



Executive
15 February 2011

**Report from the Director of
Environment and Neighbourhood
Services**

Wards Affected:
ALL

The Brent Placemaking Guide

1.0 Summary

- 1.1 The Brent Placemaking Guide has been developed in order to support and advise all those whose work impacts on the design of the public realm. In advocating a greater focus on good urban design, it responds to recent government advice and best practice guidance on how to create successful places. In time, its use will improve the quality of the Public Realm in Brent.
- 1.2 This report briefly summarises the content of the Brent Placemaking Guide and seeks the Committees approval to formally adopt the Guide as design guidance to be used by officers across the Council.
- 1.2 The Guide is shown at Appendix A.

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 That the Executive approves the Brent Placemaking Guide.
- 2.2 Note that the Director of Environment & Neighborhood Services, in consultation with the Director of Regeneration & Major Projects will arrange a series of design workshops across council departments to ensure that the advice and guidance given in the guide is adopted and understood by all council staff whose work impacts on the design of Brent's public realm.

3.0 Details

- 3.1 The Brent Placemaking Guide provides a means to deliver excellence in the borough's public realm through good urban design. It aims to achieve a safe, attractive, accessible and inclusive environment by setting out public realm policy and design guidelines and specifications for materials, street furniture and the layout of streets and spaces that fall within the control of the council.

- 3.2 It also seeks to develop civic pride and foster a sense of public ownership in the streetscene and looks at ways of encouraging the use of streets and spaces for community activities.
- 3.3 The Guide is intended to deliver a base level of good quality and a stylistically consistent public realm throughout the borough. In this respect, it details a limited palette of good quality materials and street furniture which can be used in all streets in Brent.
- 3.4 While the Guide recognises that a more individual and bespoke approach may be appropriate in specific locations for example town centres, the overarching design principles, objectives and approach outlined in the Guide are applicable universally within Brent.

Who is the Guide For?

- 3.5 The Guide has been produced for all those whose work impacts on the public realm. This embraces officers in the Directorate of Neighbourhood Services particularly Transportation and Streetcare Services and in the Directorate of Regeneration & Major Projects, but would also include other officers across the Council involved in shaping public spaces in the Borough. Successful public realm design depends on different professional disciplines working together and in collaboration with a wide range of other people whose views and decisions matter. The Guide will therefore also be relevant to contractors, developers, statutory authorities, local groups, residents and businesses.

Content of the Guide

- 3.6 A summary of the content of the Guide is provided at Appendix B. The Guide is shown at Appendix A.
- 3.7 The Guide advocates good urban design. Urban design is about places, how they function and evolve sustainably, how to make them vibrant and vital, how to look after them, how to make them successful. It is also about people and communities and improving the quality of life by providing an attractive and safe street environment and enhancing people's experience of their local neighbourhoods.
- 3.8 The Guide responds to a growing professional and public awareness that a new approach to the design and management of our streets is necessary in order to create better places; places with identity and character, places that are not dominated by motor traffic.
- 3.9 This new approach has formed the basis of a number of recent government publications including:
- By Design: Urban Design in the Planning System, Towards Better Practice, DETR;
 - Manual for Streets 2, Department for Transport, 2010;

- Traffic Management and Streetscape, Department for Transport, March 2008.
- 3.10 Much of the Council's funding for public realm works is provided by Transport for London via the LIP (Local Implementation Plan) process. It is desirable that there is consistency between the Council's and TfL's approach to public realm design.
- 3.11 London-wide guidance on the design of major traffic arteries is given in Transport for London's Streetscape Guidance which has recently been revised. In addition, November 2009 saw the publication of London's Great Outdoors – A Manifesto for Public Space where the Mayor sets out his ambition to work with the boroughs *“to revitalize public space to make a big difference to London's quality of life.”* Its sister publication: Better Streets – Practical Steps provides design guidance and is intended to *“help make the vision for great spaces a reality”*.
- 3.12 Both of these documents provide an important recognition of the way in which thinking about the design of our streets and spaces is radically changing. They also recognize that the design and the use of our streets can achieve important social objectives, knit together disparate communities and *“make for more humane interaction in our cities”*.
- 3.13 Better Streets recognizes that improvements in street design can be achieved at a range of different spatial scales *“from internationally significant projects such as Trafalgar Square at one end, to the improvement of a local parade of shops at the other. Indeed it is often these local schemes that will have the greatest impact on the quality of life of people living and working in London.”*
- 3.14 The design approach advocated in the Brent Placemaking Guide is consistent with that being promoted by the Mayor and TfL.
- 3.15 Within the context of the overall design goal of achieving excellence in the public realm, together with the new design approach and 'thinking' outlined above, a series of related objectives in the design of the public realm are included in the Guide. These are grouped under the three headings of Design, Style and Community:

Design

- Coherent and consistent approach;
- Base level of quality;
- Sustainable;
- Easily maintained.

Style

- Simple, uncluttered, functional, aesthetic;
- 'Less is more' (limited palette of good quality materials and street furniture);

- Co-ordinated elements and reduced street clutter;
- Local character (protect and enhance Brent's identity and branding);
- Celebrate the borough's diverse cultural heritage.

Community

- Inclusive, safe and accessible environment for all;
- Improve civic pride and ownership of the public realm;
- Public spaces as focuses for activity;
- Enhance users experience and interaction with the public realm.

- 3.16 The Guide does make reference to "shared spaces". Members may be aware that the aspiration of this concept in high profile schemes in other boroughs, has generated significant discussion and interest.
- 3.17 One method of balancing the community and movement functions is through the use of shared space. In contrast to previously accepted design practice which has promoted the segregation of uses, the shared space approach strives to combine, rather than separate street functions, in a way which provides a more equitable balance between motorists and other street users. It looks to improve the quality and experience of streets and spaces without needing to restrict or banish motorized traffic, a practice which has resulted in pedestrianised town centres being deserted and edgy places after dark.
- 3.18 The shared space approach uses the principle of ambiguity to change driver behaviour; drivers need to respond, not to a set of predetermined traffic rules and signs but to local conditions "as they find them", so behaviour is largely determined by the physical environment and the behaviour of others, in this respect eye contact and mutual signalling is very important. Many shared space designs have dispensed with the use of traditional kerbs and level changes, however there is no 'one size fits all' template for shared space and any design needs to consider the specific nature of the location including predominant street functions, the volumes of people and traffic, the proportions of heavy goods vehicles and the speed of traffic.
- 3.19 While there are many benefits associated with shared surfaces their design should not disadvantage key groups of users such as the blind and partially sighted. This particular topic is the subject of much current debate and research and designers should refer to the latest advice and examples of good practice when preparing shared surface proposals. The Guide makes it clear that the shared approach needs to be considered on its merits in each particular case, and will not be universally appropriate.
- 3.20 Risk is often cited as a reason not to pursue a "place' led approach to street design which may be considered at odds with more 'traditional' methods adopted in the past.

- 3.21 There may be concern that the Council could be liable to litigation claims if officers divert from the well worn path of for example erecting the maximum number of traffic signs in order to 'cover all' eventualities. Likewise the widespread use of guard railing can be seen, at least in part, to have arisen from a risk-averse approach to pedestrian planning. In both of these cases the outcome is likely to be a cluttered and defensive environment which provides too much information for the average road user to clearly comprehend, and which erects barriers to pedestrian movement under the guise of protection.
- 3.22 Recent government advice challenges this risk-averse approach. The Manual for Streets suggests that an over cautious approach is not '*conducive to creating distinctive that help support thriving communities' places*'. It also states that '*design that does not rely on conventional standards can achieve high levels of safety*'.

Consultation

- 3.23 The Guide has been developed and agreed by a panel of officers in the (former) Directorate of Environment and Culture and hence is considered appropriate in relation to planning, transport policy and street management considerations.
- 3.24 A draft of the Guide has been available on the council's website for a number of months together with an email address for comments. A copy of the draft guide was also sent for comments to the following organisations:
- Design for London
 - Transport for London
 - The London Boroughs of Barnet, Camden, Harrow, Ealing, Hammersmith & Fulham, City of Westminster
 - Urban Design London
 - Radar
 - Living Streets
 - Royal National Institute for the Blind
 - Royal National Institute for the Deaf
 - Guide Dogs for the Blind Association
 - Greater London Authority
- 3.25 Officers also intended to give presentations on the Guide to the Local Area Consultative Forums. Agenda pressures precluded this at a number of ACfs and so it has only been possible to give full presentations on the Guide to the Kingsbury/Kenton and Willesden area forums. Notwithstanding this, residents and other stakeholders have had the opportunity to comment on the draft Guide through the Council's website.
- 3.26 No comments have been received as part of the consultation outlined above. However, the Guide is intended to be a 'living document' and subject to periodic review. It will therefore be possible, subject to resource considerations, to make changes and additions to the Guide in response to any future feedback and as new information on best practice emerges.

4.0 Financial Implications

- 4.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report. The cost of developing the report has been met from 2010/11 and 2009/10 E & NS Revenue budget (Transportation budget centre). The estimated cost of producing limited number of hard copies of the Placemaking Guide, facilitating electronic access to the Guide, and undertaking associated publicity and awareness raising is £5,000. Provision for this work exists within the 2010/11 Revenue budget (Transportation budget centre).
- 4.2 There will be indirect financial implications for organisations implementing scheme/works within the public realm flowing from using the approach set out in the Guide. It is not possible to quantify those implications with certainty. However, the materials and principles recommended in the Guide are already used in most public realm schemes, particularly those funded through the TfL LIP settlement and within the Capital (Roads) Programme. Consequently therefore the adoption of the Guide is unlikely to increase scheme costs. Similarly, the “less is more” approach to design advocated in the guide is likely to result in lower ‘whole-life’ costs for the majority of public realm works.

5.0 Legal Implications

- 5.1 The Council has the power under section 62 of the Highways Act 1980 to carry out improvements to a highway. However, if the Council does carry out improvement schemes, it has a duty to ensure they are reasonably safe in reasonable circumstances. A relevant point in considering this will be whether the Council’s design accords with relevant guidance from Government and other appropriate bodies, which the Guide seeks to do. There is no requirement to place any particular signs or markings on the highway, save as set out in relevant regulations.

6.0 Diversity Implications

- 6.1 A full Impact Needs/Requirement Assessment of the Placemaking guide has been carried out. The assessment concluded that the aims of the Guide are consistent with the council’s Comprehensive Equality Policy and that the content of the Guide would not have a differential impact on any particular group. The assessment did however highlight the current debate relating to the use of shared surface treatments and concerns expressed by particular groups/organisations, in particular the Guide Dogs for the blind Association.
- 6.2 The conclusion of the assessment is consistent with a review of similar guides undertaken elsewhere which shows that there are no significant diversity implications other than those in regard to people with mobility or visual impairment. In this respect the Impact Needs/Requirement Assessment identifies a requirement (included in the Guide) to: *“continue to monitor the latest research regarding public realm design and in particular shared space*

design and incorporate any new findings and guidance into the Brent Placemaking Guide”, when the document is reviewed.

- 6.3 The principles of inclusive design need to be followed to create streets which are accessible and used by as wide a range of people, including people with mobility or visual impairments, people with learning difficulties, children and the elderly. However, as CABE has pointed out in their publication *Civilised Streets* (2008):

“even with good design and resources it may often be the case that what is welcomed by one group of public space users will be disliked, or avoided by others, For those designing or commissioning streets in most public places, a judgement will need to be made that balances the needs of all users.”

- 6.4 The key words here are *judgement* and *balance*. the designer needs to use professional judgement and adopt an holistic approach to deliver a public realm the design of which is balanced with respect to all users in relation to the hierarchy of users promoted in the Guide, which is:

Primary Consideration:

- Pedestrians;
- Cyclists;
- Public transport users;
- Specialist service vehicles (emergency services, refuge vehicles etc.)

Secondary Consideration:

- Other motor traffic.

7.0 Staffing/Accommodation Implications (if appropriate)

- 7.1 There are no staffing/accommodation implications arising from this report.

8.0 Environmental Implications

- 8.1 The fundamental objective of the Guide is, over time, to make a positive impact on the environment, locally and in general, within Brent.
- 8.2 Section 4 of the Guide discusses how good urban design supports sustainability and can make a significant contribution to tackling climate change and supporting the Council’s environmental initiatives such as the Carbon Management Plan.
- 8.3 The Guide specifies the use of sustainable materials, where possible to be sourced locally to cut down on carbon emissions arising from transportation.
- 8.4 Section 4 of the Guide also covers Whole Life Planning and the need to Reduce/Re-Use and Recycle public realm materials wherever possible.

Background Papers

None

Appendices

Appendix A – (Draft for approval) Brent Placemaking Guide

Appendix B – Summary of (Brent Placemaking Guide) contents.

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APPENDIX B

BRENT PLACEMAKING GUIDE CONTENTS

- 1 Introduction**
 - Purpose of the Guide
 - Town Centres
 - Conservation Areas
 - New Development
 - Red Routes
 - Who is the Guide For?
 - How the Guide is Organised
 - Design Checklist

- 2 Achieving Excellence**
 - What is Urban Design?
 - Benefits of Urban Design
 - Urban Design Principles
 - A New Approach
 - The Mayor and Transport for London
 - The Place Function
 - A Shared Vision
 - Striking A Balance
 - A Philosophy of Care
 - Risk and Cost – Barriers to Good Design?
 - Less is More and the Role of Ambiguity

- 3 Streets and Community**
 - Public Realm Objectives
 - Streets for All
 - Shared Space
 - Open Space
 - Move and Rest
 - Active Streets
 - Play
 - Public Art
 - Designing Out Crime
 - Designing Out Fear of Crime

- 4 Sustainability and Street Management**
 - Sustainability
 - Managing Climate Change
 - Sustainable Landscape Design
 - Whole life planning
 - Reduce/re-use/recycle
 - Repair and Replacement
 - Highway Asset Management Plan
 - Street Cleaning

- 5 Materials and Construction**
 - Footways
 - Dropped Kerbs
 - Footway Strengthening
 - Footway Crossovers
 - Utility Inspection Covers
 - Private Forecourts
 - Shared Surfaces
 - Footway Materials
 - Carriageway Materials

- 6 Street Furniture**
 - General Principles
 - Bollards
 - Traffic Bollards
 - Guardrailing
 - Seating
 - Street Lighting
 - Feature and Decorative Lighting
 - Bicycle Parking
 - CCTV
 - Litter Bins/ Salt Containers/Cigarette and Gum Disposal

Recycling Facilities
Utility Cabinets
Advertising
Public Toilets

7 Traffic Management and Calming

Ambiguity
Street Scale and Design
Junctions
Pedestrian Facilities
Traffic Calming
Lateral Speed Reduction Measures
Vertical Speed Reduction Measures
Road Closures
20mph Zones
Cycling

8 Signs and Markings

Reducing Street Clutter
TfL Approach
New Schemes
Carriageway Markings
Pedestrian Signage
Information Boards
Vehicular Traffic Signs
Street Nameplates
Self-Adhesive signs
Mounting Signs

9 Parking

Parking Demand
Controlled Parking Zones
Restricted Parking Zones
On Street Parking Layouts
Footway Parking
Motorcycle Parking
Bicycle Parking
Hardstandings and Crossovers

10 Trees and Soft Landscape

The Benefits of Trees
Tree Species and Location
Tree Planting
Tree Pits and Surrounds
Tree Grilles
Carriageway Planting
Tree Removal
Private Land
Green Verges
Incidental Shrub Planting
Planters
Hanging Baskets
Highway Marginal Land and Pocket Parks

11 Putting It Into Practice

Design Examples