



## Briefing for the Public Petitions Committee

**Petition Number:** [PE1595](#)

**Main Petitioner:** Alexander Taylor

**Subject:** Moratorium on shared space schemes

Calls on the Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to place a moratorium on all shared space schemes until safety concerns have been addressed

### Background

Shared space is an urban design concept that is defined in the Scottish Government's [Designing Streets](#) policy statement as "...a street or place accessible to both pedestrians and vehicles that is designed to enable pedestrians to move more freely by reducing traffic management features that tend to encourage users of vehicles to assume priority."

It is worth noting that this is not a Scottish concept, also featuring in the UK Department for Transport's [Manual for Streets](#). The idea of shared space is generally acknowledged as originating in The Netherlands as part of the woonerf (living street/recreation area) concept developed during the 1970's. It is important to note that [Dutch traffic law](#) differs from that in the UK so that Dutch pedestrians can use the full width of a road in a woonerf and cars are restricted to walking speed.

Designing Streets is the Scottish Government's key planning policy document on street design. Its policies are used by planning authorities in the drafting of regional and local development plans. They can also be a material consideration in deciding whether to grant or refuse planning permissions for relevant developments.

Designing Streets includes a section entitled "Ensuring Inclusive Design", which states:

"Shared Space, and level surfaces in particular, can cause problems for some disabled people. The absence of a conventional kerb in level surfaces can pose problems for some blind or partially-sighted people, who often rely on this feature to find their way around. The lack of visual cues may also pose problems for pedestrians with cognitive

difficulties. It is therefore important that level surface schemes include an alternative means by which visually-impaired people can navigate. Such elements can be designed in collaboration with local people, including representatives from local disability groups and access panels. Disability groups should also be invited to provide input throughout the Quality Audit stages. Quality Audits are explained in more detail in Part 3 *How to achieve better outcomes*. Any design solution should be informed by local context and the local community.”

More detail on the design of shared spaces, principally aimed at highway engineers and urban designers, is set out in the UK Department for Transport [Local Transport Note 1/11: Shared Space](#).

The interpretation and application of the policies set out in *Designing Streets* and associated UK guidance is a matter for individual planning authorities when drafting development plans or deciding on applications for planning permission.

The UK Government commissioned transport consultancy MVA to undertake a study into the impact of shared spaces on disabled people, which [reported](#) in October 2010. Amongst its conclusions is the following:

“Among disabled people, visually impaired participants appeared to be the most uncertain in their navigation of streets and tended to have needs and desires that were often different from those with other disabilities. For example, when answering trade-off questions they were more likely to say they would prefer texture defined pavement and road to colour defined pavement and road, whereas mobility impaired and deaf/hard of hearing participants were more likely to say they would prefer colour defined pavement and road. An equal number of those with learning difficulties preferred either option.

7.3.3 The issue of whether shared space areas should be designed with a level surface or not is clearly key. It is already known and apparent from these research findings, that visually impaired people feel more at ease when there is a kerb and mobility impaired pedestrians find it physically easier when there is none. However, the research suggests, it should be possible to reach workable compromises in street design.”

### **Scottish Government Action**

The Scottish Government has not reviewed the policies set out in *Designing Streets* since its publication in March 2010.

### **Scottish Parliament Action**

The issue of shared spaces was raised in an [oral question](#) by Fiona McLeod MSP on 10 December 2015 to the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Communities and Pensioners' Rights.

**Alan Rehfisch**  
**Senior Research Specialist**  
19 January 2016

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