



# Reviewing personal safety measures on streets in England: call for evidence

## Living Streets' response

1 September 2021

### Introduction

We are Living Streets, the UK charity for everyday walking. We want a nation where walking is the natural choice for local everyday journeys, free from congested roads and pollution, reducing the risk of preventable illnesses and social isolation and making walking the natural choice. We believe that a walking nation means progress for everyone. Our ambition is to get people of all generations to enjoy the benefits that this simple act brings and to ensure all our streets are fit for walking.

We have 41,003 active supporters and 55 local groups.

This document sets out our responses to questions contained in the [UK Government call for evidence](#) which closed in September 2021. Since we didn't respond to all questions, only those we answered are contained here.

# Response

In your opinion, which design features and street environments:

	<b>Streets?</b>	<b>Transport locations (for example bus stops, taxi ranks, rail stations)?</b>
<b>Positively impact personal safety on:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Streets are clean and in good repair</li> <li>• Good lighting.</li> <li>• Clear sightlines. Fencing and planting does not block views (passive surveillance).</li> <li>• Windows (and doors) provide passive surveillance</li> <li>• Active street frontages and the movement of people during the day and in the evening.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilities that are clean and in good repair</li> <li>• Good lighting.</li> <li>• Clear sightlines. Fencing and planting does not block views (passive surveillance)</li> <li>• Windows (and doors) providing passive surveillance</li> <li>• Active street frontages and the movement of people during the day and in the evening.</li> </ul>
<b>Negatively impact personal safety on:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Litter, graffiti and streets that are in poor repair</li> <li>• Lack of visibility, poor sightlines e.g. fencing or poorly maintained planting blocking views.</li> <li>• Poor lighting</li> <li>• No windows overlooking the street (no passive surveillance)</li> <li>• Blank frontages and closed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Litter, graffiti and facilities that are in poor repair</li> <li>• Lack of visibility, poor sightlines e.g. fencing or poorly maintained planting blocking views.</li> <li>• Poor lighting</li> <li>• No windows overlooking the facilities (no passive surveillance)</li> <li>• Blank frontages and closed</li> </ul>

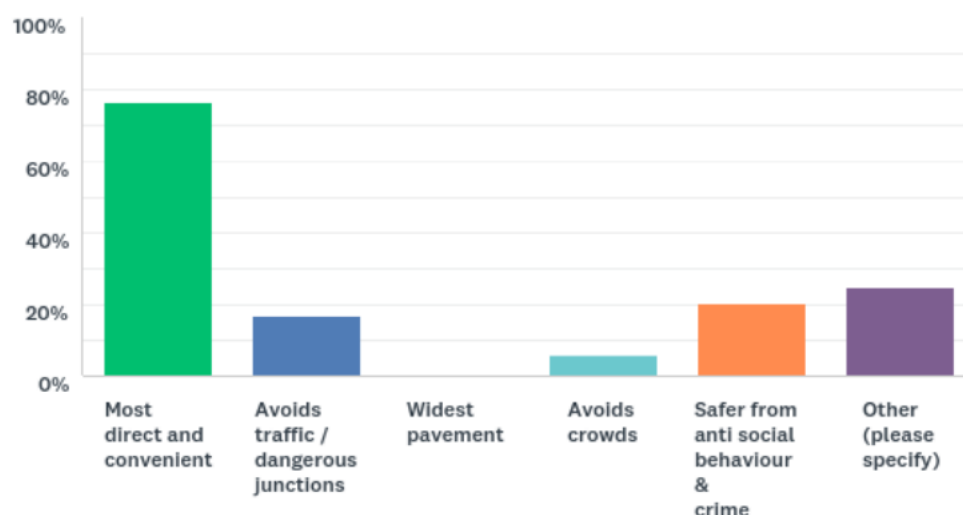
	<p>premises removing the presence of people</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tunnels and underpasses.</li> </ul>	<p>premises removing the presence of people</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to transport facilities via tunnels and underpasses.</li> </ul>
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**Which design features and street environments, in your view, can influence the perception of risk (whether people feel safe) on streets and transport locations (explain how these factors vary by demographics and, if possible, providing specific or anecdotal evidence)?**

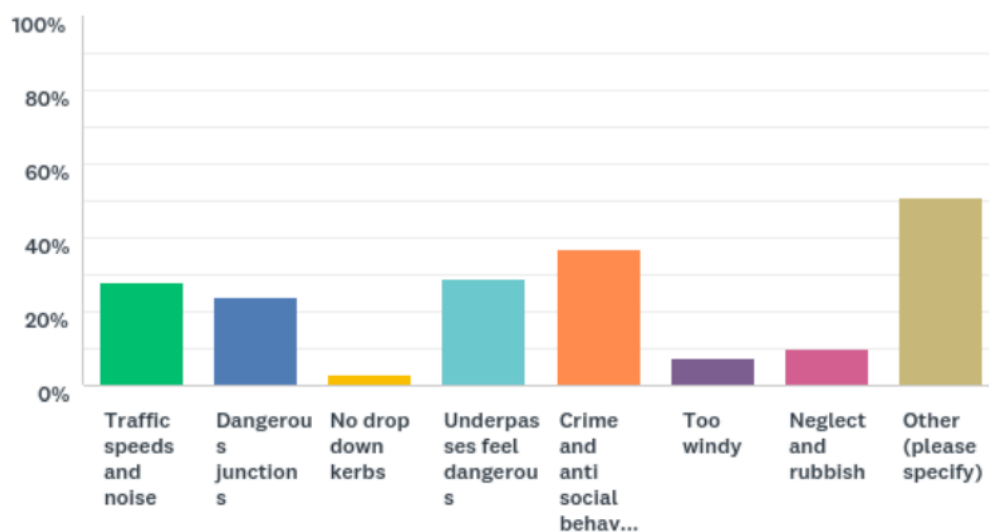
Fear of perceived and actual crime and anti-social behaviour is an issue that is often raised on Community Street Audits. This can be compounded by:

- traffic speed and volume, and severance
- Issues relating to pedestrian crossings and underpasses
- Quality and maintenance of public realm, such as: littering, street clutter, footway quality and lighting.

For example, the results of stakeholder engagement carried out by Living Streets for Redbridge Borough Council on changes to the Ilford gyratory showed that 76% of participants chose their walking route as it was the most direct and convenient choice. 16% of respondents adapted their route to avoid traffic and dangerous junctions, and 20% of respondents chose a route they considered to be least prone to anti-social behaviour and crime. Other responses included choice of route being influenced by location of bus stops, relative ease of using wheelchairs, safety and convenience when walking with children. The majority of respondents chose the most direct and convenient route regardless of other factors, with a significant minority regularly walking a less direct route to avoid actual or perceived issues they expected to encounter on their journey – see below.



Crime and anti-social behaviour was a significant factor influencing respondents' decision to avoid or change routes. 37% of respondents identified concerns about crime and anti-social behaviour as a reason to avoid particular routes and 29% specifically identified underpasses as feeling dangerous. 10% of people raised litter and lack of maintenance as an influence on route choice. 28% of people identified traffic speeds and noise as a negative factor along their route and 24% identified that dangerous junctions were an issue. 8% of respondents mentioned excessive wind speeds around the Pioneer Point area, caused by wind deflected from tall buildings in the vicinity – see below.



Changes to street design, such as avoiding enclosed spaces which can become a focus for anti-social behaviour, improving sightlines and increasing natural surveillance may address some of the concerns about crime and anti-social behaviour raised by residents. However, a coordinated approach to tackling problems identified is required with support from relevant council teams and external agencies.

**What, in your view, are examples of changes to street environments which involved users to address personal safety (including where users and communities were involved in the design of solutions either for specific projects or as a longer-term strategy)?**

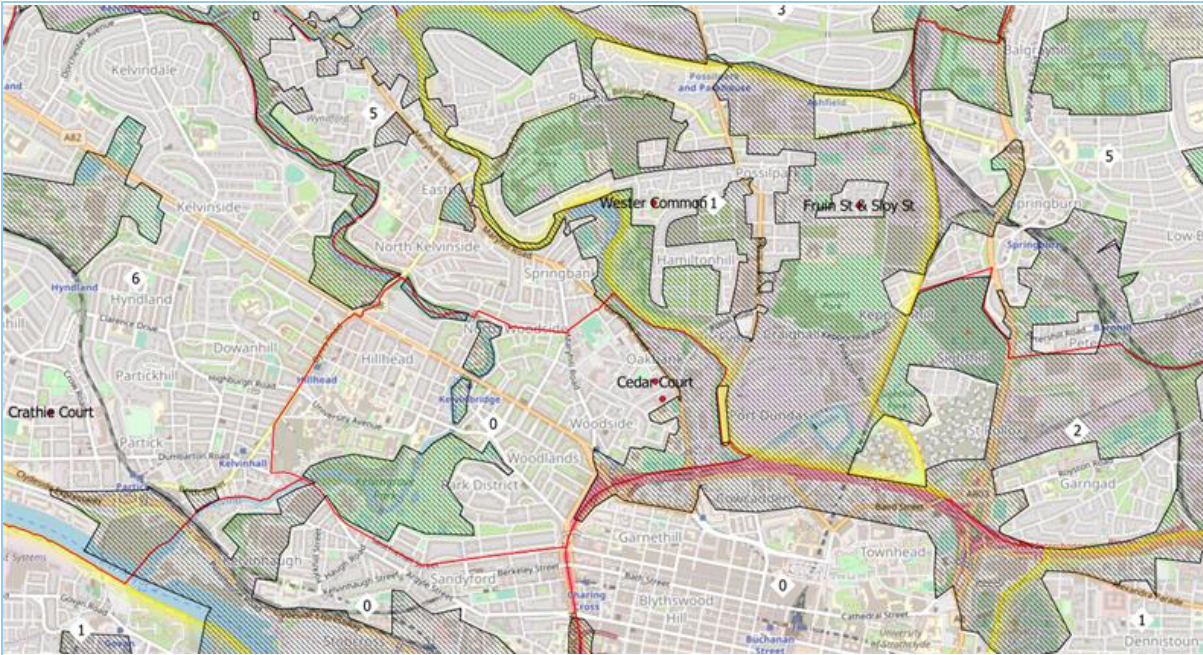
In our experience, community street audits and reviews usually make their way to Highways Teams who generally do not feel able to or even want to address the personal safety issues raised by residents because these fall outside of their remit.

**Any other comments?**

Changes to street design can help to improve personal safety, but it is urban design and land use planning that really shapes how streets are used. Street design can only make adjustments around the edges. It is essential to look at how a place functions in order to influence who is there, why they are there, what they are doing, who else may see you, where you (as a pedestrian) can escape to (and so on). Transport choices provide another layer of decision making.

Passive surveillance strategies, active uses at street level and long trading hours can help provide a safe environment day and night. We use the phrase 'passive surveillance' to refer to the way in which an area can feel more welcoming where occupied buildings have windows looking onto a street or other area. Even where a pedestrian is alone, without actual sight of other people, good passive surveillance means they do not feel isolated and that they feel to be in a 'public' area.

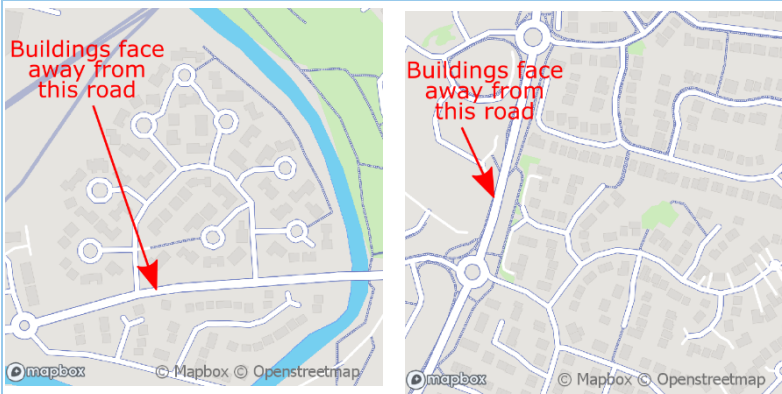
A lack of passive surveillance of a street or area can create a barrier for pedestrians, particularly after dark or later at night. In winter, many everyday journeys take place after dark. Living Streets' work in Glasgow is illustrative of the issues pedestrians face. We found that problems with a lack of passive surveillance can arise from land uses which are positive in other ways. Industrially focused areas may provide employment but become very unwelcoming out of hours. Green space is an asset for a wide range of reasons, but even well-tended parks may be unwelcoming after dark.



The map above shows well off areas with traditional tenement housing – versus the deprived areas surrounded by old industrial sites and vacant land (black hatching = lack of passive surveillance). These small islands of community are places where pedestrians will not want to walk in or out at night. People who live in expensive parts of the city can walk into town, but that those people in the poorer areas have to trek through industrial wastelands.

Some of the less obvious issues we found arose from a lack of ‘active frontage’ along a street. A lack of passive surveillance was an issue because buildings had been built to turn their back on a key route. Pedestrians could be very near to residential property or shops but passing behind or between them, or alongside walls lacking windows. In some cases, the level of passive surveillance would vary by time of day if businesses had shutters.

‘Distributor-style roads’ – a style of linking road intentionally created in car-orientated design for residential areas – are designed for the movement of vehicles and contribute to the problem. Residential and other types of property do not face onto the road. We found many locations where a road had intentionally been designed on this basis. We also often found locations where a road of this character had been allowed to develop over time.



We noted that not all areas that lacked a sense of passive surveillance felt unwelcoming after dark or later at night. The presence of other pedestrians, people cycling, or even passing vehicles, sometimes made an area more welcoming.

We also noted that in some locations the ugly environment, noise, pollution, the experience of being dazzled by headlights and splashed by vehicles, and the proximity of fast vehicles, added to levels of anxiety and discomfort. Again, different groups would be more sensitive to these signals. For some it might discourage journeys by foot whilst others might completely avoid these areas.

Photographs illustrating issues



Greenock. Route to nearest supermarket separated from major carriageway, lacking passive surveillance.



Greenock. Key route to town centre, lacking passive surveillance.



Possilpark, Glasgow. Key route toward city through former industrial area



Possilpark, Glasgow. Key route to city alongside road designed for vehicle-capacity/flow.

**For more information, please contact:**

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