

MANCHESTER CITY COUNCIL

REPORT FOR INFORMATION

COMMITTEE: Communities and Neighbourhoods Overview and Scrutiny

DATE: 11th December 2007

SUBJECT: Accessible Neighbourhoods – Footpaths and Highways

REPORT OF: Head of Engineering Services and Head of Planning

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

To look at how accessible the footpaths and highways in our local communities are for pedestrians and particularly for specific groups such as the disabled and older people (safety) and the legal position relating to enforcement of pavement parking.

To look at the Planning approach in relation to shops displaying goods and advertisements on frontages and the intrusion that it can cause.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Committee:

- notes the content of this report;
- indicates its support for the key areas of activity

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS FOR THE REVENUE AND CAPITAL BUDGET

Physical schemes to support pedestrian activity are budgeted for within the City Council's LTP Highways Capital Budget and Neighbourhood Renewal Funds.

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BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Greater Manchester Local Transport Plan (GMLTP)
Greater Manchester Walking Strategy

Guide to Development Supplementary Planning Document and Planning Guidance; adopted in April 2007.
Design for Access 2

WARDS AFFECTED

All

IMPLICATIONS FOR

Employment	Environment	Anti- Poverty	Equality	Human Rights
Yes	Yes	No	No	No

Implications for Employment:

Promotion of walking as a sustainable mode of transport can increase accessibility and safer routes to employment centres. Health improvements brought about by increased levels of walking can enable individuals to access the job market.

Implications for Environment:

Pedestrian improvement schemes include a range of measures that benefit the environment:

- through improved public realm and footway provision, local environments become more attractive;
- walking activity programmes can increase use of and access to local parks and green spaces;
- as more people shift their mode of travel away from the private car to walking benefits arise in terms of a reduction in levels of congestion and improvements in air quality.

1. INTRODUCTION

The creation of Neighbourhoods of Choice has been identified as one of the core drivers of success for the city of Manchester. The priority is to create truly sustainable communities where people choose to live because of the quality of life on offer; to create neighbourhoods that are clean, green and free from crime.

The council aims to contribute to the creation of Neighbourhoods of Choice by:

- Promoting a quality physical environment and a sense of place
- Building and sustaining a sense of community and neighbourhood pride
- Developing quality district and neighbourhood centres
- Ensuring quality and choice of housing
- Ensuring safer communities
- Building on the quality and reputation of schools and other public services.

Neighbourhoods with good pedestrian environments encourage the gathering of people to socialise, they are places that people want to visit and enjoy. Improving the pedestrian environment helps develop the local economy, increases activity in the district centres and the city centre and eases access to local schools, shops, health facilities, libraries and other amenities.

The pedestrian routes in and around local communities are key factors to achieving these aspirations. Pedestrian movement forms part of most journeys and is the key to sustainable travel both in its own right and as a means of interchange with other modes of transport. Walking should be the first choice for local access because it is direct, safe and pleasant. For some, whether through disability, age or health, walking is not a choice, but opportunities for personal mobility and access need to be available.

The Greater Manchester Local Transport Plan acknowledges that the current pedestrian environment needs improving and encourages walking as part of the sustainable transport system. Conditions for walking are being improved through a range of activities, including the Quality Bus Corridors, where pedestrian facilities are routinely put in or improved, through highway maintenance and improvement schemes, and by the health sector promoting the benefits of walking and cycling.

Manchester has introduced traffic free streets (in the city centre), traffic calmed streets, new pedestrian crossings, improved pedestrian crossing facilities at junctions, dropped kerbs, pedestrian signage and better footways as part of highway maintenance and environmental improvement programmes.

Travel co-ordinators and road safety officers have targeted walking in their work with schools. School travel planning includes improving facilities and removing localised congestion, whilst working in conjunction with school crossing patrol and road safety education services.

The aim of this report is to highlight a range of activities carried out over the past few years which have resulted in improvements to conditions for pedestrians.

2. PEDESTRIANISATION / TRAFFIC FREE STREETS

Pedestrianisation schemes play a significant role in the city centre. They help to reduce the possible conflict between high volumes of pedestrians and vehicles. The expanding core pedestrian area started with the retail areas of Market Street and King Street and has been extended to St. Ann's Square and Piccadilly. Most recently an improved pedestrian environment has been implemented in the Cross Street/Corporation Street area with the streets closed to vehicles during the peak pedestrian periods.

Whilst considering all the issues associated with changes required because of the opening of the Shudehill Transport Interchange, the problem of pedestrian safety was reviewed, particularly at the junction of Cross St, Corporation St and Market St. This section of highway was re-opened in 1999, as part of the redevelopment following the 1996 bombing; however since its re-opening there had been a substantial number of serious collisions mainly involving pedestrians and buses. A Prohibition of Driving Order restricting vehicular movements, with some exceptions, along Cross Street, Corporation Street and Market Street was implemented in late 1999; however the scheme was wholly reliant upon Police enforcement.

Evidence showed that many drivers ignored the Prohibition of Driving Order, resulting in 47 collisions in the 5-year period prior to the introduction of the current scheme. Of these 47 collisions, 6 resulted in serious injury and 1 in a fatality. Of the 49 casualties that resulted from the 47 collisions, 43 involved a pedestrian.

An Experimental Order restricting access between the hours of 11am and 7pm on Cross Street, Corporation Street and St. Mary's Gate, to all vehicles except Metroshuttle buses and emergency vehicles was introduced January 2006. Signage was implemented on the approach to these roads to warn drivers of the restricted access and to ensure that the restriction was self-enforcing automated bollards were implemented. The operational hours were selected because all the Killed or Seriously Injured (KSI) collisions occurred during these hours and this coincided with the highest pedestrian footfall in this area.

In the initial few months following the introduction of the Experimental Order there were over 15 damage only collisions, identified by CCTV, bus operators and Council staff. The majority of these collisions occurred because of vehicles attempting to tailgate Metroshuttle buses and impacting the bollards whilst operational. A large number of collisions took place in the months immediately following implementation of the bollards, thereafter the frequency of collisions reduced significantly.

The Experimental Order was considered successful, during the trial 6 slight injury collisions were recorded along Corporation Street and St. Mary's Gate. Of these 6 collisions, 4 were because of vehicles striking the bollards. The other 2 occurred at the junction of Corporation Street and Market Street and both involved the pedestrian entering the carriageway. However, these two collisions occurred some distance from the bollards and outside of the operational hours.

Following consultation, a Permanent Traffic Regulation Order was made in July 2007. The order is self enforcing, limiting the number of vehicles passing through Cross Street, Corporation Street and Market Street by the automatic bollards positioned on these carriageways.

Prior to the Experimental Order and bollards being implemented 43 pedestrian collisions occurred at times when concentrations of pedestrians were at their highest. The bollards have been successful in reducing the number of pedestrian collisions, with only 2 occurring post implementation (both outside of the operational hours) – a reduction of 95%.

3. ACCESSING CENTRES

The Greater Manchester Walking Strategy and Local Transport Plan acknowledges the benefits of identifying Key Routes and Destinations as a means of developing work programmes to assist pedestrian movements.

A Key Destination is somewhere to which people are likely to walk for example city or district centres, major employment sites, public transport interchanges, parks and recreational areas, retail centres/streets, hospital, educational establishment or a leisure facility.

A Key Route is one, which has a significant purpose, linking two or more Key Destinations together. They are usually characterised by high pedestrian flow rates, but may not fulfil their potential because of any number of reasons.

City Centre

City Centre improvements expressly for pedestrians have centred around public realm and footway improvements using high quality paving; these schemes have included improvements to lighting and street furniture and tree planting. New or upgraded pedestrian crossing facilities have been installed to facilitate pedestrian movement across the city centre; the Controlled Parking Zone (CPZ) has rationalised on-street parking and increased the provision of “disabled” parking.

A review of the pedestrian signing in the city centre took place in 2002 and a number of issues were identified. As a result, 70 finger post signs were erected across the city centre. The product proved to be of a high quality and the signing network has been added to over the past few years so that there are now some 118 finger posts across the city centre.

District Centres

Some district centres such as Wythenshawe and Harpurhey have benefited from significant investment which has enabled pedestrian improvements to be implemented as part of the redevelopment. Others such as Levenshulme, Didsbury and Chorlton have had their pedestrian environments improved as a result of transport improvements associated with the introduction of Quality Bus

Corridors. Yet further centres such as Rusholme, Cheetham Hill and Longsight have had a range of transport and regeneration improvements which have combined to improve pedestrian facilities.

Improvements specifically for pedestrians include new upgraded pedestrian crossing facilities to assist movement across arterial routes; carriageway narrowing and junction plateau; rationalisation of on-street parking; footway and street environment improvements using paving that is fit for purpose; improved lighting; tree planting; street furniture and street art to emphasise the area identity; and improved pedestrian signing.

Gorton and Cheetham Hill are district centres which are have currently planned retail improvements which will bring with them improved pedestrian facilities over the next few years.

Quality Bus Corridors

Quality Bus Corridors (QBC's) are not just about introducing bus lanes; each of the corridors is different and has different demands placed upon it. A range of measures can be taken to suit the needs of the local community and these include pedestrian facilities.

In June 2007 a satisfaction survey was carried out in Didsbury District Centre following completion of a major QBC scheme. The survey included a sample of pedestrians, cyclists, bus users and motorists. Local traders were also interviewed. Almost 75% of visitors to Didsbury travelled there on foot or by bus. Overall the majority were satisfied or very satisfied with the improvements to facilities, in particular the improvements to the bus shelter and pedestrian facilities. Likewise most traders were generally satisfied or very satisfied with the various improvements and agreed that similar improvements would benefit other district centres in Manchester.

These encouraging results indicate that holistic and integrated highway improvements can provide a range of benefits to all road users.

4. ROAD CROSSINGS

Pedestrian crossing facilities play a major role in alleviating some of the conflict between pedestrians and other road users. An increase in the number of appropriately sited pedestrian crossings helps to create more direct, safer routes. Many controlled and uncontrolled crossing facilities have been installed across the city as part of casualty reduction schemes. These include signalised junctions in the city centre and district centres; puffin crossings on busy roads; pedestrian refuges on wider roads that have pedestrian demands over shorter periods of the day or have lower pedestrian demands than busier streets; zebra crossings where a road is not wide enough for a refuge.

Where feasible long pedestrian waiting times are reduced and greater consideration is given to the directness of pedestrian routes. Subways and

footbridges are sometimes the only feasible option for crossing major roads safely, but the inherent personal safety issues in using such facilities has led to a reduction in their effectiveness as crossings. For existing facilities it is essential that they are well lit with good levels of visibility and natural surveillance, and are well maintained to reduce the perceived or real risk of attack.

There are 522 signal installations throughout Manchester, of which over 80% have pedestrian facilities. Approximately half of the installations with pedestrian facilities are at junctions, the other half are pelican or puffin, mid-point crossings.

Since April 2005 there have been 48 new installations of pedestrian facilities to the existing network. This includes new puffins or toucans and new or modified junctions with new pedestrian facilities. In addition, a number of facilities have been upgraded to bring them in line with current electrical safety standards. All new or modified controlled crossings are installed as compliant with the latest Department for Transport standards which includes facilities for disabled people.

5. MAINTENANCE OF FOOTWAYS

Maintaining and managing the use of footways and pedestrian routes is an essential aspect of upgrading the walking experience. This could include widening footways, non-slip surfaces, consistent provision of dropped crossings, good signing, removal of obstructions, including prevention of parking on footways where appropriate and improved enforcement of Traffic Regulation Orders, better street cleansing and lighting. It remains important that the pedestrian network is aesthetically attractive and reflects the character of the local area in an appropriate manner.

Highway maintenance involves a variety of activities associated with ensuring the pedestrian network is satisfactorily maintained.

Reactive Maintenance

Reactive Maintenance is usually small scale repairs undertaken to ensure the safety of the public at specific locations, includes:

- Mitigation Repairs - repairs to defects identified during regular inspections;
- Reports Repairs – urgent action following reports from the public;
- Emergency Repairs - action instigated in response to specific incidents e.g. flooding, subsidence, cavities.

Planned Maintenance

Planned maintenance is work that involves a number of specific programmes:

- Structural Maintenance - involves works which safeguards the fabric of the highway network, including footway reconstruction and resurfacing;
- Major Repairs - area based packages of repairs which may include surface repairs to either footways or carriageways;

- Routine Maintenance - programmed repairs to street nameplates, road signs, road markings and street furniture;
- Cyclic Maintenance - works such as gully cleaning which is undertaken on predetermine routes on a regular basis;
- Winter Services - gritting, maintenance of grit bins and snow clearance that is necessary to ensure the safety of the travelling public, generally between October and April each year. Although this concentrates mostly on roads, footways are cleared and gritted during severe weather.

6. LOCAL ACCESS ROUTES

The Local Access Routes programme is the main reactive provision for disabled people. Pre-planned work mentioned in the above sections of this report is designed to Design for Access 2 to be inclusive for all users including disabled people.

The Access Officer, who is based in Forward Planning, receives a request from a client either directly or via other agencies. The Officer visits the client and agrees the best route from their home to local facilities such as shops, doctor's surgery, etc. The Officer records the site visit, including photos, and then makes a recommendation regarding the request, advising the client accordingly. If the route is viable, the Access Officer liaises with Engineering Services to ensure that an accessible route - with dropped kerbs and tactile paving - is provided from their home to these facilities.

Over the past few years between 8 and 13 routes have been installed each year.

7. PLANNING APPROACH TO SHOPS DISPLAYING GOODS AND ADVERTISEMENTS ON FRONTAGES

The planning system is an effective mechanism for ensuring inclusive environments. Planning proposals are considered against the Guide to Development Supplementary Planning Document and Planning Guidance which was adopted in April 2007. This planning policy specifically addresses the issue of disability, and requires fully accessible and inclusive design in all developments. Further guidance is provided in Design for Access 2, which was produced jointly by the city council and Manchester Disabled Peoples Access Group with full consultation with members of the Access Review Forum. Together these two documents ensure that new buildings and places are designed to be used equally by all.

Whilst the planning process can require new environments to be fully accessible, there are legacies from the past which still represent access challenges. One positive response to improving access for people is the Local Access Route scheme, which is detailed in section 6 of this report. A further opportunity is given through the planning application and enforcement process.

It is the case that the forecourt of any premises can be used ancillary to the primary operation, without the need for any further planning permission. This can

give rise to traders using the forecourts to display their goods which can hinder the free movement of pedestrians and disabled people by increasing the potential hazards for the highway users. Whilst such uses are outside planning control, at those sites which are subject to planning applications, including retrospective applications for the erection of canopies, a restrictive condition can be applied which will control the proximity of the forecourt trading to the highway, thereby allowing people to freely pass. The condition used will require that no goods will be displayed within 1 metre of the back of the pavement, therefore creating a service area and minimising any customer conflict with pedestrians. This is a process that can be adopted across the city.

Where obstructions of the public footway, (e.g. A-board signs or food produce) are reported, a Street Environment Manager or a Highways Inspector will visit the location and inform the offending business or property owner that under the Highways Act it is an offence to wilfully obstruct the public highway. The Inspector or SEM will request that the offending obstruction is removed and in most cases this is sufficient for the matter to be resolved.

Where the offence continues the business / property owner will be sent a letter, serving notice that the Council will remove the offending item if it is not removed immediately. If the obstruction is still not removed, Council staff will visit the premises, sometimes with the Police, and seize all items that are causing an obstruction. The owner of the items can be fined for the offence and for the storage and recovery of the items.

In those rare cases where items are causing a danger to the public by causing a complete obstruction the Council can remove them immediately without the need for prior notification.

8. RIGHTS OF WAY – THE OFF-ROAD NETWORK

Rights of Way Improvement Plan (RoWIP)

Manchester City Council published its first Rights of Way Improvement Plan (RoWIP) in November 2007.

The aspirations of the Manchester RoWIP include the wider range of access opportunities, both statutory and non-statutory, which are available to local people. Manchester is one of only a few authorities in the country to have a Rights of Way network of less than 100km in total length. However, in addition to the Rights of Way, there are many opportunities for wider access across the city using permissive paths and other routes such as cycle tracks.

The purpose of the Manchester RoWIP is summarised by the vision statement:

“To develop a functional, adaptable off-road network which meets the current and future needs of the people of Manchester; and promotes and supports the development of sustainable communities.”

The off-road network is a key facilitator of sustainable travel, both in its own right and as a means of interchange with other modes of transport. The off-road network should be the first choice for local access because it is direct, safe and pleasant.

Creating a more functional off-road network can encourage more people to walk or cycle and this in turn, through increased usage, can help provide a better environment. It can help increase social interaction, improve the local economy and improve people's wellbeing. Relative to the cost of building new roads, the off-road network is more cost effective to provide.

The Manchester RoWIP will become an integral part of the transport plan for Manchester and will support the objectives outlined in the GMLTP2 and Walking Strategy respectively.

Improvements to Public Rights of Way

Manchester has approximately 75km of public right of way which are maintained to a very basic level through a modest LTP Capital budget allocation.

In carrying out asset and condition audits in preparation for drafting the RoWIP it was recognised that with existing funding levels many paths were not fulfilling their full potential because they were in a condition that was unattractive or unsuitable for regular use.

The situation fuelled a successful bid for funding from the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund under the Transport Thematic Partnership's Sustainable Travel allocation. Grants totalling £110k were made over the financial years 2005/6 and 2006/seven. Some additional financial support was made from the LTP Capital allocation and significant financial assistance has been provided in some locations by the Cycling Officer and the Irk Valley Project.

'Walk This Way' was the resulting project aimed to prioritise those rights of way which had fallen into disuse or were perceived to be under utilised because of their poor condition. A list of potential candidates was made from which - following consultation with the public, ward co-ordination and potential partners - two annual programmes were implemented.

Feedback from the schemes has been overwhelmingly positive and although no formal counts have been taken, use would seem to have been significantly increased and broadened.

9. PAVEMENT PARKING

Vehicles parking on the footway or verge can cause damage, danger and obstruction to road users especially pedestrians but particularly disabled people, the visually impaired, elderly and those with prams or pushchairs. Such parking

can also cause environmental damage to kerbs and surfacing, grassed areas and the utilities underneath the footway. Repairing damage can be costly and there is potential for the City Council to be faced with claims for injuries received because of damaged or defective surfaces.

Environmental Services regularly receive requests to enforce pavement parking and it is clearly an issue for many residents. Street Environment Managers, who regularly liaise with Members, Ward Coordinators and residents associations, have also raised this as a significant issue in certain wards. However, under existing legislation and traffic orders it is not unlawful to park on the pavement unless the street is subject to parking restrictions (yellow lines).

As a trial, it is proposed to introduce a prohibition of pavement parking Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) on a route within Manchester where there is a current problem causing danger to pedestrians. Motorists who obstruct the footway on this route would be liable to receive a penalty charge notice.

The Council's Legal Services have advised that a specific TRO for each location where a danger/obstruction/damage is being committed will be required. Justification is required for each selected location, prior to inclusion in the order. Consultation will take place with residents, Traffic, Emergency Services and other agencies, as with any Traffic Order, and there will be the opportunity for objections to be considered.

In addition to the issues raised there are some locations where parked cars on very wide footways can result in traffic flow issues, particularly during the peak periods. A few randomly parked cars along both sides of a road can reduce a dual carriageway to one lane in each direction. Consequently, buses accessing existing bus stops are forced to wait in the single live traffic lane thus bringing all traffic to a halt. On-footpath parking is also carried out in a random manner causing unnecessary difficulties for pedestrians, particularly the disabled.

A trial scheme on Rochdale Road south of Victoria Avenue is currently underway to provide wholly on-footpath parking areas. The parking areas are clearly identified with markings and signs, resulting in an unobstructed footway for pedestrians and a passable carriageway for vehicles.

10. CONCLUSION

There are a variety of activities currently being carried out or planned which will improve access for all pedestrians, including disabled and elderly people, to a range of community services. Despite this there is always room for further improvement and the Committee's views on what further actions should be considered would be welcomed.

