

## Children & Young People Committee

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### Providing safe places to play and hang out

## The Case for Homezones

### Purpose

The National Assembly for Wales' consultation to review the effectiveness of current policy provision and initiatives in providing safe places for children might consider the case for supporting 'Homezones' as a means of providing these safe places for children to play and hang out.

### Why Homezones?

The erosion of safe, convenient and rewarding places for children to play within our neighbourhoods is well documented and covered in some detail in Sustrans accompanying report.

The dramatic increase in motor vehicle numbers, their predominance and increased speeds are the biggest villains in this story – cyclists, pedestrians and most especially children, are paying a huge price for our travel convenience and mobility needs.

Open spaces, parks and playing fields all have a role to play in providing such spaces but visiting them can be a traumatic and dangerous endeavour if the street is full of parked and/or speeding vehicles. So the function of our streets needs to be seen as more than just a conduit for moving vehicles; they should reflect and allow people's needs.

Our residential streets need to be thought of as public spaces once more, where the balance of activities between different users such as children, pedestrians, cyclists, the elderly, people with disabilities, and *then* motor vehicles, is re-thought and differently planned.

An explanation of the principles for creating Homezones and the case for their consideration is outlined below.

## **Background - What is a 'Homezone'?**

Homezones can be thought of quite simply, as; -

### *safe residential streets*

Where positive, physical interventions allow and encourage pedestrian interests as the predominant activity; where vehicles are still allowed - but only as 'polite guests'.

They were first created within the residential streets of (mainly) northern European towns around 40 years ago – although the first ones did not appear in the UK until around 20 years ago.

Within these streets democracy of the use of the space is re-established after years of dominance by the motor vehicle – allowing children to play, adults to socialise with neighbours and all pedestrians to enjoy the space. They are completely inclusive, integrated spaces rather than exclusive, segregated spaces.

The main objective within a Homezone is to reclaim the residential street space from purely transportation use to mixed and integrated uses, ie. more space for pedestrian activity and less space for vehicular transport uses.

It is far easier and more cost effective to consider the Homezone design approach for new residential streets rather than retro-fitting into existing streets. In new residential developments the costs can be offset against the cost of constructing a conventional street. However, consultation with new/prospective residents needs careful consideration.

Both new and existing street schemes are feasible but each requires a different approach.



*A typical Woonerf (Homezone) in Utrecht, The Netherlands, with shared surface, raised beds and street trees, bike rails and parking bays*

## Background - How are Homezones achieved?

The above conditions for democratic, mixed-use street-spaces are all achievable through simple but sophisticated measures that are designed to significantly reduce vehicle speeds, (to little more than walking pace).

Current street design is for a uniform approach in every neighbourhood (pavement widths, kerbs and roadways widths all uniformly regulated).

Homezones allow a bespoke design approach where within different street spaces (and different neighbourhoods) a variety of methods of well designed and unique interventions are utilised to achieve the desired lower vehicle speeds, eg.

- shared street surfaces (ie. removal of kerbs and use of more pedestrian friendly paving materials),
- reduced vehicular space (such as carriageway widths),
- reduced visibility for drivers,
- more enclosure of street space through planting or well placed furniture/equipment

Once vehicle speeds are reduced it becomes realistic, and moreover, completely safe, to consider a variety of pedestrian based activities within the street space.

This is due to the following significant outcomes:-

- much shorter vehicle stopping distances are possible,
- all important 'facial recognition' is more easily established between drivers and pedestrians enabling **all** users to better negotiate use of the space,
- less space is required for vehicles to manoeuvre, so more space is available for other, pedestrian, activities,
- the elements of 'variety', 'surprise' and 'features' can be safely introduced.

The best Homezones depend upon being community generated and also rely upon open and imaginative professional input; ie. street designers working with the residents of a street who have a direct say in what activities are appropriate outside their homes and within their street, and where children are considered as equal stakeholders within the street environment.



*Play area instead of car parking bays in Rhos Nathan Wyn, Aberaman, Aberdare, RCT*

## **Summary / Recommendations**

Homezones are simply **safe residential streets**.

They are streets in which the rights of all users - from small children to teenagers, families, people with disabilities, cyclists and the elderly - are established and protected whilst still accommodating the need for motor vehicular access. They are about the creation of completely democratic, shared street-spaces.

Living in a Homezone means having safe and convenient places for adults and children to play and hang out right on your doorstep. What could be better!

## **Document References**

*Manual for Streets (2007); Department for Transport*

*Homezone Design Manual; Mike Biddulph*

*Statutory Instrument 2006 No. 2082, the Quiet Lanes and Home Zones (England) Regulations 2006. London: TSO.*

*Department for Transport (2006) Circular 02/2006 – The Quiet Lanes and Home Zones (England) Regulations. London: TSO.*

*Department for Transport (2005) Home Zones: Challenging the future of our streets. London: Department for Transport*

*IHIE (2002) Home Zones Design Guidelines. London: IHIE*

## **Photographic Appendices**

*Rhos Nathan Wyn, Aberaman, Aberdare, RCT*

*Hendrick de Keijserstraat, Utrecht, The Netherlands*