



In the zone

THE HOME ZONE concept is based on the Dutch 'woonerf' (roughly translated as 'living yard') – residential streets or groups of streets where the layout is informed by the desire to create a built environment that naturally facilitates a wide range of uses. The aim is to provide welcoming social spaces for meeting and playing that also function as highway spaces, through which traffic can move, albeit at reduced speeds.

The creation of a successful retro-fit home zone – one created in an existing development – should open up a previously car-dominated area for varied social use through sometimes dramatic, sometimes subtle, alterations to the traditional street layout. High-quality public realms that offer enjoyable, safe, walking and cycling routes are fundamental to encouraging more people to travel sustainably.

The Dings case study

Sustrans' Liveable Neighbourhood team has been working in partnership with Bristol City Council on The Dings home zone. This part EU VIVALDI-funded scheme has seen seven residential streets transformed by the efforts of both residents and professionals. It involved them working closely together in creating an appropriate design, incorporating not only revamped highways, but also newly commissioned public artworks that reflect the identity of The Dings.

The team's community travel workers (CTW) have been central to the high

RETRO-FIT HOME ZONES ARE OPENING UP CAR-DOMINATED NEIGHBOURHOODS FOR VARIED SOCIAL USE. **PETER LIPMAN** OF SUSTRANS EXPLAINS HOW THE PROCESS HAS WORKED IN THE DINGS, BRISTOL

levels of residents' involvement in implementing the home zone. This has also led to a sense of ownership and an understanding that informed and active community participation is vital for the creation of a successful retro-fit home zone.

Ongoing house-to-house visits from the CTW have been absolutely key to ensuring high resident participation in the project, as many residents are not able, or willing, to attend conventional meetings or events. The resulting, repeated, face-to-face contact has ensured ongoing detailed and open discussions with over three quarters of the residents. Which, in turn, has helped the professionals involved in the project gain a clear understanding of the community's needs and desires.

Residents have made the decisions on everything from parking layouts and materials, through to selecting which artists to appoint for a part Arts Council-funded public art project. The central importance of the community

The creation of a home zone has changed Birken Street in The Dings from an area blighted by rat-running traffic (below left) to a high-quality public realm that offers a variety of safe and enjoyable uses (above)





Images: Sustrans

participation process has been reflected in the results of a recent follow-up survey where 96 per cent of people living in the now completed streets (from the 70 per cent of households contacted) indicated that they were happy with the information they had been given about, and their involvement in, the project.

Addressing parking issues

Its prime location, close to the city centre and Bristol's main railway station, meant that The Dings had been blighted by rat-running traffic and commuters using residential streets as free car parks. Residents' concerns about commuter parking and the need to deal with this issue in a way that fitted into the home zone design, have resulted in the residents agreeing to an innovative positive parking scheme. This will be implemented once Bristol City Council has completed its current strategic review.

Positive parking informs drivers that they may only park in the spaces clearly identified with darker paving. This removes the need to use double yellow lines and excessive signs. It is intended that this scheme should be introduced along with a residents' parking scheme to deal with the current commuter parking problems. The Department for Transport has confirmed that it is

prepared for the scheme to be piloted on an experimental basis.

The retro-fit future

There are now scores of examples of retro-fit home zone schemes, with widely varying designs and results. This has fostered an increasing demand from residents all over the UK for more home zones. However, what is clear from the projects completed so far is that to replicate home zones on a larger scale will require significant, and as yet unidentified, capital and/or the development of a less capital-demanding way of delivering designs that yield the results of a successful home zone.

Without new capital and revenue funding, the development of future home zones might well end up being restricted to areas receiving regeneration funding or as part of new-build housing. If this ends up being the case, how can home zones be implemented as retro-fit schemes in the enormous number of UK neighbourhoods where they could make such a positive difference?

Successful home zones can make a massive contribution to delivering a wide range of Government policies across different areas, including transport, planning, sustainable communities, environment and health. They can help overcome problems in these fields by enabling local communities to work with local authorities to reclaim control over their streets and create welcoming and safe social spaces.

At Sustrans, we believe that the case has been made for more home zones and we are working on plans for pilots to show how they can be delivered in a way which fits the currently severely limited funding climate.

CASE STUDY: CUMBERLAND STREET, NORTH PORTSEA – ONE YEAR ON



Featured in the *Green Places* 'Review of the Year' (GP 11, page 14, above), the Cumberland Area home zone in North Portsea, part of the City of Portsmouth, has been completed for over a year now.

An environmental enhancement for a council-owned residential area, the scheme was developed in response to concerns from the local community regarding: safety and security; the quality of the external environment; and the lack of facilities for local children. The design of the scheme, which was undertaken by Terra Firma Consultancy on behalf of Portsmouth City Council, included: traffic calming measures; improved parking provision; upgrading of soft landscape; enhanced lighting; CCTV; gated access; and a central square outside the community project shop.

A year on, how has it all been received? Over the past year, the home zone has featured in both the local and national press. It was nominated for 'Best Street' in the 'You can do it!' award scheme run by the daily Portsmouth paper *The News*; featured in the

latest edition of *Interpave*; and won the home zone category in the *Local Government News* 2004 'Street Design' competition.

Perhaps the most revealing piece of publicity, however, was in the local press although this at first did not appear to be a positive turn of events. The story concerned local teenagers who had dragged wheeled communal bins into the central courtyard and set them alight on Bonfire Night. They then threatened fire fighters who attended the blaze, so preventing them from putting out the fire. The group only dispersed when the police arrived on the scene.

Disappointment at Terra Firma gave way to disbelief when the local housing officer said that in some ways the incident signified a success. This became clear as he explained that the home zone development had brought about a sense of pride in the area, not only for residents, but also for the council staff. Since the completion of the home zone, regular dumping of unwanted furniture and household items had decreased and standards of maintenance and cleanliness around the area had vastly improved. In the run up to Bonfire Night, which is usually an occasion where willful burning and firework throwing got out of hand, enormous efforts had been made to keep the area free from debris. The youths had to resort to dragging out the bins, as no other burnable material was available.

For residents, the area has become a much lighter and friendlier place. As a result of the number of large trees removed from the areas around the flats, especially within the central courtyard, once heavily shaded areas are now open and sunny and the newly created gardens are, on the whole,

well tended. The council has replaced poor fencing to the rear of properties and residents' pride in their properties is clear to see.

The area has a history of high levels of vandalism and the planting stages of the project suffered at the hands of the local children. Despite the use of larger ten-litre plant stock across the scheme, in the hope that a more established appearance from day one would attract less vandalism, much of the planting around the multi-use ball court was pulled up and thrown around. Plants were gathered up and replanted where possible, and the vandalism gradually died away, but the problem left bare patches. Replanting may be an option in future years, but at this stage budgetary restrictions mean that the planting beds remain with some occasional gaps.

Potential vandalism of lighting was another concern at the design stage, especially with bulkhead light fittings above building entrances. One year on, there has been damage to lights, but not on the envisaged scale, and the problem is not one of great concern to the housing department. Similar fittings have been specified

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on projects in the vicinity, with additional mesh guards and it is hoped that this will deter any future vandalism problems.

As part of the home zone scheme, marked parking bays were laid out across the area, denoted by changes in materials and minimal white lining. Much of Portsmouth is covered by restricted parking zones, with residents' parking schemes. The Cumberland Area is one of the latest additions to the growing number of these areas. Unfortunately, as part of the scheme the council has painted double yellow lines between bays and across block paving strips and chicanes along Cumberland Street, the main street in the home zone area, where parking is obviously impossible due to width.

This flies in the face of the home zone concept and partially returns the area to the vehicle dominated scene that it was pre-



home zone. For the highways engineer, project manager and the designers this is an incredibly disappointing step backwards.

Following the work on the Cumberland Street scheme, Terra Firma was asked to look at schemes for three adjacent areas of North Portsea. One, Ward House, is currently under construction, and another, Sarah Robinson House, has just received planning permission. Much of the ethos of the home zone has rubbed off on to these projects and it is hoped that they will increase the newly found pride of place in the Portsea area.

The Cumberland Area, despite the removal of many trees as part of the scheme, remains one of the leafiest parts of Portsea. Sandwiched between the main tourist route to the Historic Dockyard and the new Gunwharf development and the Naval Dockyard Wall, the area is becoming, once more, a place for the local community to be proud of. The Spinnaker Tower is clearly visible from the scheme, as are the masts of HMS Victory, Nelson's flagship, reminding the residents of the strong connections of their area with the past and the possibilities of a bright new future.

By Robyn Butcher, a landscape architect, and associate with The Terra Firma Consultancy. Visit: www.terrafirmac consultancy.com

Top: For residents, the area has become a much lighter and friendlier place. Once heavily shaded areas are now open and sunny

Above: A floodlit ball court is a popular addition to the scheme and used by young people on a regular basis

Below left: In the early days the planting was subject to vandalism, despite the use of larger stock. Some gaps will remain until the budget allows replacement



All images: Terra Firma

Peter Lipman works for sustainable transport charity Sustrans. He is director of Liveable Neighbourhoods, a project which sets out to involve residents and other users of urban areas in the re-design of their streets so as to create safe, accessible and welcoming social spaces.

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