

# Balancing active travel, accessibility, safety and security in future streets

A perspective paper from  
Marshall's Landscaping





# Foreword

Across the UK, local authorities are facing a challenge unlike any seen before.

The expectations placed upon our streets continue to grow. They are expected to support active travel, improve public health, increase accessibility, strengthen local economies, reduce emissions, improve road safety and create attractive places for communities to enjoy.

At the same time, authorities must contend with constrained budgets, ageing infrastructure, increasing security requirements and growing public scrutiny.

The challenge is not a lack of ambition; the challenge is delivery.

The industry is not short of guidance. Documents such as Local Transport Note 1/20 provide a clear vision for what good active travel infrastructure should look like. Active Travel England continues to drive higher standards and greater accountability. Yet translating policy into practical, deliverable projects remains complex.

Every authority faces different constraints. Some struggle with funding and resources. Others face physical limitations within historic streets. Many must balance competing demands from residents, businesses, transport providers and accessibility groups.

In my experience, the most successful schemes are not defined by individual products or isolated interventions. They are defined by how effectively they enable movement. This paper explores the challenges shaping future street design and outlines five delivery priorities that can help local authorities create safer, more inclusive and more resilient places.

Because ultimately, successful streets are not designed around infrastructure. They are designed around people.

**Mike Goodwin,**  
**Regional Trading Director and Active Travel Lead**  
**Marshalls Landscaping**

# Why active travel matters

Active travel is often discussed in terms of cycling infrastructure and walking routes.

In reality, its impact extends far beyond transport.

Active travel refers to everyday journeys made through physically active means such as walking, wheeling, cycling and scooting. These journeys connect people to work, education, healthcare, retail and leisure opportunities.

When delivered successfully, active travel infrastructure can contribute towards multiple local authority objectives simultaneously.



## These include:

- Improved public health and wellbeing
- Reduced congestion
- Better air quality
- Lower carbon emissions
- Increased town centre footfall
- Greater social mobility
- Improved community connectivity

The challenge is creating infrastructure that people feel confident using.

That confidence is shaped by safety, accessibility, legibility and the overall quality of the environment.

Infrastructure alone does not change behaviour – experience does.



# What good looks like

Cycle Infrastructure Design (Local Transport Note 1/20) established five principles that continue to shape active travel infrastructure across the UK.

These principles provide a useful framework for future street design more broadly.

## → Coherent

Routes should form part of a connected and understandable network.

## → Direct

Infrastructure should support efficient movement with minimal delays and detours.

## → Safe

Users should feel protected from conflict and danger.

## → Comfortable

Infrastructure should be intuitive, accessible and enjoyable to use.

## → Attractive

Routes should contribute positively to the quality of the public realm.

These principles remain as relevant today as when they were introduced. The challenge is translating them into practical schemes within real-world constraints.





# The reality of delivery

While the principles of good design are clear, delivery remains challenging. Local authorities continue to face a number of significant barriers.

“The challenge facing local authorities is not a lack of vision. It is finding practical ways to deliver that vision.”

## Funding uncertainty

Short-term funding cycles can make strategic planning difficult and limit opportunities for network-wide delivery.

## Skills and resource constraints

Many authorities face challenges recruiting and retaining specialist active travel and public realm expertise.

## Public opposition

Changes to streets often generate resistance, even where long-term benefits are clear.

## Integration challenges

New infrastructure must work alongside existing highways, utilities, public transport networks and public realm assets.

## Competing priorities

Parking, loading, accessibility, active travel, safety and placemaking all compete for limited space.

## Existing infrastructure constraints

Historic streets and limited road widths frequently create design challenges.

## Five delivery priorities

The challenges facing local authorities are complex, but the direction of travel is clear. Streets must now do more than move people efficiently – they must support safety, accessibility, placemaking, resilience and long-term value all at once.

To help navigate these competing demands, we have identified **five delivery priorities** that can guide better decision-making and support the creation of streets that work more effectively for everyone.

# PRIORITY 01

## Design for every user

**The most important question that can be asked during any design process is simple:  
Who is this street for?**

Historically, infrastructure has often been designed around the needs of dominant user groups. Yet modern streets must serve a much broader range of people.

A visually impaired pedestrian experiences a street differently to a cyclist. A wheelchair user encounters different challenges to a parent pushing a buggy. An older resident may require greater levels of certainty and confidence than a regular commuter.

Designing for every user requires more than compliance with standards. It requires understanding how people experience and interact with their environment.

### Authorities should ask themselves:

- Can all users understand how to move through the space?
- Are routes clear and intuitive?
- Are crossing points easy to identify and use?
- Have accessibility needs been considered from the earliest design stages?
- Does the scheme promote confidence for less experienced or less mobile users?

## Marshalls' Perspective

### Infrastructure doesn't change behaviour on its own

We can build cycle routes, crossings and make public realm improvements, but if people don't feel safe, comfortable or included, they won't change their behaviour.

The schemes that really work are the ones that make movement feel intuitive. They remove uncertainty. They help people understand where they should be and how they should move through a space.

That's why I believe we need to think beyond individual interventions and focus on the overall user experience.

**Kelly Blackburn,**  
Project Specification Manager



# PRIORITY 02

## Reduce conflict through design

The clearest, safest streets are those that reduce uncertainty before conflict has a chance to arise.

Many challenges associated with active travel infrastructure stem from one common issue: uncertainty.

When users are unclear about where they should be, who has priority or how they should move through a space, conflict becomes inevitable.

**This can occur at:**

- Shared-use routes
- Junctions
- Bus stop bypasses
- Crossing points
- High-footfall public spaces

Too often, conflict is addressed after implementation through additional signage, markings or enforcement.

Yet, the most successful schemes take a different approach. They design out conflict from the beginning.

Good design creates clarity. It establishes intuitive movement patterns, defines boundaries and makes desired behaviours obvious.

The safest streets are often those that require the least explanation.

Rather than forcing users to interpret complex environments, successful infrastructure guides them naturally through space. Good design should make the safest behaviour the easiest behaviour.

## Marshalls' Perspective

**Accessibility should never be an afterthought**

One of the most significant and positive changes I've seen in recent years is the growing focus on inclusive mobility. However, too often accessibility is still treated as a specialist consideration rather than a fundamental design principle.

The reality is that every street user benefits from clearer, safer and more intuitive environments. What works for a wheelchair user often improves the experience for parents with pushchairs, older pedestrians and many other users.

Some of the most effective projects I've worked on have succeeded because accessibility was considered from the earliest design stages rather than being addressed later in the process. If we genuinely want to encourage more people to walk, wheel and cycle, we need to ensure that everyone feels confident using the infrastructure we create.

**Paul Masters,  
Key Contractor Manager**





PRIORITY

03

## The importance of detail

The difference between an adequate scheme and an exceptional one is often found in the details people use every day. Large-scale visions are important. However, the success or failure of a scheme is often determined by the smallest details.

### Kerbs

Kerbs remain one of the most effective tools available to designers. They provide physical separation, establish hierarchy and help users understand how space is organised. Well-designed kerbs can improve safety, accessibility and confidence for all users.

### Transitions

These are often where challenges emerge. Poorly designed dropped kerbs, crossings and level changes can create significant barriers for wheelchair users, mobility scooter users and people with visual impairments.

Every transition should be considered from the perspective of all users.

### Delineation and segregation

Clear separation between different modes can reduce ambiguity and improve safety. Whether achieved through kerbs, materials, level changes or other interventions, delineation plays a crucial role in reducing conflict.

The most successful schemes are rarely those with the most infrastructure. They are often those where every detail has been carefully considered.

## Marshall's Perspective

### The smallest details often matter most

When people talk about successful active travel infrastructure, they often focus on the big-picture vision.

In my experience, success is frequently determined by the details.

A poorly considered transition, an unclear boundary between users or a kerb detail that doesn't perform as intended can have a disproportionate impact on how a space functions.

These are often the elements that users notice every day, even if they don't consciously recognise them.

Good design is rarely about adding more. It's about ensuring every surface, every detail and every element performs its role effectively and contributes to a coherent user experience.

The best schemes are often the ones where the details work so well that nobody notices them.

**Gurvinder Kharood,**  
Project Specification Manager





## Integrating security without compromising placemaking

The most successful security measures are those that protect people while allowing places to remain open, intuitive and welcoming. Security has become an increasingly important consideration in public realm design, particularly as Martyn's Law brings greater focus to protective security in publicly accessible places.

Town centres, transport hubs, event spaces and civic environments often require measures that protect people from vehicle-related threats. However, poorly integrated security measures can have unintended consequences.

They can create barriers to accessibility, disrupt movement patterns and undermine the character of a place.

The challenge for designers is achieving protection without compromising the user experience.

### Successful solutions should:

- Maintain accessibility
- Preserve movement routes
- Support inclusive design
- Enhance public spaces
- Integrate seamlessly into the wider environment

The best security measures are often those that users barely notice. By incorporating security considerations into the broader design strategy from the outset, local authorities can create places that feel both safe and welcoming. This is increasingly important as streets evolve into multifunctional spaces that support movement, social interaction and economic activity.

## Marshalls' Perspective

### Security and accessibility shouldn't compete

Security has become an increasingly important consideration for local authorities, particularly in busy town centres and public spaces.

What I've found encouraging is that the conversation has evolved significantly. A few years ago, security and placemaking were often seen as competing priorities. Today, there is a much greater understanding that both objectives can and should work together.

The most successful schemes integrate security measures into the wider design of a space rather than treating them as separate interventions.

When done well, security can support accessibility, improve user confidence and contribute positively to the overall character of a place. Good security design should protect people without reminding them that they're being protected.

**Paul Haggerty,**  
Sales and Specification,  
Landscape Protection



PRIORITY

05

## Design for long-term success

Design choices made today should continue to deliver value, adaptability and performance well into the future. Infrastructure should not be judged solely on how it performs today. It should be judged on how effectively it continues to serve communities tomorrow.

Too often, schemes are designed around immediate priorities without sufficient consideration for future maintenance, adaptation and evolving user needs.

### Designing for long-term success requires authorities to consider:

- Durability
- Ease of maintenance
- Adaptability
- Future policy requirements such as Martyn's Law
- Whole-life costs
- Changing travel behaviours

The pace of change across transport, technology and urban design means flexibility is increasingly important.

Future streets must be capable of evolving alongside the communities they serve.

## Marshall's Perspective

### Designing for opening day is not enough

One of the questions I encourage project teams to ask is: "How will this scheme perform in ten years' time?"

That's often a very different conversation from discussing how it will perform on opening day. Materials, maintenance requirements, user behaviour and policy priorities will all evolve over time.

Successful projects remain adaptable and continue to deliver value long after construction has finished.

As budgets become increasingly stretched, durability and whole-life performance are more important than ever.

Good infrastructure is not simply about what we build today. It's about what we leave behind for future generations.

**Mark King,**  
Head of Pavement Engineering



# Future streets checklist

**Before progressing any future streets project, local authorities should ask:**

- ✓ Have we designed for all users, not just our primary users?
- ✓ Have accessibility considerations been embedded from the outset?
- ✓ Have we identified and reduced potential conflict points?
- ✓ Is movement through the space intuitive and easy to understand?
- ✓ Have we considered how physical design will influence behaviour?
- ✓ Are kerbs, transitions and delineation working as intended?
- ✓ Have security requirements been integrated into the wider design?
- ✓ Have maintenance and whole-life costs been considered?
- ✓ Is the scheme adaptable to future needs and policy changes?
- ✓ Will this infrastructure still perform effectively in ten years' time?

## Conclusion

Successful streets are rarely defined by a single intervention.

They emerge from the careful integration of accessibility, movement, safety, security and placemaking. As local authorities continue to balance increasingly complex demands, we believe the most successful schemes will be those that place people at the heart of every design decision.

The future of our streets is not about prioritising one user group over another, or one objective above all else.

It is about creating environments that allow everyone to move safely, confidently and independently.

That is what designing movement means. And that is the perspective Marshalls brings to the conversation.

# What's holding back better future streets in your area?



Share your thoughts in  
our quick 10-second poll  
Scan and have your say

## Delivering safer, future-ready streets starts here

Get in touch with Mike Goodwin, Regional Trading Director and Active Travel Lead to learn more and find the right solution for your scheme.

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