



zone home

Home Zones are growing rapidly in popularity, encouraged by government drives towards 'Liveability' and 'Sustainable Communities'. Pave-It explains what they are, talks to the author of an important design guide and looks at one successfully completed Home Zone.



HOME ZONE CASE STUDY

North Portsea, Portsmouth

Designed by The Terra Firma Consultancy for Portsmouth City Council, these extensive environmental improvements make wide use of precast concrete paving within the Home Zone concept. A complete Square was constructed as a raised table with road and pavements at the same level, and traffic calming measures such as chicanes, pinch points and ramps incorporated along streets. Contrasting surfaces were achieved with different forms of block paving and tactile paving used at crossing points.



Home Zones are residential streets or groups of streets where people and vehicles share the whole road space safely and on equal terms – although the motorist should feel like a 'guest' in the area. They are designed so that quality of life takes precedence over ease of traffic movement and they aim to promote neighbourliness and a sense of security. Home Zones need to be designed as vibrant public spaces to accommodate play, exercise and relaxation by residents including children, the elderly and disabled people. They should be individually designed to give a sense of identity and community. They must create a safe and secure environment while enabling vehicle access and parking.

Detailed guidelines are now available including *Home Zone Design Guidelines*: 2002, from the Institute of Highway Incorporated Engineers (IHE) and *Home zones – A planning and design handbook*: 2001 by Mike Biddulph (interviewed opposite), published by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. Interpave will also shortly publish a design guide focusing on paving Home Zones. An essential ingredient of Home Zones is street resurfacing – frequently with precast concrete block and flag paving. The various guidelines recognise the need of paving materials to give each Home Zone individual visual appeal and definition of a specific character. Most of the paving in Home Zones will be shared surfaces but without traditional stepped kerbs to identify the carriageway. So, a variety of colours, patterns and textures is needed to clearly differentiate various

surfaces such as parking, junctions and non-vehicular areas without the clutter of signs and painted lines common to our streetscape.

Precast concrete block and flag paving, with related products such as dish channels, are ideally suited to Home Zones – whether created within existing streets or as part of new residential developments. They meet the criteria set out in the guidelines by providing a firm, even surface enabling ease of movement by wheelchair users and others and offer proven long-term performance, durability and minimal maintenance while offering endless variety in shape, scale, colour and texture. With existing streets, the Home Zone surface will generally be created by raising the carriageway level up to meet the footway, eliminating stepped kerbs. This can be easily and economically achieved using an overlay construction of block or small element flag paving. In addition, weather independent 'dry' construction methods without curing optimise available working times to fit in with the requirements of residents and, as only small plant and equipment is needed, disturbance is minimised.

equally shared between pedestrians and vehicles was important. As a contrast to the predominantly bitmac surfaced road, block paving in raised tables was used in key spaces where the surfacing was to be perceived as a higher quality and where the car is a 'guest' in the pedestrian environment with pavements obsolete.

Where below-ground service runs are regularly altered and upgraded, block paving was the obvious choice. We believe the flexibility of the surfacing will avoid patchy 'making good' and ensure a continuing, consistent finish. Unsurprisingly, value for money was also an important factor. In a scheme covering a large residential area, the design had to be carefully costed in order to meet the budget. With the use of concrete block paving, rather than natural stone, the project achieved maximum impact whilst still satisfying financial constraints."

Robyn Butcher of Terra Firma said:

"Whilst the concept of a Home Zone is to give equal priority to all users, the redesign of a complex existing residential area with its parking problems, through-routes for lorries, pavements and budgetary constraints, made this very difficult. Differentiation between vehicular areas and those

home zone update



Pave-It talks to Mike Biddulph, Senior Lecturer in Urban Design at the School of City and Regional Planning, Cardiff University and author of *Home Zones: a planning and design handbook*.

Pave-It: Where did the Home Zone concept originate?

MB: In the Netherlands during the 1970s. It was applied initially as part of area-based traffic calming initiatives where one or two streets would be treated as "woonerf" or "living yards". Visiting these schemes has convinced practitioners in the UK that these places work. The idea has since spread to become normal practice for residential street design in a number of countries in northern Europe, including Germany and Sweden.



Pave-It: How well are they being received here in the UK?

MB: Home Zones have been received with mixed emotions. Some residents campaign vigorously for the idea to be applied to their street, whilst others are concerned about the loss of parking or the prospect of a lot of children playing outside their home. But home zones are typically just pleasant, quiet and safe residential environments where you can park your car as you always did. Professionals are very keen on the concept and there is evidence that housebuilders are building them into new schemes – although we still need to make sure that local authority highway engineers are supportive.

Pave-It: How do shared external surfaces work in practice?

MB: I always like to say that people already know how shared surfaces work, as most car parks are shared surfaces – although a home zone would be a lot quieter. Essentially there is no footway, which means that a pedestrian can use the whole width of the street. Vehicles drive and park in designated areas just as they do know, although a street may be redesigned to slow the traffic. Residents have a little more space to move around. This is important for children and the elderly in particular, as these are groups who often feel hemmed in by traffic.

Pave-It: What are the essential characteristics for shared-surface paving materials?

MB: They must convey the message that this is not a normal "black top" street dominated by traffic, but rather a residential area and living space of which the street space forms a part. One of the key ways in which this meaning can be conveyed is by the use of visually stimulating paving. Additionally, designers often want to more subtly designate parts of the streetscape for particular functions – highlighting parking areas or a vehicular path and, of course, variation in paving also serves a role here. Finally, it is often thought that home zones might be more individual, and some variation in character can be achieved in the paving, through use of pattern and colour. Cost remains a big issue though, and designers are looking for materials that are robust and easy to replace, so that maintenance doesn't become an issue.

Pave-It: How do you see the future for Home Zones?

MB: Now that we have home zone legislation there is the opportunity to develop more interesting and safer streets, but that opportunity mustn't be lost as it did for example with "play streets". House buyers and tenants should demand more home zones as resident expectations are gradually raised.

I would love to live in a home zone and I would pay a premium for living in such a place. That's a message that needs to be conveyed to housebuilders in particular.

