

# Creating a space for everyone

## Shared space areas in Bath city centre

In a busy city like Bath, drivers and cyclists often compete with pedestrians for limited space and respect between users can be affected. Last year, Bath's first shared space project was completed in Seven Dials. This project reflected the desire of the Council to reduce the dominance of cars within the City, instead giving the area back to pedestrians and improving the public realm. Now, there are plans to extend this approach into nearby Saw Close, but what exactly is shared space and how does it work?

### Restoring balance and making space to move

In the past, many public areas were effectively unstructured space. People walking, horse-drawn carriages, bicycles all intermingled without formal restrictions or barriers (1). It is only with the advent of the motorised vehicle that these spaces became segmented by user group. Pedestrians were now crammed onto narrow, busy footways in order to allow for passing cars.

The first modern Shared Space designs originated in the Netherlands and have since become common

across other European cities. An area like this recognises that people are equal and should be treated as such. The perceived pecking order that pedestrians must give way to cars is removed, instead encouraging cooperation between users. Cars no longer control the space and must allow for pedestrians, this reduces traffic speeds and makes the area less hectic. Cyclists can use the area without being restricted to narrow cycle lanes. The aim is for people to use this space courteously and considerately.



## Seven Dials: a shared space approach

More pedestrians than cars use the area around Seven Dials (2), but were forced onto crowded footways to make way for motor traffic. The aim for Seven Dials was to create a public space with a greater focus on pedestrian and cyclist needs. Creating a less managed environment by removing conventional road signage and traditional rights of way means that everyone has an equal right to move about this space (3). Walking around is easier for pedestrians and spending time in the area is more pleasant.

## Designing the environment

The introduction of guidance from the Department for Transport in 2011 is now enabling many local authorities in the UK to develop their own local projects to transform cluttered streets and make spaces more sociable.

To differentiate these 'less managed' environments from a conventional street, substantial changes are made to the materials. The traditional stepped kerb edge between road and pavement is removed, creating a level surface across the whole area and the establishing that pedestrians can utilise all the space. A completely level surface also helps people with mobility problems, as they no longer have to go to specific drop kerb points to cross the street.



Conventional kerb steps (1) are replaced with a level surface, contrasting patterns and 'ribbed' paving (2) to mark the boundary line between footway and carriageway, as seen in Stall Street (3).

'Gateways' are created into shared space zones, with signage and other indicators such as ramps on the carriageway to increase driver awareness of their surroundings and encourage lower speeds. Different paving types are used to denote the path that cars should follow, maintaining a comfort zone either side. 'Tactile' or textured materials are used to indicate the previous boundary between the road and pavement so that people with visual impairments can stay within these comfort zones and avoid areas that traffic may pass through.



## The future of Saw Close

In recent years, the Council has developed a public realm and movement strategy, which sets out the key principles to transform the streets and spaces of Bath's city centre. The strategy accommodates the needs of a modern city while respecting the cultural and architectural heritage.

Bath's development and success as a city dating back to the early 18th century has been as a destination for leisure. With its Theatre, numerous restaurants and forthcoming casino development, Saw Close is highlighted in the strategy as the optimum location to build on this rich social history and create a lively and stimulating public area. Continuation of the shared space environment from Seven Dials into Saw Close will help to realise this area as a destination for cultural events, social activity and nightlife.

