

LIVING STREETS WALKABILITY PROJECT



Whilst it might be the end of the road for Living Streets Walkability Project, the recommendations from our Community Street Audits are just starting to be fully realised. The benefits from this project will be felt for years to come – town centres everywhere should read on, and take note.



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Living Streets works to bring our streets to life,
with more walking in people-friendly public spaces.



What is Walkability?

A walkable community is **designed for people**, to human scale, emphasising people over cars. It promotes a mixed, vibrant, healthy, enjoyable and comfortable environment to live and walk in. It returns rights to the most vulnerable, looking out especially for children and people with disabilities. A walkable community has shops and services within easy reach on foot.

Planning for people

Over the past few decades planners and engineers have fallen into the trap of prioritising cars over people on foot. Community ties have weakened and trips once made on foot have been replaced with motorised trips to places further away. To break this cycle we must understand and act on the needs of pedestrians by engaging with local people. Living Streets uses Community Street Audits to help achieve this.

Working with boroughs, individuals, local groups and interested stakeholders, the project applied Community Street Audits at four district centres in outer London. Attention focussed on important walking routes to/from and within these places to encourage more people to make walking their first choice and to make the experience more enjoyable.

Community Street Audit, Harlesden

Living Streets Community Street Audits assess streets and public spaces from the viewpoint of people who use them. We believe that local people know their streets better than anyone. Recommendations for improvement are based on locals' views and Living Streets expertise.



We would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who has been involved with the project, especially the Boroughs of Barking & Dagenham, Brent, Ealing and Havering, London Councils and local auditors who gave their time freely and willingly.

Harold Hill – Havering

Based on the Community Street Audit recommendations, this busy walking route has been widened and upgraded to provide a better experience for people walking to/from the local shops at Hilldene.

The route passes through a dense residential area and cuts across the road network. Pedestrian numbers increase significantly the closer the footway gets to the shops, leading to a crowded footway at peak times. Given a voice by the Community Street Audits, local people were quick to point out that the footway should widen as it gets closer to Hilldene, like the mouth of a river.

“It was not wide enough to cope with the flow of people, particularly at the start and end of the school day,” commented Jo Ratcliffe, Community Development Worker and manager of nearby St. George’s Church and centre. “Now people can pass each other in comfort without getting wet or muddy feet. The surface is smoother and more pleasing on the eye.”

Recommendations made by the Community Street Audit are helping to inform a wider regeneration programme across Harold Hill, that was launched in 2007.



This couple (left) would have struggled to spread out in this much comfort on the path before it was widened.

Before



Dagenham Heathway -

“We want a shopping street – not two parades divorced from each other.” This was the major finding from the Community Street Audit in the Heathway, where auditors were adamant that crossing the road should be much easier.

A progressive town centre enhancement scheme was worked up, including the removal of 550m of guardrail, and is now nearing completion. Already the Heathway is starting to feel more open, even with temporary barriers in place. The widened central crossing can now cope with flows of people leaving the station (top) while two refuges offer protection in places where crossing was previously very difficult, if not impossible (middle). Guardrail removal at two junctions, combined with existing all red vehicular phases and raised tables will cater better for diagonal crossing patterns by pedestrians (bottom).

Other improvements include the designing out of a pinch point by a bus stop, pedestrian-friendly lighting and a carriageway redesign to slow motor vehicles.

Barking & Dagenham

After

But vitally Barking & Dagenham did not stop at the boundary of the town centre. Walking routes to/from the Heathway have been upgraded as part of a rolling programme and three wards to the north have been smartened up by removing unnecessary street clutter.

These enhancements to the public realm are acting as a catalyst for wider regeneration. Led by the council, the outlook is promising. Work will start on a one-stop shop and library in 2008, and shop-front improvement grants are being matched by local businesses. There are already signs that the Heathway is on the up. A leading supermarket has returned for the first time in a decade, reducing the need to head further afield, by bus or car, to pick up some of the most basic goods.

It's been five years since similar, much celebrated, approaches were adopted on Kensington High Street, but the principles have not been widely adopted in other district centres across London. But with Living Streets' help, Barking & Dagenham has shown that it should be possible to make people-friendly streets all over London.



Harlesden – Brent



Harlesden – as was

Code-named Operation Flowsafe, Living Streets joined forces with the police, fire brigade and various council departments to educate and enforce action against illegal parking and loading – which often blocks pedestrian crossings in Harlesden.

Focussing on management and enforcement issues, such as cleansing and illegal parking, has improved life for pedestrians. Brent Council is seeking funding for a complementary town centre improvement scheme to pick up on other Community Street Audit recommendations.

A hard-hitting cleansing regime has been set up, to much acclaim, in Harlesden. Litter and flytipping used to abound, but not any more. Bridie Walsh, a member of HEART, the local resident-led environmental group, said “ More people seem to respect the cleanliness and use the bins more. It’s also reassuring to have the street cleaners around in the evenings. We just hope the cleanliness is maintained. It’s made a real difference.”



Flowsafe in action

Hanwell – Ealing



A programme of designing out obstructions has taken place outside the shops and on some key routes in Hanwell. The surface is more uniform and new flush dropped kerbs and tactile paving have been introduced. The pictured crossover is a considerable improvement – before the surface was mismatched with a big drop up and down.

The improvements have been particularly appreciated by people who use mobility scooters. One auditor commented that before she felt like she was going to take off, but now she has a much smoother and more comfortable ride.

Plans are being considered to extend the existing clocktower area, in order to improve it as an entrance to the shopping area for people on foot.

Lessons learnt & Looking forward

By working together, the Walkability Project has shown how, residents, stakeholders and local authorities can have a positive impact. Here are our key tips for future success:

For community groups and individuals

- Build community support and contact your Councillors and council officers with your ideas, not just complaints
- Be prepared to accept reasonable compromises
- Are there ideas that you can start yourself, for example, hanging baskets?
- Understand that changing public space is complex and can take a long time
- Celebrate successes, no matter how small they may seem

For councils

- Use the knowledge and experience of local people to identify key pedestrian routes, issues and potential solutions. People are prepared to walk for 15 minutes before they look to another form of transport. To encourage walking trips, schemes should stretch about one mile from the edge of a town centre
- Establish clear co-ordination internally and with external stakeholders to take recommendations forward. Identify a local champion and establish a focussed steering group
- Build momentum by implementing quick fixes
- Adopt a holistic approach ensuring that:
 - physical improvements enhance the overall streetscape
 - ongoing maintenance and enforcement are prioritised
 - town centres offer a varied and attractive shopping experience
 - walking is promoted locally as a low-carbon, healthy, convenient means of accessing London's district centres
- Establish funding streams for pedestrian and public realm improvements, including s106, internal and TfL funding

TfL has recently published *Best Practice for Local Walking Schemes* to assist boroughs and stakeholders prepare walking funding submissions. It places emphasis on the identification of *Key Walking Routes*, building on some of the successes of the Walkability Project. The guidance recommends Community Street Audits as a tool to capture evidence to support submissions. TfL funding available for walking schemes has more than doubled during the lifetime of the Walkability Project – a trend which we hope will continue, and be complemented by other programmes which give pedestrians the priority that they deserve.

To find out more about Community Street Audits visit our website or call us.

London news from Living Streets

Living Streets is a national charity, established in 1929, with offices in Scotland, the North-east and London. With London's population predicted to grow by one million by 2025, we need to prioritise walking as a healthy, efficient way of making short trips so that we get the most benefit from our streets and public space.

During the lifetime of the Walkability Project, Living Streets has established a regional forum of our local groups and activists to highlight matters of importance to pedestrians across the capital.

- We've been supporting local groups to encourage their borough to become the first to introduce 20mph as the standard speed limit – a move which will make walking more pleasurable and save lives.
- We are calling for a new walking plan for London, with more ambitious goals and targets than the 2004 original. A new plan would better reflect the vital contribution that people-friendly streets play in creating happy, healthy, successful communities.
- We're excited by Legible London; a proposal to introduce a single co-ordinated way finding system for London. You may have seen the prototype near Bond Street? Did you know there are currently 32 different signage systems causing confusion for pedestrians in central London?
- We believe that where there are traffic lights for motor vehicles, there should be green men for pedestrians. Across London 60% of signalised junctions have some green men missing. We are lobbying to bring that number down.
- Our existing national Walk to School campaign is now accompanied by Walking Works, encouraging employees to walk some or all of the way to work. Each campaign now has a specific London support officer. We're just starting two new projects in the capital. We will promote walking in communities across London where physical improvements have just taken place. Secondly we will help communities in Barking & Dagenham and Redbridge to improve and promote neighbourhood walking routes.



Legible London prototype

Inspired by our work? Then support us or get involved with our campaigning. Visit www.livingstreets.org.uk or call 020 7820 1010.

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May 2008