

# Designing Streets

## Introduction

This paper provides a brief summary of the key messages and questions/answers posed at the Designing Streets training sessions across Scotland. The Improvement Service has provided over 40 Designing Streets training events across Scotland and the courses have been attended by officers from all Scottish local authorities. It is intended that this paper is a useful reference note and reminder of some of the key learning points and issues discussed at the Designing Streets training.

## Five Designing Streets policies

- 1. Street design must consider place before movement.**  
Consider the street environment - design for pedestrians first, street widths, carriageway widths, who has priority, what is the pedestrian desire line.
- 2. Street design guidance can be a material consideration in determining applications and appeals.**
- 3. Street design should meet the six qualities of successful places as set out in Designing Places.**  
Re-enforcing the hierarchy of place first over movement and the need to consider pedestrians and cyclists at the top of the hierarchy.
- 4. Street design should be based on balanced decision-making and must adopt a multi-disciplinary collaborative approach.**  
A multi-disciplinary collaborative approach allows issues to be considered and decisions made within the overall context and by a group rather than individual.
- 5. Street design should run planning permission and the roads construction consent processes in parallel.**  
The RCC process has to begin at the early stages in order that parameters are agreed for the design and that the RCC officer can be involved in the decision-making process. This assists in a balanced decision-making approach.

## Key messages of Designing Streets

### Context

Local surroundings, local topography, local patterns and building designs.

Balanced approach through considering each element and issue within the overall context of the plan and the objectives.





## Connection

Connections to existing - community, access points, to the local environment. Does the new design feel like it belongs there?

## Identity

Can you identify the design as part of that place? Does it fit into the surroundings? Does it create a place people can identify with in terms of scale?



## Street Engineering review

Set out the acceptable parameters for the development site including:

- key visibility splays;
- vehicle tracking (type and routes);
- methods of speed control;
- drainage discharge rates;
- materials palette;
- agreement of SUDS techniques;
- utilities strategy;
- landscape strategy.

## Quality Audit

The Quality Audit can ensure that street designs are appropriate and meet the objectives set out. They also provide a strong defence against any liability claims that may arise after implementation.

A typical Quality Audit may include:

- review of visual quality;
- road safety audit;
- walking audit;
- cycling audit;
- inclusive access audit;
- community use audit.

The audit brings together assessments by various professionals to highlight where any compromises in the design are apparent, making it easier for decision-makers to view the scheme in the round.

## Six key qualities of successful places



## What Designing Streets is not about

- Pedestrianisation of all streets.
- Every street being shared space.
- Children playing on every street.
- Expensive materials everywhere.
- Reducing car ownership.
- Bespoke street furniture for every street.

## FAQs/issues raised at Designing Streets training sessions

### What do we now do about our Roads Guidance document?

All Roads Guidance that is based on Design Bulletin 32 principles is now out of date and superseded by Designing Streets policy. Thus, as most roads guidance in Scotland is formed from this basis it should no longer be used.

### Will this multi-disciplinary collaborative approach not just add to the time inputs for our authority?

It may appear that there is a much greater burden on the authority however overall we would anticipate that this will not involve greater time input but will involve a greater understanding of the many

competing demands and issues and result in a better design solution. By discussing issues collectively it is likely that any solution/design coming forward will be more generally compliant with the authority's desired outcomes.

**Developers don't want to change their layouts or approach. It is up to the developer to change. We only respond to their plans?**

The developer has produced plans/design in accordance with local authority standards and guidance in the past in order to obtain consents. Many developers see benefit in creating better places in order that they can sell their new properties. Developers will work with the authority to produce a layout that will get them their planning consent and Roads Construction Consent with as little difficulty and delay as possible.

**How do we ensure that we provide a safe enough environment?**

We have found no cases across the country where a local authority officer has been sued over design. Designing Streets recommends a balanced decision-making approach in order that issues and solutions are discussed and a way forward is agreed. The authority should be in a position to defend its decision where objectives are set, design is reviewed against those objectives and the process is recorded to show considerations and decisions.

**People prefer to live in a cul de sac.**

New developments have been designed over the past 20 to 30 years to align with Roads Guidance which promoted segregation of users and a rigid streets hierarchy in order to try to design out road safety risk. The guidance dictated that new development layouts introduced long cul de sacs and did not provide connection to other communities. The majority of new housing available up until now has been designed on this basis i.e. cul de sacs.

However, some of our most desirable, in demand and higher property value communities are located in well-connected networks. Research by Savills backs this up.

**If we increase connections it will increase rat running.**

Street design will be such that the streets will not provide drivers with extensive sightlines or forward visibility to encourage high vehicle speeds. Thus, it will be more beneficial for drivers to remain on more main streets with direct connections as there will be no time saving in travelling through the development area.

Instead of concentrating all vehicles onto one route or through one connection point, with a more connected network there is opportunity for drivers to take a variety of routes. Thus, traffic can be dispersed throughout. With this dispersion, there will be increased capacity on the main route and a reduction in congestion. Thus, the main route will be more attractive to drivers.

We request all traffic signs we think may be required at the outset because once the developer has permissions and things are in place we cannot go back and obtain additional funding.

Every sign, line and pole within a development should have earned its place to be there. There is not a duty of care on the local authority to sign for every possible eventuality that the driver may encounter. Road users are responsible for their own behaviour.

If you consider that signage may be an issue in the future, you can secure a bond through the s75 agreement to cover future signage for a fixed period of time. If the issue does not arise and signage is not required, the bond can be returned to the developer.

**What will be the implications on our future maintenance budget?**

Reduced signs, lines and poles should reduce future maintenance budgets in terms of refurbishment and replacement.

If less land area is provided as streets/roads the local authority will have a reduced area for future maintenance. With dispersed vehicle volumes rather than a concentration onto one or two points there is a dispersal of impact. Wear and tear on the carriageway can be cumulative (once a crack appears it's a rapid deterioration). Thus dispersal will provide a longer life for the street before a repair is required.

**Street trees only cause us problems - maintenance, settlement, roots etc.**

It is essential that the appropriate type of tree is introduced in the local area and that the full size of the tree is considered in the design. Street trees visually enhance the local environment and have a positive impact on mental health as well as contributing to the local environment in terms of air quality. Street trees can assist in providing natural traffic calming along a street.

A future tree maintenance plan should be included as part of the green space maintenance plan.

**Open space maintenance often causes us problems. If the space is defined and adopted by the authority then it is included in our maintenance plan. However, where we don't adopt the land it is the responsibility of the home owners/occupiers. When the private maintenance plan doesn't work we are often called upon to deal with issues as people cannot distinguish between adopted and un-adopted open space.**

The amount and size of any open space should be carefully considered in any design. The open space should be of use and contribute to creating a pleasant and attractive environment. If open space is concentrated rather than in small parcels this may make adoption and future maintenance easier and less of a burden on the authority.

**Many communities don't want additional development around them so making additional connections through can often cause us problems with objections from existing residents.**

Ideally, a masterplan should consider future potential for development in the longer term. This can be included in the property and land ownership deeds that state that residents accept future potential connections and development.

Where a new development is being connected into an existing community it should be highlighted at the

public engagement/consultation the positive aspects in terms of increased opportunity to link to facilities and increased accessibility, particularly for walking and cycling and the associated health (physical and mental) benefits.

**People like to park where they can be sure their vehicle will be safe and secure.**

Designing Streets accepts and agrees with this. It is essential to provide sufficient levels of car parking and to ensure that the parking is located in the right place and at the right scale for that particular location. Parking courtyards tend to work best when accommodating 8 to 10 vehicles and are overlooked.

**Cycling on the street is too dangerous because traffic speed is too high on many residential roads.**

Design of residential streets should make it clear to drivers that only speeds under 20 mph are appropriate. When vehicle and cycle speeds are more aligned the environment is much safer for cyclists, particularly at junctions. Reduction in carriageway width and visibility are just one way of sending a clear message to drivers that the vehicle does not dominate in that environment.

**Will I be liable if I make the wrong decision and there is an accident in the future?**

With a multi-disciplinary collaborative approach which leads to balanced decision making the chances are extremely remote as decisions are taken collectively. This approach encourages discussion of issues within the overall context of the development (from a variety of professional backgrounds). This should be recorded for future reference to demonstrate the decision making process.

**How do we accommodate disabled users on shared surfaces?**

Designing Streets does not advocate shared surfacing in every street, only where it is appropriate.

One of the main issues around provision of shared space is how the visually impaired navigate through the street and there is on-going research into this issue. The majority of objections to shared space tend to be on large public open spaces where very little guidance is provided by building lines for the visually impaired.

In more enclosed local areas where shared space is introduced there are a variety of techniques including changes in texture and colour that can be used to assist in guiding the visually impaired and these should be introduced according to local needs.

**We have paths that run between back gardens in order that they are away from traffic.**

Remote paths tend not to be attractive options for access as users don't feel safe and secure using them because they are not well overlooked. Locals often request that these paths are closed as they attract anti-social behaviour.

**The boy racer can still get around the network at high speeds and could crash into buildings, gardens or people.**

Consider the degree of risk and its likelihood of occurrence. Our risk-averse approach in terms of road safety over the past 20 to 30 years has resulted in other issues that we have to tackle. Try to minimise

the opportunity for this type of behaviour, for example by ensuring short link lengths and tight corner radii to reduce speeds and reduce opportunity to reach higher speeds.

## Sources of further information

- Manual for Streets - [www.dft.gov.uk/pgr/sustainable/manforstreets/pdfmanforstreets.pdf](http://www.dft.gov.uk/pgr/sustainable/manforstreets/pdfmanforstreets.pdf)
- Evidence and research for Manual for Streets - [www.dft.gov.uk/pgr/sustainable/manforstreets/manualforstreetsevidence.pdf](http://www.dft.gov.uk/pgr/sustainable/manforstreets/manualforstreetsevidence.pdf)
- Living Streets research/articles - [www.livingstreets.org.uk/news/uk/](http://www.livingstreets.org.uk/news/uk/)
- British Social Attitudes Survey on Transport 2010 - [www.dft.gov.uk/adobepdf/162469/221412/221513/714374/bsareport.pdf](http://www.dft.gov.uk/adobepdf/162469/221412/221513/714374/bsareport.pdf)
- CABE Good practice examples - <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20110118095356/http://www.cabe.org.uk/resources>