

Home Zone Report

1.0 Introduction

This report is a community response to the published ideals of the Bristol Local Transport Plan. We believe that the characteristics of the Ashley Vale area of St Werburghs make it highly suitable for the implementation of a Home Zone. Relevant features of the area include low traffic movements, a network of varied routes (especially cycling and pedestrian) permeating the area, a number of families with small children, a popular family attraction in St Werburghs City Farm and a developing self-determining community that believes in self-help.

2.0 The Area and Local Community

The area north of Mina Road tunnel, historically called Ashley Vale, is a small neighbourhood in the northern part of St Werburghs. It is an inner city area with a unique 'country' feel as it is surrounded by allotments and green spaces. It has a diverse mix of land use including Edwardian Housing, Light Industrial Units, The Farm Pub, St Werburghs City Farm, Ashley Vale Allotments, Hopetoun House, Narrowways Millennium Green and the proposed AVAG Self Build housing and community office/workshop. The houses lie along three streets – Hopetoun Road, Watercress Road and the northern section of Mina Road. There is a track – Boiling Wells Lane – that leads through to the next valley composed mainly of smallholdings.

The area, being topographically isolated and distinct, has traditionally had a strong community. The achievements to date of the Ashley Vale Action Group (AVAG) in its attempts to purchase the disused scaffolding yard in the area has strengthened the community still further. AVAG is a non-profit making company composed of residents living in Ashley Vale working voluntarily. Its aims are: to refurbish and rent the existing office block; to enable a separate group of self-builders to build 22 homes; to design and build six Housing Association homes; and to design and manage the open spaces and roads within the site. AVAG's aims are community-orientated and the formation of the group has helped bring the community together in a unique manner.

3.0 The Area's Suitability for a Home Zone

The only through routes in the area (and the Boiling Wells valley) are pedestrian/cyclist and consequently there are easily fewer than 100 car movements an hour – the nationally agreed criteria that is a prerequisite for Home Zone status. Although there are low car movements, unsuitably high speeds are often witnessed, especially of visitors to certain attractions in the area.

A major reason why many families locate in Ashley Vale are the facilities offered to small children. The City Farm is a magnet for children and the adjoining playground is often

busy. The City Farm Café and Farm Pub also attract visiting families. Although the playground and City Farm are ideally placed in a quiet street, the present layout of the road (with through traffic to the allotments) still presents a danger to small children. Advisory Keep Clear markings are often ignored and children run between parked vehicles between the playground and the animal pens. The City Farm offers an after school club and they have expressed interest in removing the divide created by the road. They would like to have skipping games and the like but do not have the space in the playground or Community Building. The City Farm offers horticultural therapy to mentally and physically disabled persons and the Sunshine Coach visits once a week, yet to ensure their safety these visitors have to form a train when they travel between different Farm sites. There is clearly a need here to rethink the current road layout.

The popularity of the City Farm and the Pub together with the presence of other thriving businesses in the area, means that the demand for parking is quite variable. During busy periods, such as hot summer days, demand is high; at other times, demand is relatively low. A parking survey is ongoing, but records since July show that saturation never quite occurs. Of the 64 No spaces available the survey has only found a maximum of 49 No of these spaces taken up, but it must be noted that on this occasion an additional 11 No vehicles were anti-socially parked on the Keep Clear markings. But despite these busy periods, Ashley Vale has quite a low on-street parking requirement. This is for several reasons: there is a low car ownership of residents; a private garage offers parking for 22 cars; trade vehicles are parked off street; and the mix of uses spread the requirement over 24 hours. But given that experts predict a 20% rise in car ownership over the next 10 years and 50% over 20 years, it is important to be proactive and to act now before a significant parking problem emerges. The wide streets (12 to 14m) in Ashley Vale lend themselves to an improved parking layout. There is enough space for creative solutions while enabling the access of larger service vehicles.

Although Ashley Vale and the Boiling Wells Valley have no through route for vehicles, the area is permeated by many footpaths and tracks. Sustrans own the footpath between Station Road and the City Farm and intend to upgrade it to a cycle path. There are aspirations to have a Greenway along Boiling Wells Lane. Leisure Services are in the process of constructing a footpath link between Ashley Hill/Ashley Down Road and Ashley Vale Cottage. This area is a prime site for demonstrating and encouraging travel by sustainable means.

Recent community-led actions have led to a growing sense of self-determination in the area but, like many inner city areas, it does also have its fair share of problems. Despite the presence of some poor housing stock, the area missed out on the St Werburghs and St Agnes Area Improvement Scheme and is not included in schemes planned for the Ashley area. However, part of the AVAG Self Build Scheme includes the renovation of the existing office block in order to generate income for the community. Everyone will have a say in how this money is spent. This spending power will help sustain a community that is prepared to find creative solutions to the neighbourhood's problems, but is unlikely to become available for several years. Initial funding of a Home Zone scheme by the Council would help ensure that the community's plans to redevelop the area can be realised.

4.0 The Consultation Process

The December 2000 issue of the 'Home Zone News' reported that community consultation is the key to a successful project. Bottom-up initiation by the community was very successful in the Leeds Methleys pilot scheme. Bristol City Council has embarked on two Council Led Home Zone pilots. The Bristol Local Transport Plan supports, in principle, the values of a Home Zone but reiterates that consultation and residential approval is paramount.

In order to test the feasibility of a Home Zone scheme in the Ashley Vale area with a view to applying for funding, several residents have undertaken a community consultation. A previous consultation exercise, overseen by a consultant from the Neighbourhood Initiatives Foundation and conducted during The City Farm Summer Fair in June 2000, had already indicated that there was likely to a high level of support for the idea. Of the 250 local people who filled in a questionnaire, 97% agreed that priority of road use in the area should to be given to pedestrians and cyclists (see enclosed report).

The follow-up consultation was focussed entirely on questions of road use and layout, and directed specifically at those people living and working in the immediate neighbourhood. To help inform this phase of the consultation, a tentative Home Zone plan for the area was produced. The plan showed build-outs, chicanes and humps to calm traffic entering the area. It also demonstrated perpendicular and chevron parking, and the use of planters and bollards to control it. The plan shows the use grass grids (perforated concrete pavers that allow grass to grow within them) to emphasis the green 'rural' feel that the area already enjoys. Two detailed plans were produced – an area-wide Home Zone plan and a phase 1 plan (shown in Appendix 1). The different phases of development are outlined on an accompanying plan.

Residents were first introduced to the Home Zone concept in the late summer when a pamphlet and video was circulated around a number of houses. In the week commencing 3rd December, two residents who had been briefed on the proposed Home Zone scheme visited all the houses in the area to discuss the ideas in detail and to administer a brief questionnaire (see Appendix 2). The questionnaire was designed to enable residents to approve or disapprove of the crucial aspects of a Home Zone and to give them the opportunity to comment on any aspect that concerned them. This preliminary consultation was able to gauge the general reaction towards the Home Zone concept and its application to this area. The results are discussed below.

5.0 Results and Analysis of the Preliminary Consultation Process

Of the 39 homes in the area, 38 were approached (one is unoccupied) along with two of the businesses (the City Farm and the Farm Pub). 30 of the homes and both the businesses returned a completed questionnaire giving an 80% response rate. In all, completed questionnaires were returned by 36 individuals. This is an extremely high response compared to, say, the 47 % response rate of the Leeds Methleys consultation exercise.

The distribution of responses is shown in Figure 1 and copies of the completed questionnaires are shown in Appendix 2.

An analysis of the results demonstrates the following: -

- Over 95% of consultees agreed with the concept of a Home Zone for this area. Interestingly, very few returns were neutral indicating some degree of understanding or appreciation of the concept.
- No respondent disagreed with the provision of traffic calming in the area. This would indicate the feeling that most residents are unhappy about the common occurrence of speeding vehicles.
- There was evidence of concern with respect to residents parking. Although 80% agreed that an improvement along the lines suggested in the phase 1 plan was acceptable, some people noted that the exact layout of parking arrangements would be important. The consultation has indicated that parking issues will rank highly in any new scheme and will have to be dealt with sensitively and with a consensus of opinion.
- Softening the hard landscape with planting scored highly with 95% agreement. However, 5% strongly disagreed with the idea of planting, in the case of one person because of worries about hay fever.
- There was strong support for the provision of a child's play area within the Home Zone. 89% agreed with 9% remaining neutral. This level of support is probably a result of the large number of families with small children in the area. One person strongly disagreed.
- Cycle facilities gained strong support with over 90% of respondents agreeing with provisions for cyclists. This may indicate a desire to promote cycling as the preferred mode of transport rather than the car.

In addition to giving quantitative responses, respondents were also invited to write down any comments they wished to make and 24 respondents did so. Indeed, one person wrote a page and a half! These comments are particularly useful in providing an insight into what the key issues will be for this Home Zone scheme and will help in targeting specific questions for future consultation rounds.

Many comments were highly supportive of the various Home Zone ideals like planting and giving pedestrians and cyclists priority. As such they reinforce the results shown in the quantitative data. Other comments help indicate the precise nature of any concerns. For instance, there was concern over what form the traffic calming and parking arrangements would take: 'Depends on exactly what these consist of ...'. The benefits of redesigned parking were weighed against convenience and needs: 'practicality of being able to drive and park near your home', 'need to consider needs of farm visitors and provision of disabled users'. Others indicated that parked cars could present an eyesore: 'Car parking bays should be sensitively placed and screened from houses...' or that they should be discouraged altogether: 'cars only allowed until car sharing scheme established'

Speeding vehicles were highlighted as a problem: 'will one day cause a fatal accident ..', 'I don't wish to see another child in hospital...'. Not everyone wanted children's play areas

and one person suggested that they should be 'placed away from where they may cause nuisance ...'. Some suggested that the whole area needed improving with one person noting the 'decrepitude of the built environment...' and the need for 'high quality materials and enduring design to inject a sense of respect...' Another person pointed out that 'original cobbles...' still exist under some of the current road surfaces. Respondents also revealed a desire for on-going consultation saying that they would 'welcome further consultation' and one person stated that all ideas 'should be subject to rigorous consultation of all residents in the street and not just the few ...'.

6.0 Conclusions and The Way Ahead

This preliminary consultation exercise demonstrates that there is overwhelming support amongst residents for a Home Zone in Ashley Vale. The idea is also supported by the City Farm and the Farm Pub. High levels of response in all aspects of the questionnaire express the community's desire to tackle difficult issues and see improvement in the area. Recent projects in the area have led to positive and proactive community actions which have helped strengthen community relations. This area is therefore ideally suited for the application of 'The Dutch Model' of Home Zone, and could provide an example of how 'bottom-up' community involvement can achieve a degree of self-determination.

Home Zones are expensive and draw on scarce Local Authority budgets. They cannot be introduced into an area without a combination of factors contributing to a satisfactory cost-benefit. Slowing vehicle speeds down, reducing casualties (particularly amongst young children), improving the local environment and reducing the dependency on the car are all improvements that can be attained in Ashley Vale. The community wants to be proactive in attempting to gain these benefits. It has a series of ideas to support its application for Local Authority funding to start a Home Zone. There are plans to set up a car club once the community office block is up and running, thereby reducing parking demand, and other plans to introduce electrically-assisted bicycles powered by solar panels.

The high level of support for road re-landscaping and traffic calming, together with the proactive and creative attitude of this community, make the Ashley Vale area an ideal location for a community-led Home Zone scheme.