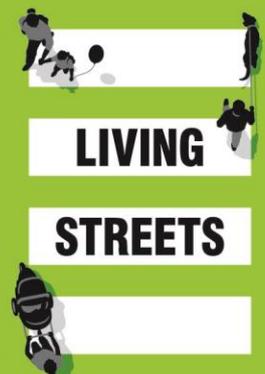


Our approach to promoting inclusive streets: position paper

We are Living Streets, the charity for everyday walking. Our mission is to achieve a better walking environment and inspire people to walk more.



Our approach to promoting inclusive streets

INTRODUCTION

This paper aims to capture and share Living Streets Scotland's work towards the promotion of inclusive streets. We are setting out our views and inviting discussion from likeminded organisations to inform our work in this area, and to support wider understanding of what we mean by inclusive streets (in concept and in practice).

What are inclusive streets?

Successful public spaces are spaces where all members of our communities can, and do, walk or wheel.

Living Streets Scotland believes everyone should have the same right and expectations of our public spaces regardless of age, disability, gender, race, or economic circumstance. This means:

- Supporting a rights-based approach in our campaigns and project delivery
- Representing pedestrians (including people who use wheelchairs and other mobility aids) as an advocate, ally, and a 'critical friend'
- Recognising that well-designed streets work for everyone, and spaces that work for people with additional access needs also work for everyone else.
- Challenging gaps in existing transport policy where systemic change is necessary to deliver sufficient space for walking.

Understanding protected characteristics

We believe street design practitioners must be proactive in considering all protected characteristics (as defined by the Equality Act 2010, listed below). This means not only addressing characteristics directly disadvantaged by physical infrastructure but considering the social and environmental barriers as well.

Age	marriage and civil	religion or belief
Disability	partnership	sex
gender reassignment	pregnancy and maternity	sexual orientation
	race	

Inclusive streets will reflect the needs of people with these protected characteristics as well the needs of people experiencing economic hardship/poverty. Some of these characteristics can be particularly overlooked, but all have a bearing on accessibility of streets and public spaces.

This is more than applying standards or carrying out an equalities impact assessment (though these are important tools). A more proactive approach is needed alongside a change in the culture of street designers and managers. Too often street design remains a non-inclusive practice because the time, resources and expertise are not available to reach the beneficiaries of policy decision and processes. Whilst not every group may want to be involved, they must have the option to be.

Principles of inclusive streets

Equity in place: Everyone has the same rights, and the same expectation of experience, of the public realm.

Enabling spaces: streets and places, through their planning, design, management, and maintenance, provide the same quality of experience for everyone by prioritising people with additional needs.

Everyone matters in street and place planning, and specific needs must be understood. Planners must engage people with protected characteristics and communities experiencing economic hardship at the heart of the process.

Diversity is success. Diversity among who can and wants to walk and wheel in public space becomes an indicator of the quality of the space.

Putting people first, not cars. Scotland's National Transport Strategy places walking at the top of the sustainable transport hierarchy. We must recognise that some people with protected characteristics are less likely to have access to vehicles and are more reliant on other forms of transport. Conversely, children, older people, people with disabilities and poorer communities often suffer most from the impact of traffic. Overall levels of traffic from private cars can be reduced while allowing car access where it is needed - e.g. for a mobility need that can't be met by alternatives.

The challenge of delivering inclusive streets

Avoiding conflict

Nothing in this paper is new in terms of policy, yet we see few of these concepts delivered successfully in practice, despite approaches such as Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs). This indicates a system change is needed. At times, there are disagreements between groups who may seem to be natural allies. There can be disagreements on what an 'accessible street' should be, and what design elements they would consider to be enabling or necessary.

Unsatisfactory outcomes

Street design is complex and change can be perceived as delivering 'winners' and 'losers'. There can be tension between organisations representing different user groups or street functions, for example between cycling advocates and disability representatives over cycling infrastructure design ('bus bypasses'), or

rebalanced spaces where pedestrians are given more priority but must share the space with cars ('shared space').

Often the response leads to overly-complicated designs, and the resulting improvements can become a poor compromise that do not work as intended. These tensions can often result in a stalemate though either perpetual consultation, or 'do nothing' being adopted as the best achievable compromise. This generates fatigue or an ongoing mistrust in the process especially where people invest time and do not see a return for their contribution.

Beyond the usual suspects

It is important to recognise that many people are effectively excluded from streets and public spaces due to social rather than physical barriers, and that a narrow focus on 'accessible streets' will not necessarily deliver spaces where everyone feels equally welcome or safe. Conversations about inclusion need to move beyond safely managing pedestrian and vehicle interactions, to broader concepts including feeling safe from falls and harm or intimidation from violence. In this respect, we particularly need to consider the issues related to age, gender, race, religion and sexual orientation, alongside hidden disabilities. This includes working on improvements to safety/perceived safety such as street lighting/safety in low light, dropped kerbs, safe crossings, streets maintenance, access to disabled parking and resting places.

Towards space equity

Despite a strong policy context, too often the discussion is too narrow and restricted by existing ideas of how streets should function to deliver traffic flow and car access as a priority. There is little discussion on what constitutes essential traffic movement, for example limiting traffic but retaining access to disabled parking or time limited access for local deliveries. This narrow approach limits our shared understanding about what is possible, and the types of design and features that can be considered. For example, limited available space puts street cafes and accessibility for walking and wheeling in conflict, but this could be avoided by creating more space for pedestrians beyond the existing pavement line.

There is further discussion to be had about whether safety design features are there to assist pedestrians or constrain their freedom. For example, controlled crossings are rightly deemed essential by many users due to the sheer volume and speed of traffic they need to navigate, but alternative options such closing streets and full pedestrianisation are rarely presented as viable options.

Raising aspirations

All users can benefit if brave decisions are taken that reduce traffic levels, reduce vehicle speeds, and allocate significantly more road space to pedestrians, active travel and sustainable public transport. Too often the most disadvantaged groups are arguing over the leftover street space. Instead they need a seat around the top table and a say about options for the whole street.

The role of Living Streets

We do not believe the situation will change through either reaffirming existing government policy (which we support) or more of the same consultation at a local level. Instead, we need alternate approaches to involving people in street design, improvement, and management. To achieve this, Living Streets will:

Involve people who use our streets and spaces every day (or, who could walk or wheel them every day if enabled to) to understand their needs and facilitate change. We want to capture and amplify the least heard voices. This includes how we evaluate our projects.

Reach out beyond existing interests. We need to proactively engage and understand the needs of people beyond groups already concerned with physical barriers to active travel.

Build shared understanding. Whilst there is much common ground, this can be obscured by a lack of a shared language and understanding of technical concepts. Different stakeholders understand concepts of access, equity, equalities and inclusiveness differently, and we believe that there is further work to be done to define 'Inclusive Streets' as an outcome that can be measured.

Build partnerships with groups representing people with additional access needs from streets and pavements, that capture the experiences and aspirations of people at a local level.

Promote the bigger picture, that moves beyond individual design concepts and their impacts on one user group. This means a deeper discussion on everyone's entitlement to streets, where movement is efficient, lingering is pleasant and safety (real or perceived) is not a concern.

Share expertise. We will collect and promote evidence from our partners, drawing on and sharing research and evaluation on inclusive streets, including from our own project experience.

Raise aspirations. We recognise that many people have low expectations of their streets and public spaces, often accepting poor quality environments as impossible to change, and often believing their own needs are a low priority.

Act as a critical friend. Although we aim to build alliances, we will also sometimes need to question assumptions or unintentional biases.

Test and learning through projects and partnerships. Our position will evolve, and we will be proactive about seeking out and building positive, productive relationships with partners outside of active travel field.

Ask for more time and resources because processes that involve people, especially reaching traditionally underrepresented groups, are undervalued. We must move from community consultation as simply an 'event', to 'community capacity building' which evolves and is sustained over a longer period of time.

Promoting better approaches: the key areas for action

Through our work we will look for:

Planning that is about placemaking. Community empowerment and ownership help facilitate active and sustainable travel, reduces reliance on private car use and supports access to town centres.

Public engagement that is honest about the scope for influence and seeks out the widest range of voices to co-produce solutions.

Capacity for change, because time and processes must reflect each community's starting point and scope to learn. If the capacity in any part of the community is limited, then it must be boosted even if this takes time and resources.

Design guidance which evidence-based, prioritises those with highest need first and delivers the Transport Hierarchy. Essential access for vehicles is better defined, especially where access to a car and disabled parking meets an accessibility need.

Street management that is proactive in removing barriers to walking and reduces reliance on private cars, and locally accountable to user groups.

Maintenance: allocation of spend on maintenance that prioritises those with greatest need; improved understanding of the impact of maintenance decisions on 'vulnerable' pedestrians.

Further information

If you would like to help us develop our work on inclusive streets, please contact scotland@livingstreets.org.uk or ring 0131 243 2645.

Thanks to the organisations that gave feedback on this paper, including Mobility and Access Committee for Scotland (MACS).