

This month, **Colin Davis** appraises pedestrian priority in non-residential shared-use streets.

Design notes

Most readers will be familiar with home zones, those special residential areas where pedestrians should be able to walk down the middle of street and feel perfectly safe because vehicles are obliged to give way to people.

These schemes often involve painstaking consultation and the participation of local residents as traffic calming techniques are innovatively merged with landscape design.

The principle of such a 'shared surface' has many advocates, and there have been several attempts to replicate the idea in non-residential locations. Obvious locations are in small town centres, where total pedestrianisation, even for a short period during the day, is just not feasible. Whereas a large store in a pedestrianised street can dictate that deliveries should take place during certain restricted hours, small traders in small towns do not have that luxury.

Perhaps some form of home zone for shopping streets is needed? Of course, it would have to be called a different name – possibly 'community zone'. It would be a place where pedestrians would still have priority over vehicles, and the vehicles would be restricted to essential delivery or services.

That there is a need for such a traffic regulation is shown by the attempts which are now being made to create shared surfaces within the current traffic order rules. Streets with low traffic speed and flows, which for practical purposes cannot be made wholly pedestrianised, are being resurfaced so that the footway merges with the carriageway.

Such schemes can look very enticing on paper. But the removal of a kerb along a normal trafficked road means people – especially those with vision disabilities – need to have at least some understanding of where they can walk in safety.

Drivers assume that in a road they have a degree of priority, and would expect pedestrians to keep to one side on, what seems to them, to be the equivalent of the footway.

Kerbs are sometimes replaced with white lines or a longitudinal ridge-like form of tactile paving. There is no mention of them in the *Highway code* and so they are misunderstood. In some cases, temporary plastic barriers are put where the kerbs once were (*top right*) – which rather negates the original intention of a shared space.

The pictures (*right, mid and bottom*) are also of shared use streets in Germany and the Netherlands, where the pedestrian zone signs allow for essential deliveries. Local culture dictates that those drivers allowed into the streets drive with consideration for pedestrians. This could be a difficult concept to get across to our own 'white van man'.

Would you be confident enough to walk down the middle of a shared-use shopping street and feel safe? Or do we really need an official form of home zone for shopping streets?

