

# DIY Streets

## Project Review **2009**





# Foreword

From Sustrans



**As we head into the project's final year, the DIY Streets pilot programme is starting to bring about changes to communities. Resident groups and Council departments are engaged in the business of re-designing streets to create a better, more inclusive shared space with people at their heart.**

The 11 street design layouts are now being discussed and agreed by residents, and art projects are well underway. During the final year of the project we will be encouraging residents to think about how they will use their new street spaces differently, focusing on sustainable travel promotion and activities which fit with other local priorities.

The original idea for DIY Streets grew from Sustrans' hands on experience of delivering home zones in Bristol and Swindon, as well as learning from other practitioners' experiences over recent years.

Through DIY Streets, we are testing whether the best of home zones – robust community involvement and innovative traffic-calming features – can be delivered in a more cost-effective way, while still delivering the many wider benefits of earlier home zone projects.

This year we aim to fine tune an approach, which, with the right level of support, could give many hundreds of communities across the UK a chance to re-connect with their neighbours and enjoy all the healthy and environmental benefits that liveable neighbourhoods can bring.

Malcolm Shepherd  
Chief Executive, Sustrans



# What is DIY Streets?

DIY Streets is helping residents to re-design their own streets affordably, putting people at their heart, making them safer and more attractive places to live. The project aims to replicate the positive successes of home zones, creating more peaceful spaces where kids can play and neighbours can chat, at a lower cost and with communities driving the process.

The project is being delivered through a partnership approach between Sustrans and local partners which include councils and housing associations. In many cases, a wide array of Council departments have become involved, including: housing and/or regeneration, neighbourhood planning, transport planning, highways maintenance, highways engineering, arboriculture, parks, arts and children's services.

This Project Review outlines the progress made within the project to date and reviews some of the key early lessons for partners and other interested parties.



#### Participating streets are:

- 1. Penn Street, Manchester**  
(co-funded by Manchester City Council)
- 2. Monsell Road, London Borough of Islington**  
(co-funded by Transport for London (TfL) supported by LB Islington)
- 3. Clapton Terrace, London Borough of Hackney**  
(co-funded by TfL, supported by LB Hackney)
- 4. Brooke Road & Evering Road junction, London Borough of Hackney**  
(co-funded by TfL, supported by LB Hackney)
- 5. Somerset Street, Cardiff**  
(co-funded by Cardiff City Council)
- 6. Firhill Road/Passhouses Road, Sheffield**  
(co-funded by Sheffield City Council)
- 7. Ellacombe Road, Torquay**  
(co-funded by Torbay Council)
- 8. Castle Street, Port Talbot**  
(co-funded by Neath Port Talbot Borough Council)
- 9. Heol Degwm, Bridgend**  
(co-funded by Valleys to Coast Housing Association)
- 10. Iden Road, Coventry**  
(co-funded by Coventry City Council)
- 11. Beechcroft Road, Oxford**  
(funded by Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, supported by Oxfordshire County Council and Oxford City Council)

# Community design process



An interactive street trial at one of Sustrans' DIY Streets in Torquay. Residents are encouraged to modify and improve initial prototypes and designs.

**Community involvement is integral to the project's success. From the outset of the project, residents have been encouraged to look at the issues in their street and contribute their opinions and ideas on possible solutions.**

### Engagement

One important aim of this process is to ensure that all residents feel that they have a say in the way their street operates and is managed and hopefully encourages care and respect in the street by all the users.

Although engaging the community in an ongoing detailed design process has been essential to the project it has also brought challenges, such as reaching consensus on the final street layout.

In some streets, where there were well established community groups or tight knit friendships, internal communication has been excellent, ensuring productive progress towards the aims of DIY Streets. Furthermore, these groups have been able to demonstrate that they can carry out pro-active research independent of Sustrans. A number of DIY Streets have been particularly strong in this area.

For example, in Ellacombe Road the residents have carried out extensive research into local history, which has been used within their art project, while the residents of Clapton Terrace have organised their own meetings, carried out various strains of research and even been in contact with the waste department to trial communal bins in their street.

A wide range of engagement methods have been used by Sustrans and residents to encourage everyone to get involved in the process. Home owners have given their personal time and energy to contribute to important communication channels such as newsletters, surveys, doorstep conversations, street events, formal meetings and practical workshops.

### How and where

Street design workshops have varied amongst the groups. The preferred design workshops take place indoors where more in-depth concepts can be explored through group discussion. Where this has not been possible, Sustrans has instead organised drop-in sessions. These drop-in sessions allow residents (many of whom are less vocal in group settings) the opportunity to speak one-on-one with the designer.

One of these drop-in sessions was held in Firshill Road. The session resulted in a much higher resident turnout (40 people) compared to the previous design session where just two residents attended. We have seen similar results from several streets, indicating that a flexible approach is an extremely important factor when involving the local community.





The choice of meeting place is also very important because residents often do not have too much time to spare and need the meeting to be as convenient as possible. Sustrans has held lots of meetings outdoors in the street which have been very successful. If a session needs to be held indoors a location very close to the street is essential – at Heol Degwm, Iden Road and Clapton Terrace Sustrans has even held meetings in residents' houses.

### Inspiration

A range of materials including photography, plan drawings and 3D sketches of the proposed street designs and possible street furniture have been used at design sessions to help stakeholders visualise the changes possible.

As well as design sessions, Sustrans has organised additional meetings on issues such as safety (in relation to crime rather

than health), suitable tree and plant species and how to involve children in the project. Residents of Monsell Road were particularly interested in “greening” their street. As a consequence a tree officer from the Council was invited along to meet with the residents and talk them through the appropriate species of trees and plants, as well as the logistics of planting.

Street parties have been a great way to get everyone together, share ideas and celebrate progress. They have provided an opportunity for everyone involved to relax, enjoy some food and drink and chat with their neighbours whilst utilising the street (perhaps for the first time) as a social venue rather than as a thoroughfare. A street party was held in Penn Street where residents tucked into a feast of food donated by the local Co-op.



### Trial and error

Once a new street layout had been agreed upon, many of the streets trialed the design by closing the street and marking out the layout with chalk, traffic cones and straw bales. These interactive trials are crucial in giving a much clearer picture of the proposals and allow alterations to the design to be made “on the spot”. They are also an opportunity for fire and refuse vehicles to run a test drive, ensuring the design won’t hinder essential access to the street. Ellacombe Road and Monsell Road, both trialed their proposed design in October 2008 and many of the residents were so enthusiastic that they arrived early to help set up.

A very successful cross street seminar was held for all 11 streets in July 2008. Sustrans provided training for community champions and the seminar was also a useful opportunity for those present to gain an overview of the progress made in other streets and exchange lessons learnt.

### Longevity

80% of those surveyed at the DIY Streets felt that “improving the sense of community” was either important or very important. Although some of the DIY Streets residents were already active in their

local communities and a few had formed resident groups, several of the streets did not have any clearly defined community structure at the outset of the project.

Over the last year Sustrans has helped form five constituted resident groups (at Ellacombe Road, Heol Degwm, Castle Street, Clapton Terrace and Brooke Road & Evering Road) and some already established groups have reported higher attendances at meetings and interest in their area and local issues. Clapton Terrace resident Mike Abraham explains the long term benefits of such groups, “Whatever the project’s outcome, the process has brought the residents together in a way that has re-established a Clapton Terrace community. People don’t just say hello to each other in the street, there seems to be genuine affection for our neighbours.”



A street party at Penn Street

# DIY Street **design** features

The DIY Street design process considers a number of key design features which have been used in the proposed layouts for all 11 streets.

## Reclaim the space



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Showing that a street is not simply a through-fare for cars but a well loved and used space is essential in influencing drivers' behaviour. The residents of Clapton Terrace felt that this was very important and will therefore be planting a wild flower garden down one side of the street, creating a welcoming gateway feature and more visible walkways for pedestrians.

## Chicanes



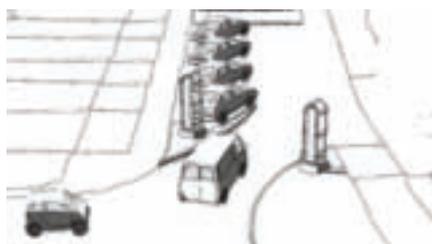
Monsell Road and Ellacombe Road will both use a chicane effect to reduce traffic speeds by narrowing the road width and reducing sight lines.

## Reduced sightlines and enclosure



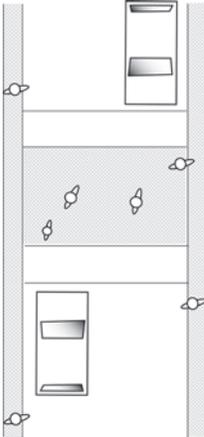
The Heol Degwm street design uses the principle that if drivers are unable to see a clear path ahead of them, or if they feel enclosed by vertical features (in this case cars and boulders), they will normally slow down. This can be accomplished using echelon or perpendicular parking if space allows, or other physical features like planters or hard landscaping features as marked out in this street design.

## Narrowing the road and creating gateways



Iden Road is likely to be narrowed visually to encourage careful driving when entering the street. In contrast Ellacombe Road will use build-outs at both sides of the entrance to physically prevent drivers from speeding as they enter the street.

## Speed tables



These effective traffic calming features are often unpopular due to the conflict between reducing traffic speeds on the one hand and minimising noise and vibrations from passing traffic and driver discomfort on the other. In Monsell Road, for instance,

one of the main reasons why residents are so committed to the project is because they want the existing speed cushions removed. That said, residents in almost all the other streets have asked for a raised table of some sort and they remain an extremely effective traffic-calming feature if designed and built well.

## Street furniture



Iden Road will include formal seating which when positioned carefully will enhance the setting, provide a focal point where residents can chat and socialise in comfort and possibly provide shade in the summer.

## Greenery

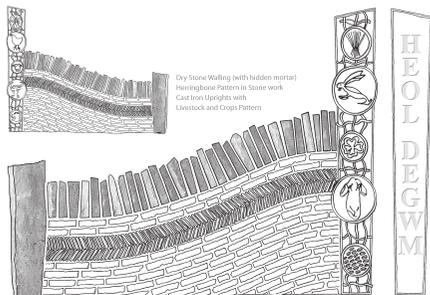


Trees and planters will be used in Firshill Road and Passhouses Road to help transform driver behaviour and make the streets more attractive. There will be both free standing planters for flowers, herbs and shrubs and a few much sought-after trees on Passhouses Road.



Proposed gateway features by artists Thrusell and Thrusell for Iden Road.

## Art Projects



Part of a proposed street entrance by artist David Mackie for Hoel Degwm, reflecting traditional dry stone walling.

selection of artist. Such was the enthusiasm for the art project at Hoel Degwm that a group of eight residents turned up unexpectedly to sit on the interview panel for the artist interviews.

Once the artist was appointed, several resident meetings explored ideas, the history of the area and feasible proposals. A further funding bid was drawn up and signed off by residents after a rough proposal had been agreed upon. Art projects have been started in Ellacombe Road, Hoel Degwm, Castle Street, Iden Road, Clapton Terrace and Brooke Road & Evering Road.

Art projects have been established in six of the 11 streets after “taster” sessions identified sufficient resident interest. Residents play a key role in all steps of the artwork process, from writing the artists brief, short listing the applicants and sitting on the interview panel to make the final

The Ellacombe Road arts project is well underway and features a gateway that will act as an attractive and welcoming entrance-way as well as a psychological traffic calming measure.

# Evaluation and monitoring

At the outset of the DIY Streets project, residents were invited to attend a design and evaluation session. Using CABE's evaluation tool SpaceShaper they were able to view their concerns and aspirations immediately jumpstarting an initial dialogue between residents and Council Officers on the problems and possibilities for the street in question.

Initial door to door surveys were carried out by residents on a range of subjects focusing on residents' opinions of the existing street and their use of it.

This baseline research identified a clear demand for both traffic-calming and street enhancing elements for the project. For example:

- 75% of surveyed residents across all streets felt their street was currently "not at all safe for children to play"
- 90% of residents rated "reducing the speed of traffic" as important or very important.
- 75% of residents felt that "enhancing the street with trees, artworks etc." was important or very important.

Additional baseline data on parking observations, traffic counts and speed has been gathered either by residents or through formal surveying.

Similar evaluation techniques will be applied once construction has finished, including door to door surveys, a follow up Spaceshaper session and traffic and speed counts.

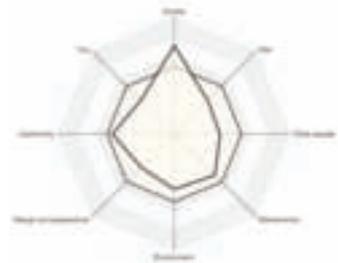
The CABE Space Spaceshaper is a practical toolkit for use by anyone - whether a local community group or a professional - to measure the quality of a public space before investing time and money in improving it. The toolkit from CABE Space works by capturing the perceptions of professionals involved in running a space, as well the views of the people that use it.

The 'spider' diagram on the right illustrates that residents and professionals perceived Monsell Road's Access to be the only characteristic performing better than average. All of the other characteristics are underperforming (those within the dotted black line).

While *Maintenance*, *Environment* and *Community* under perform, *Use*, *Other people*, *Design and appearance* and *You* can be considered as significantly under performing. For example the design of the street was considered 'bare', a 'no mans land', in comparison to adjoining streets. The residents were therefore keen to introduce certain attractive elements from the adjoining streets that they considered aesthetically pleasing to brighten up Monsell Road.

General information about Spaceshaper can be found on CABE's website: [www.cabe.org.uk](http://www.cabe.org.uk)

Current perceptions at Monsell Road



Source: Sustrans, 2008

# Lessons learnt

Sustrans has uncovered a number of learning points which can be applied across all streets together with a number of learning points that have required applying an individually crafted approach on a street by street basis to resolve problems. A few of these are outlined below:

Concern	Solution found
<p><b>Decision making</b> Reaching consensus on final design.</p>	<p>Be sure to have a clear decision making process.</p>
<p><b>Low turnouts</b> Low response rate on voting for final design.</p>	<p>Extend the deadline and follow up with emails, phone calls and door-to-door visits.</p>
<p><b>Ascertaining resident interest at outset</b> When selecting streets, it was very difficult to distinguish between residents who wanted a traffic problem to be fixed for them and those residents who wanted to actively participate in fixing that problem and enhancing their street.</p>	<p>Working closely with local partners in project choice and allowing sufficient time to assess interest at the outset are clearly important.</p>
<p><b>Community engagement</b> Projects where residents have been more proactive throughout the process are generally also those piloting more ambitious design proposals, than those with groups not as involved.</p>	<p>It is unclear to the team what kind of test might identify these more proactive residents, but it does seem to be a real advantage to have a core group of more than six residents prepared to volunteer time to the project.</p>
<p><b>Funding</b> There was difficulty in securing the revenue match funding requirements. Securing £10K per annum for three years proved challenging in some cases, since transport budgets are generally “revenue poor”.</p>	<p>Here, collaborations with other teams (e.g. neighbourhood planning, regeneration or housing) have proved very effective.</p>
<p><b>Working with artists</b> The team did not introduce the concept of working with an artist at the outset of working with the community, for fear that it would be confusing, or detract from the process of learning about traffic-calming. While it is true that developing the project gradually, building in different elements, might be ideal, it has caused difficulties in terms of project management.</p>	<p>It would seem preferable in future projects where arts might be considered, for this to be introduced earlier on.</p>

# The **future** for DIY Streets

The focus of the final year (to March 2010) will be on holding detailed design sessions with residents, agreeing detailed plans with each Council and, most excitingly, construction activities on all 11 streets. Other activities are also planned, to ensure we maintain resident support and engage them in thinking about how they might use their new street spaces differently once they are complete. These activities will focus on sustainable travel promotion and activities which fit with other local priorities, as well as follow-up monitoring and dissemination events. Subject to funding, another priority this year is to run the detailed workshops and meetings to reach a final decision on the design of art features.

Once construction has been completed we'll be arranging with the residents street



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parties in all of our 11 streets to celebrate and enjoy the transformed streets and all our hard work!

And finally, follow up evaluation work will hopefully prove the merits of this approach and enable the principles of DIY Streets to be replicated nation-wide, creating many more liveable neighbourhoods.

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One giant leap.

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