

Planning and designing 'home zones'

A home zone is a residential street where people come before vehicles. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation, as a social housing landlord, was keen to understand and implement the home zone concept in its planned New Osbaldwick development in York. It therefore commissioned Mike Biddulph to examine lessons from both long-standing home zone schemes in Northern Europe and 14 recent pilot projects in the UK. The study found that:

-  Although home zones can promote road safety, the main benefit for people is the altered perception of how the street can be used. Home zones allow for a wider range of activities in space formally considered exclusively for vehicle use. Distinct design features encourage self-enforcing speed restraint by drivers.
-  Home zone projects are being used to develop community capacity, bringing local people together to improve their environment. In addition, they are being used for environmental improvement, in order to make urban living more attractive and encourage greater pride in local environments.
-  Schemes progressed in partnership with residents responded to local community conditions and more closely fulfilled local people's needs and aspirations. Spending time engaging communities at the start of a project helped prevent misunderstandings between professionals and residents.
-  Independent facilitators - versed in community development issues, community planning techniques and highway, landscape and urban design - helped ensure maximum community involvement, allay fears of schemes being imposed onto the community and also encourage a more creative scheme. Initial experience suggests that the intermediary can be a design consultancy, a local housing association, or the local authority's own community development workers.
-  The use of community planning techniques has helped ensure the involvement of normally excluded groups, such as older people or children.
-  Residents commented favourably about the presentation of schemes in model form, using familiar pictorial views or a simulation event of the project. Simulations, in particular, were successful both in encouraging awareness of a scheme and fostering neighbourliness.
-  Housing developers are now starting to apply home zone treatments in new-build situations, because they recognise them as 'family friendly' and think that they offer an attractive marketing opportunity.

What is a home zone?

A home zone is a residential street where the living environment clearly predominates over any provision for traffic. The design provides space for motor vehicles, but fully accommodates the wider needs of residents. This is achieved by adopting approaches to street design, landscaping and highway engineering that control how vehicles move without restricting the number of vehicular movements.

In a home zone people share what would formerly have been the carriageway and pavements; if it is well designed, vehicles' maximum speed is only a little faster than walking pace (less than 10 mph). This means that other things can be introduced into the street, for example, areas for children to play, larger gardens or planting including street trees, cycle parking, and seats where residents can meet. Home zones can be designated under the terms of section 268 of the Transport Act 2000, or section 74 of the Transport (Scotland) Act 2001.

Recent home zone initiatives

The UK campaign to promote home zones has been co-ordinated by the Children's Play Council and Transport 2000 and is regarded as a translation of the Dutch concept of a 'woonerf' (literally 'living yard'). These two organisations, with support from the Child Accident Prevention Trust and others, called for Dutch-style home zones to be introduced on a pilot basis in the UK, along with funding and legislation to allow local authorities to set them up.

The UK Government has gradually shown greater commitment to the home zone idea. Nine pilot projects have been initiated in England and Wales, four in Scotland and one in Northern Ireland. More recently £30 million has been made available as part of a Home Zones Challenge for England. In Scotland the Public Transport Fund will provide £11.85 million over three years for projects that encourage walking, cycling and safer streets.

Where might home zones work here?

The home zone concept can be applied to either streets in new-build schemes or to existing streets where there is an established population.

Home zones could be established where there is existing or potential resident support and little or no existing or planned local green space in either private gardens or public areas. They may be popular in existing streets either where there is already a large amount of street activity or where residents perceive

that traffic is dangerous and are discouraged from going out. Dutch guidance on home zones advises that treated streets should have fewer than 100 vehicles per hour at peak times, and that continuous treatments in a street should be less than 600 metres in length. Streets being considered for treatment should also typically become the destination for traffic within the area with very low levels of through-traffic.

What can they achieve?

Results from previous research into home zones have indicated that there are clear benefits from introducing schemes:

- increased social activity;
- wider ranging activity and children's play;
- more efficient use of carriageway space;
- a more attractive and visually diverse street scene;
- increasing levels of communication between drivers and pedestrians;
- reduced driving speeds;
- greater levels of safety.

Some principles for home zone planning

The research found that the pilot projects were progressing most successfully where the schemes have been developed in partnership with local people and where planning and design techniques have been adopted that involve everyone who might be affected by a scheme. In more disadvantaged areas it was found that home zone projects were being used to help develop local community capacity and to aid urban regeneration.

As part of the planning process residents regarded it as critical that design and engineering professionals should avoid the use of jargon. The pilot projects often used visualisations and 'mock-ups' of their schemes to convey plans to residents, rather than relying on more abstract engineering drawings. In addition, groups benefited from direct experience of home zones gained from visiting other schemes, on the continent or in the UK.

As professionals and residents work together to develop schemes it is important that people go at the right pace for both groups. Pilots sometimes showed evidence of tensions where schemes were being developed either too quickly or where residents felt that nothing was happening. In certain situations the benefits of introducing 'small wins' were stressed by both highway engineers and community

development workers. These are minor improvements that can be introduced early so that residents can feel that the scheme is delivering benefits. Small wins could include a road closure or introducing speed humps. In addition, facilitators were helpful. These may typically be design professionals who can work with residents to progress a scheme. Often groups in the pilot projects worked in their street, by running planning events there or even holding street parties. This was regarded by community development workers and residents themselves as a useful way of encouraging all members of the community to reconsider how they use their local environment.

The key people to involve

The pilot projects have typically sought to involve similar groups of people in progressing their projects. Within local areas residents' groups have often been the source of the home zone idea, whilst they can also actively assist in progressing schemes. In addition, the pilot projects have typically identified a professional 'lead' person to manage the project. In most, but not all, cases this has been a highway engineer. Residents, in particular, enjoyed the continuity of knowing who to speak to about a home zone scheme. Independent designers have also been used to help residents plan the schemes. Designers can encourage a higher degree of creativity in response to local circumstances; allow alternative professional perceptions of the street to be considered; have training and experience in the use of participatory design processes; and produce high quality graphics. Schemes have also benefited from the early involvement of local politicians and housing professionals.

The development process may need to make a particular effort to include certain groups within a community, especially disabled people, older people, children and young people. In addition pilot projects also had to commit time and other resources to finding and involving people in the community who will not readily become involved in a planning process of this nature.

Paying for home zones

Very roughly speaking home zones currently being progressed in the UK are costing about £200,000-£300,000 per street (£1,000 per metre of road). In England, many previous projects have paid for their work through funding gained from a Local Transport Plan bid. In 2001, money raised from this source ranged from £100,000-£350,000 for home zone schemes. Some of the projects have also gained

© Alan Mason, Northmoor Urban Arts Project 2001



Stainer Street, Northmoor, Manchester. The first home zone in the UK showing a shared surface treatment, indirect vehicular route, parking arranged in echelons, patterned paving and street tree planting.

funding from regeneration initiatives with an environmental improvement dimension, such as the Single Regeneration Budget.

In England, the Government is providing £30 million through the Home Zones Challenge Fund; this will fund approximately 100 schemes. Other possible sources of future funding include finance from New Deal for Communities, the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund, Community Chests, Coalfield Regeneration Trusts, Section 106 (England and Wales) or Section 75 (Scotland) planning obligation agreements, the Landfill Tax Credit Scheme, the Community Fund, local authority arts funds, and finance direct from housing associations and societies. In Scotland, activists also see additional funding for home zones coming from the Public Transport Fund.

Principles of home zone design

The pilot projects have been exploring the use of design principles which have been commonly adopted in other parts of Northern Europe. Some of the key principles are:

- Home zones are not being considered in isolation. For example, home zones are being introduced as an element of a wider area traffic calming initiative, such as 'Safer Routes to School'.
- Schemes include parking and landscape features which do not allow vehicles to drive too close to residential properties.

- Schemes manage the use of signage, landscaping or street furniture so that these elements are visually integrated and attractive rather than creating visual clutter.
- Wherever possible, home zones include no distinction between a roadway and a pavement.
- Entrances to a home zone are clear and include a home zone sign so that drivers can readily interpret the difference between the home zone and more traditional streets.
- Within a home zone there are no lengths of carriageway which allow drivers to believe they have priority and subsequently achieve unacceptable speeds.
- Public lighting is used to illuminate speed-reducing measures at night.
- Dimensions within the home zone are adequate to provide for slow moving through-traffic, parking and the servicing of buildings.
- Home zones provide adequate parking for both existing and potential new residents within direct vicinity of people's homes.
- Front gardens are included or retained where possible.
- Seating can be controversial so it is normally planned and located with care.
- Home zones are designed so that the whole environment offers the potential for informal play and related activities that do not disturb the peace of other residents.

The future of home zones

In order for home zones to be more widely adopted, the researcher suggests the following initiatives:

Funding: The Home Zones Challenge Fund is clear evidence of the Government's commitment to the concept in England. However, longer term funding specifically for home zone schemes is needed, if further schemes are to be encouraged in all parts of the UK.

Strategy: Home zones are regarded as a useful mechanism in urban renewal. As such they might be integrated into strategies which encourage people to both enhance their own neighbourhoods and also consider alternatives to car use.

Promotion: Central government needs to support the home zone concept in key policy statements, in revisions to the highway code and driving test, and through dedicated research which highlights the benefits from introducing home zone

schemes. Local authorities could provide officers dedicated to promoting and developing schemes, whilst also having information available locally for interested residents' groups.

Signage: A standard sign for home zone treatments already exists in many parts of continental Europe; this could also be adopted in the UK.

New developments and the planning system: Schemes will be more easy to implement where local authority residential design guidance acknowledges the home zone concept. Revisions to national design policy statements like Design Bulletin 32 in England will act as a catalyst to this change.

Partnership: Home zones will progress where local activists, who are often key people in ensuring the success of home zones, are being assisted by the key professional agencies who are also promoting the scheme locally.

About the project

The project was managed by the Children's Play Council. The research was undertaken by Mike Biddulph (Cardiff University) and involved interviews with a professional and a community representative from each UK pilot project followed by a one day seminar with activists and community representatives. This empirical work was supplemented by a review of literature about, and visits to, a number of established UK, German and Dutch home zone schemes.

How to get further information

The full publication, **Home Zones: A planning and design handbook** by Mike Biddulph, is published for the Foundation by The Policy Press (ISBN 1 86134 371 X, price £13.95).