **pedestrianisation**⁷ is preferable to a naked street, which may also bring additional economic benefits to local businesses. Many of our high streets and public squares fall into this category. In all cases, the pedestrian provision should reflect demand, whether through widened pavements or other roadspace reallocation.

Thorough **consultation** with local people prior to the scheme's implementation is essential, in order to ensure that all interest groups have a chance to share any concerns. We also suggest that the same groups are invited back to **evaluate** the scheme once it is up and running. Ongoing monitoring of pedestrians' experiences should ensure that any teething problems can quickly be identified and remedied.

Adequate tactile clues for visually impaired people. Naked street schemes can bring many benefits to pedestrians, but some visually impaired people can be affected. Again, consultation and evaluation with relevant groups should therefore be carried out and appropriate steps should be taken during implementation, such as the designation of 'safe space'⁸, marked out with appropriate tactile paving. Following implementation, schemes need to be evaluated thoroughly to ensure that they do not unduly discriminate against any user group, as highlighted by the view of a number of organisations representing people with disabilities that "all parties consult with disability organisations at all stages in the process of developing our streets and public spaces."⁹ Caution should be exercised in considering schemes using uniform shared surfaces, unless accessibility issues can be explicitly addressed.

Sufficient crossing points. While we champion the freedom for pedestrians to be able to cross the street wherever they please, it is important to ensure that there are sufficient demarcated crossing points for more vulnerable users.

⁷ The focus of this paper is sharing with other road users. To find out more about pedestrianisation please visit our website.

⁸ No part of the public highway could ever be considered one hundred percent 'safe' for pedestrians – unfortunately even traditional kerbs and pavements have their fair share of fatal collisions. The aim should be to minimise risk while maximising accessibility and walkability for all.

⁹ http://www.guidedogs.org.uk/uploads/media/Shared_space_statement_01.pdf

Defining success

Living Streets believes that a successfully redesigned street would:

- increase the overall number of people walking in that street;
- reduce traffic volume and speed to enable other uses of the street rather than a mere traffic corridor;
- make the street safer in absolute terms (i.e. minimise the likelihood of pedestrians and other users being killed or seriously injured);
- achieve all of the above amongst all groups of users across the population, whether defined by age, ethnicity, disability or other category.

A scheme that met the first three, but not the last, could not be regarded as successful.

We call for those implementing new schemes to measure these indicators of success. We recognise that this will be a challenging task and therefore call for more independent research to identify the impact of naked street schemes on these indicators.

The development of naked streets could bring many benefits, and we should not shy away from embracing innovative schemes to build our understanding of how it affects different users. Therefore further experimentation and trials should be encouraged: naked street principles have the potential to transform the culture and overall safety on our streets.

However, we must ensure that naked street principles are not undermined by poor implementation and lack of consultation with local people. These principles can help us to rebalance our public spaces, improve quality of life and ensure that streets are for people as well as moving traffic.

Links and further reading

Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment: www.cabe.org.uk
Civilised Streets

Department for Transport: www.dft.gov.uk
LTN 1/08 – Traffic Management and Streetscape
LTN 1/04 – Policy, Planning and Design for Walking and Cycling
Manual for Streets

Guide Dogs for the Blind Association: www.guidedogs.org.uk
Report of Design Trials at UCL PAMELA
Shared Surface Street Design Research Project

Living Streets www.livingstreets.org.uk

Hamilton-Baillie, B.
Shared Space: Reconciling people, places and traffic.
Built Environment Vo 34, No 2. June 2008
Towards Shared Space.
Urban Design International Vol 13, No 2. Summer 2008 pp. 130-138.
Hamilton-Baillie, B. and Jones, P.
Improving traffic behaviour and safety through urban design.
ICE Civil Engineering Proceedings 158. May 2005, pp.39-47.

All the above publications are available as downloads from <http://www.hamilton-baillie.co.uk/index.php?do=publications>

Jones, P., Boujenko, N., and Marshall, S. www.landorbooks.co.uk
Link & Place: A Guide to Street Planning and Design.
Landor Publishing Ltd., 2008.

Shared Space InterReg IIIB Project
Room for everyone: A new vision for public space, 2006
Shared space: From project to process, 2007
Spatial Quality: Places that attract people, 2008
Shared Space: Final Report and Evaluation, 2008

The above publications are available from <http://www.shared-space.org/>