



Image courtesy: Street Spirit Design

Managing Streets During Lockdown: Town Centres, Deliveries & Parking

05/06/2020

Sixth in our series on streets during the Corona Virus pandemic. This session will focus on changes made in the often complex environment of our town centres and look at how deliveries and parking have been operating during lockdown and what might happen during recovery.

Please watch the video of this event, or look at the presenters' slides, alongside this note

Speakers

Steve Norris, Lambert Smith Hampton

David McKenna, Street Spirit Design

Cllr Adam Clarke, Leicester City Council

Michael Cowdy, McGregor Coxall

Joel de Mowbray, LB Lambeth

Saskia Huizinga, Dutch Cycling London

Takeaways

- **Shopping is not the answer.** If you think it is, you are asking the wrong question. We must repurpose our town centres, looking beyond the buildings, to use the outdoors for street markets and events to tempt people back and provide the space businesses are going to need.
- **We need to coordinate and be creative**, not shirking from difficult options such as street closures and repurposing street space for commercial use as part of robust network planning and improvements to walking and cycling connections between centres and the communities they serve..
- **New public, outdoor commercial space needs to be managed consensually and communally by business and BiDs.** This may require changes to be initiated and led by local people.
- **The Government is funding changes to high streets, but only if these meaningfully alter the status quo.** They want to see accelerated, bold and transformational schemes.

- **Change can be delivered in stages** – emergency measures may be less robust and attractive than some want, but they can be transformed into temporary schemes and in the long run, permanent designs. For example Leicester started to create emergency bike lanes with cones, they hope to replace these with wands before formal construction at a later date.

Further notes

Steve Norris

If you feel retail is the answer for your town centers – you are probably asking the wrong question. It is an exciting time, opportunity for creativity.

Our town centers have faced waves of out of center and internet challengers. Then throw in Brexit, and Covid -19. And now we are not sure what the future high street will look like, which businesses will reopen, which will be gone for good.

Town Center high streets are 'over-shopped'. They may have too many restaurants as well – as dark kitchens set up just for deliveries take a larger part of the market. But town centers are at the heart of our communities and economies. We need them, and must repurpose them for the future.

We need to stop thinking about buildings, and focus on the outdoor spaces. Outdoor activities will draw people back to centers, and provide a reason and space for them to use them. We need to be radical in how we think about streets, and create reasons to visit.

How do we fund town centers? If retail and restaurants are not the answer? Events and marketing are relatively cheap to do. They can help get the footfall to make a variety of businesses prosper.

David MaKenna

Design places so they change driver behavior and allow people outside of vehicles to enjoy the place.

David presented 7 Design Principles, used by the Landscape Institute:

1. Design for everyone
2. Remove guardrail and declutter
3. Design appropriately for the context and location as well as movement
4. Make streets healthier
5. Make space for social, economic and environmental functions
6. Use infrastructure to communicate how you want drivers, cyclists and pedestrians to behave
7. Make designs practical, robust and flexible.

Use slow street approaches to alter driver behavior so they are subservient to pedestrians, even if they are in the carriageway. This encourages pedestrians to use the street width, which will aid social

distancing and the provision of outdoor commercial space. Use benches to create pinch points at end and middle of a slow street section. David has videos to show how this approach works.

If we are going to include parklets and café seating in Covid-19 influenced high streets, make sure they face and relate to the street, not just the pavement. Don't create barriers to cross movement through new kit such as new seating for businesses.

People question how this approach works for the partially sighted. David explained that tactile delineators and safe routes make it work and he has had positive feedback

Councillor Adam Clarke

Before Covid-19 Leicester had been doing much to change the way streets and travel work in the city, promoting walking and cycling and even taking away a flyover to create new green space.

When lockdown started the city moved fast to accelerate and adapt their approach. They started laying out cones to create pop up cycle and walking spaces linking to permanent safe routes. They have also been loaning out bikes to key workers, funded through donations, reuse of equipment and other imaginative approaches.

In Belgrave Road they have widened footways. Cones were used as an emergency measure, they are changing these to wands for temporary use and hopefully building as permanent changes in the future. They are learning and consulting as they go.

In another part of the City they have put in an advisory speed limit of 20mph. They are also reserving space now to use for outdoor shops and leisure as lockdown eases.

Leicester has a Covid-19 Transport Recovery Plan – looking at Safety, Sustainability and Social Equity. Air quality an important element of social equality. Unfortunately, they are seeing a gradual increase in pollution to pre Covid-19 levels. They want to keep a handle on this and ensure air quality improvements are permanent.

Leicester's Street Design Guide principles:

1. Streets are public places for people as well as movement arteries for transportation
2. Streets are a catalyst for urban transformation and economic prosperity
3. Streets should strive to meet the needs of all users even in constrained spaces
4. Street design should respond positively to context
5. Streets can be transformed in stages
6. Streets should be sustainable and active by design

Michael Cowdy

Michael talked through a live project in Bristol. This started as a high street regeneration project pre Covid-19, but is now heavily impacted by Covid-19 related requirements. He said that we cannot sit back and wait for Covid-19 to disappear, we need to take action to ensure high streets can adapt and survive.

People are concerned about starting to use their high streets more. Gehl architects ran a survey asking people around the world about this, and 91% said they experienced crowding in public spaces. With current concerns over crowding leading to infection this may very well stop people using their town centers.

We need to grab the opportunity and be bold with our decision making – doing things people might not have accepted in the past. Janette Sadik-Khan, former transportation commissioner for New York City said ‘ it’s a once in a lifetime opportunity to take a fresh look at our streets and make sure that they are set to achieve the outcomes that we want to achieve’ (not just vehicle movements) .

The Government is funding schemes that meaningfully alter the status quo of the road. Changes need to make a change that supports social habitation. This is happening all over the world now. We need to ask – what is more valuable, cars using the street or people using local businesses, such as sitting to eat food from a restaurant in the street?

Bristol want to make the city center a destination – and instead of taking 20 years to make big changes – they want to do it now.

Joel De Mowbray

Lambeth are able to deliver emergency and temporary schemes very fast as they have altered their processes to streamline, strip out decision points and set up a kind of conveyor belt for schemes where everyone plays to their skills and achieved a particular thing on a scheme then passes it on to another. They are starting a new project every week.

Road closures are going to be an important part of creating more space in high streets. The existing pavements are very unlikely to be big enough for everyone as businesses restart. So Lambeth are digging into their archives to find historic plans for high street road closures and use these pre prepared plans to deliver what local communities want.

They are looking for BiDs, and communities, to capture benefits from closures or other traffic changes in a collective way. This might be by deploying communal outdoor eating areas across different businesses to bring indoor activity outside. This could be using roll out blocks and coordinated cleaning, putting out and

bringing in of kit etc. They hope BiDs will help with this and believe most high streets have set ups to help with this.

If you shut a high street regularly, say Wednesday to Saturday, or every Sunday – it is not going to be able to use existing legislation. They are looking at ways to get around this issue.

Saskia Huizinga

These are exciting times but we seem to be putting in kit that is not friendly and welcoming for people. We need to be bolder and look at street closures based on a good understanding of movement networks.

Saskia looked at Islington, and mapped out the different street types. She looked at what would happen to the network if all high streets in the borough were closed. She found this could work, with bus routes having stops at the ends of all high streets. Each neighborhood cell could have some kind of high street to provide local facilities.

The Urban Design Group have produced an Emergency Street Manual – it is online, open source and evolving all the time. They define 6 types of streets to help authorities create a functioning network. This works with cells at different scales.

The manual has graphics to explain the amount of space need to fit functions in – with 2m or 1.5m or even 1m social distancing requirements. They look at kerbs, and what type pf protection/delineators are needed to provide protection when there is no raised kerb.