



Ministry of Housing,
Communities &
Local Government



Department
for Transport

Kit Malthouse MP

Minister of State for Housing and Planning

***Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local
Government***

Fry Building
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

Tel: 0303 444 3430

Email: kit.malthouse@communities.gsi.gov.uk
www.gov.uk/dclg

Nusrat Ghani MP

Parliamentary Under Secretary of State

Department for Transport

Great Minster House
33 Horseferry Road
London
SW1P 4DR

Tel: 0303 330 3000

Email: nusrat.ghani@dft.gsi.gov.uk
www.gov.uk/dft

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Dear Chief Executive

Shared space schemes

We are writing to clarify the approach that should be taken to shared space schemes following the publication of the Department for Transport's Inclusive Transport Strategy and the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government's National Planning Policy Framework in July.

Creating places that are attractive and work well for everyone should be a central goal of street design, whether as part of new developments or through improving existing areas. As part of this, we need to secure a step-change in how we design streets and communities that are accessible and inclusive for all.

The National Planning Policy Framework emphasises the importance of prioritising walking and cycling, and addressing the needs of people with disabilities and reduced mobility. The Inclusive Transport Strategy covers a number of issues, including the design, function and use of shared space, which is one approach which has been used to create attractive places and reduce the dominance of motor traffic.

In response to concerns raised about shared space and navigability, the Inclusive Transport Strategy asked local authorities to pause the introduction of new shared space schemes that feature a level surface, and which are at the design stage. This therefore does not apply to

development schemes that are currently at the planning application stage or beyond. For the avoidance of doubt, a level surface is a design feature in which the level difference between the footway and the carriageway is removed. The request to pause such schemes has led to a number of enquiries from developers, practitioners and planning authorities.

While authorities need to ensure that all schemes are designed with the needs of different users in mind, and satisfy their obligations under the equalities legislation, the focus of the pause is on level-surface schemes in areas with relatively large amounts of pedestrian and vehicular movement, such as high streets and town centres (outside of pedestrian zones). The pause does not apply to streets within new residential areas, or the redesign of existing residential streets with very low levels of traffic, such as appropriately designed mews and cul-de-sacs, which take into account the relevant aspects of the National Planning Policy Framework and associated guidance.

Features often included in a shared space scheme, such as the minimal use of traffic signs and other traffic management related street furniture, removing traffic signals, removing/modifying formal and informal crossings, raised side road entry treatments, continuous footways, table junctions and shared use routes for pedestrians and cyclists are often integral parts of other traffic management schemes. The use of these features in traffic management schemes is not included in the request to pause level surface shared space schemes. The availability of formal crossings is particularly important for visually impaired people. Local authorities should consider how this need can be met in all schemes, including shared space.

Applying the National Planning Policy Framework

A proportionate approach should also be taken in applying related aspects of the National Planning Policy Framework, so that the nature of each site, its surroundings and its users are taken properly into account. Giving priority to pedestrians and cyclists, and addressing the needs of people with disabilities or reduced mobility, does not mean that segregated footways or cycle paths are always required. This is especially the case where traffic volume and speed will be low, such as within small housing schemes, or those parts of larger schemes designed as mews or cul-de-sac.

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government intend to review national planning practice guidance to sit alongside the revised National Planning Policy Framework, which will be published in due course. The Department for Transport, with the Scottish Government and Transport Scotland, will commission research on inclusive design which will also inform further advice on creating places that are accessible, inclusive and well-designed.



KIT MALTHOUSE MP



NUSRAT GHANI MP