Play day

OUR STREETS TOO!

Street play

A literature review

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Preface

This literature review forms part of the research for Playday, which is coordinated by Play England, working in partnership with Play Wales, Play Scotland and PlayBoard Northern Ireland.

Playday is a national campaign in its 20th year, which celebrates children's right to play and where thousands of children and young people get out and play at locally organised events.

The theme of Playday 2007 '*Our streets too!*' highlights the need for change, so that children, young people and their families can feel confident about playing in streets and areas near their homes all year round. The campaign also highlights that play-friendly streets offer huge benefits to the whole community

This review explores a range of published studies and literature on the street and its relationship with children's play and informal recreation – and how this has changed over a period of time – with a particular focus on the barriers which are increasingly restricting children and young people's use of the street.

Summary

The number of children playing in the streets and areas around their homes has decreased over the past thirty years. A study of children's outdoor play in 1973 found that 75 per cent of the children observed played near to their homes, mainly on roads and pavements (Department of the Environment, 1973). Data collected for the National Travel Survey 2005 (Department for Transport 2006), suggests that only 15 per cent of children aged 5 to 15 played outside on the streets. This is the result of a number of barriers to children's outdoor play on the streets.

Increased traffic on the roads has had a huge effect on children's ability to play outdoors. This has been illustrated in a number of studies, which have consulted children on the effects of traffic on their opportunities to spend time outdoors. An ESRC-sponsored study in 2000 found that children and young people perceived traffic as the greatest danger facing them outdoors in public space, far outweighing fears of bullies and gangs, strangers and fear of attack (Matthews and Limb, 2000).

The number of child pedestrians and cyclists killed on the roads is falling steadily (Department for Transport, 2006). However Britain still has one of the worst records for child pedestrian casualties in Europe (Department of Environment Transport and the Regions, 2000). The steady reduction in child pedestrian casualties is not necessarily the result only of increased safety on the roads, and may be due in part to the reduction in children playing outdoors on the streets and areas around their homes.

Children also face barriers to their outdoor play because of parental fears for their safety. A report by Young Voice and The Children's Society in preparation for Playday 2003, reported that parents frequently projected their fears onto their children, warning them of 'stranger danger' (Stockdale, Katz, and Brook, 2003a). There is also evidence that children themselves are often afraid to go out on their own; a Home Office study in 2003 found that 66 per cent of children felt safe being out in their neighbourhood, but 30 per cent did not feel safe and remaining 4 per cent never went out alone (Home Office, 2003).

Public attitudes to children playing and spending time on the streets around their homes are also important. The results of an omnibus survey in 2004 found that 85 per cent of adult respondents agreed that it was important that children should be able to play safely in the road or street where they live. However, the respondents were not prepared to park an extra 50 metres away from their cars in order to achieve a better street environment (Department for Transport and the Office for National Statistics, 2004).

Negative adult attitudes are often focused on older children or teenagers; a recent MORI poll found that 75 per cent of the adult population supported a legally enforceable curfew on teenagers (Thomas and Hocking, 2003). Arguably the introduction of legal sanctions such as dispersal orders, child curfews and anti-social behaviour orders have also restricted the freedom of children and young people to spend time in the streets and areas near to their homes.

There have been a number of initiatives that have attempted to change the residential street environment so that children can play safely outside close to their homes. Home zones gained prominence in the UK in the 1990s; they provide an alternative to traffic-orientated streets and aim to redesign streets as a space available for social use including children's play. The sustainable transport charity Sustrans, has also introduced a new scheme called 'DIY streets', which encourages residents to get involved in a redesign of their street and achieve some of the benefits of home zones at a lower monetary cost.

The government has also shown interest in making streets safer and more accessible for children to use. The Department for Transport's child road safety strategy for 2007 includes encouraging wider use of 20mph zones in areas where children are active, and increasing road safety education. They have also published, with Communities and Local Government, a *Manual for Streets*. This manual recognises the need to incorporate different users in the design of the street, and allow for a variety of activities including children's play. Communities and Local Government has also had a lead role in coordinating the delivery of the 'cleaner, safer, greener' programme across government, which aims to increase the standard of public space and empower communities.

1 Introduction

Children and young people have always spent much of their time outdoors: in parks, playgrounds and also in the streets and paved areas near to their homes. Outdoor play is healthy and beneficial to their well-being and that of their families and the wider community (Children's Play Council, 2002). Streets that enable children to play out, socialise, and hang out with their friends also provide a social space where the whole community can interact. Much outdoor play occurs on the street, is often active and sociable and contributes to children's emotional and physical health. Research has shown that active childhoods contribute to healthy, active and fitter adulthoods (Stoate and Jones, 2003). Therefore arguably it is vital to both children's enjoyment of their childhoods, and to the future health of society, that children and young people have access to outdoor play opportunities near their homes.

There has been a decrease over the past thirty years in children's access to the streets and outdoor areas near their homes. Increasingly their independent mobility is restricted by traffic and fear, which in turn causes them to spend much of their time indoors or at organised activities. The combination of an increase in vehicles on the roads, increased parental anxiety, and restrictions on children's mobility in the form of child curfews and anti-social behaviour orders has reduced children's outdoor play opportunities.

Children's place in the public realm and specifically the importance of their access to the streets around their homes has been recognised. Government initiatives such as home zones and recommendations set out in the recently published *Manual for Streets*, as well as initiatives set up by voluntary and community organisations, are a positive step towards creating child-friendly streets. However, there is a long way to go and it is essential to look in detail at how children's access to play has changed over time, what barriers stand in the way, and what is being done to change this.

2 How much and how often do children play on the streets, and how has this changed over time?

In 1973 the then Department of the Environment (DoE) published a report entitled *Children at Play*, which included research based on over 50,000 observations of children's outdoor activities around areas of social housing. They found that the street was the most popular play place; over 75 per cent of the children observed outdoors were playing near their homes and most of this was on roads, pavements and paved areas. The study reported that the children were mainly engaged in physical activities such as walking, running, using wheeled vehicles, play equipment and ball games, and only just over a quarter of the play involved sitting, standing or other sedentary activity (Department of the Environment, 1973). These results show that in 1973 the majority of children and young people played in the street and areas around their homes.

A study carried out in 1985 by Play Board came to similar conclusions about children's use of the street for play. The study involved two samples of just over 800 children aged between 5 and 14; the children were interviewed about where they normally played when they were not at home or indoors. The most commonly mentioned places for children to spend their time out of doors were the streets (24 per cent), conventional playgrounds (18 per cent) and gardens (17 per cent). The children were also asked whether they were normally with an adult whilst at play; 60 per cent of children over 9 years old, and 38 per cent under, reported playing completely unsupervised by adults (Parkinson, 1985).

Rob Wheway and Alison Millward conducted a similar, smaller scale study to that of the Department of the Environment in 1996, which looked at children's play on housing estates. They also found that the street was the most popular play space, with 46 per cent of the children observed playing on roads and pavements, and only 12 per cent using designated play areas (Wheway and Millward, 1997). Seventy-one per cent of the play observed was active, involving walking, running, ball games and use of wheeled vehicles and play equipment.

However, there were variations in this and children's use of the street for play differed in different types of housing. Wheway and Millward found in areas that had long roads of terraced housing where traffic could pass through unhindered, children playing were absent from the streets. The fixed play areas near these streets were well used and adults usually accompanied children.

It is important to consider how the frequency of children's play in the streets around their homes has changed since the late 1990s and what the picture is for 2007. Data collected for the National Travel Survey 2005 (Department for Transport 2006), suggests that in 2005 only 15 per cent of children aged 5 to 15 played outside on the streets.

Restrictions to children and young people's mobility over time

In 1990 Mayer Hillman and others carried out surveys in English schools across the country exploring children's travel patterns and levels of personal autonomy, and the links these had with their parents' perceptions of the danger they were exposed to. The surveys replicated those carried out in 1971 by the Policy Studies Institute in the same schools in order to make a comparison. They found that there had been a decrease in children's independent mobility since 1971. For example, compared with the 1971 data, half as many children aged between 7 and 10 were allowed to go places on their own in 1990. Bike ownership had gone up for children in junior schools between 1971 and 1990, but the proportion of children allowed to use their bikes on the roads had fallen from two-thirds in 1971 to only a quarter in 1990. There was also a marked increase in the numbers of children being driven to school by their parents over this time period (Hillman, Adams, and Whitelegg, 1990).

An ESRC-sponsored study by O'Brien (2000), compared the data from Hillman's 1990 study with her own findings ten years later. O'Brien found that in comparing her data with Hillman's there was evidence of a decrease in independent use of public space for 10 and 11-year-old children. She also claimed that there had been an enhancement in parental anxiety over children's safety in the public realm since 1990, and that there had been a steady reduction in children travelling to school unaccompanied by an adult (O'Brien, 2000).

3 Barriers to children's play in the streets

Traffic

In 1971, 37,962 child pedestrians were killed or injured on the roads (Department of the Environment, 1973). The National Transport Statistics 2006 cited that 63 child pedestrians were killed in 2005; this is a fall from 77 in 2004 and 132 in 1995. The number of child pedestrians killed or seriously injured in 2005 was 2,134 compared to 4,400 in 1995 (Department for Transport, 2006b).

There has been a similar improvement in casualties for children using bicycles. Twenty child pedal cyclists were killed in road traffic accidents in 2005, compared to 48 in 1995. And only 527 were killed or seriously injured in 2005 compared to 1,249 in 1995. However, despite this decrease in casualties involving children and young people Britain still has one of the worst track records for child pedestrian casualties in Europe (Department of Environment Transport and the Regions, 2000).

This reduction in child pedestrian and cyclist casualties may not only be the result of increased safety on the roads. As outlined in the previous sections, the numbers of children playing out in the streets has reduced. It is possible that the steady reduction in child pedestrian and cyclist casualties in the last ten years is as much due to a

reduction in the numbers of children being allowed out on the streets, as it is to safer roads and streets.

The risk of injury by traffic is greater for children living in areas of high deprivation. More than 25 per cent of all child pedestrian injuries take place in the 10 per cent of most deprived wards in the United Kingdom (The Social Exclusion Unit, 2003). Risk of injury is also greater for children living in urban inner city areas than rural areas. Urban roads are more than twice as dangerous as rural roads, and 95 per cent of pedestrian injuries occur on urban roads, with children being disproportionately at risk (Audit Commission, 2007).

Wheway and Millward's (1997) study concluded that the front street was the most frequently used location for outdoor play. They suggested that for children to exploit this environment fully, traffic speeds needed to be reduced to 10mph and that as much of the road and pavement as possible needed to be visible to motorists and pedestrians within residential roads. They also found that the estates that stimulated the highest levels of outdoor play were those with the slowest traffic.

A study in 2000 published by the ESRC, consulted children aged between five and sixteen from inner city, edge of town council estates, and rural villages, asking them about the time they spent in public space. The study involved 1,087 respondents to doorstep questionnaires; semi-structured interviews with young people hanging around on the street; school-based in-depth discussion groups; and surveys of young people in five shopping malls and leisure centres. The study found that safety was a very important dimension to young people's use of public space (Matthews and Limb, 2000). The young people in the study perceived traffic as the greatest danger, far outweighing fears of bullies and gangs, strangers and fear of attack. This would suggest that traffic is the main barrier to children and young people's use of public space, and hence the main barrier to them playing in the street.

In 2004 Barnardo's, Transport 2000 and the Association of London Government published a report on the results of consultations with 150 children about how their lives were affected by traffic in their neighbourhood. The consultations involved focus groups with children aged between seven and 14 years old, and took place all around Britain. They found that children had a deep-seated fear of traffic. The children in the study felt unsafe when they were walking or playing outside and both their health and independence were suffering as a result. They were very aware that unsafe roads could place them at risk of serious injury or death and this affected their play opportunities (Transport 2000 Association of London Government Barnardo's, 2004).

The two main problems highlighted in the study were bad driving and speeding, and the children were frustrated that speeding cars prevented them from feeling safe and independent. The children also said that they were angry that the traffic in their local street prevented

them from using it, and that cars were seen as being more important. They said that they would like to see changes in their local street that would enable them to play outside, walk and cycle safely (Transport 2000 Association of London Government Barnardo's, 2004).

Parental anxiety – children's fears

The fears of parents and carers are another barrier to children's use of their local street. Parents and carers often worry about children being on their own out of doors. These anxieties lead to restrictions being imposed on children that prevent them from playing in the streets around their homes. Although traffic is one source of parental fear and caution at letting children play out, fears of danger from strangers or gangs and bullies are also prevalent.

Gill Valentine identifies in her book *Public space and the culture of childhood* that there has been a 'retreat from the street' on the part of children and young people (Valentine, 2004). She focuses on parent risk assessment of their children's play, and argues that there is 'a geography of fear' surrounding strangers and public space. As a result, parents impose limitations on their children's independent mobility in order to protect them. However this means that today's children are being denied the outdoor play opportunities that previous generations had. Valentine argues that parents use computers and video games to keep children indoors because they are afraid for their safety if they go outside.

A recent research paper, stemming from the Families and Social Capital ESRC Research Group, claims that if parents are fearful of the local environment then their children are less likely to get to know their local area. The paper also suggests, however, that children's social capital can help build parent's confidence in the local area and that the connections children have in their neighbourhood are likely to help establish relationships between their parents and the wider community (Weller and Bruegel, 2007). The paper suggests that children playing outdoors and establishing relationships with other children in their community can have a positive effect on community cohesion.

A report by Young Voice and The Children's Society in preparation for Playday 2003, involved surveys with 2,131 children aged 7 11 and found that parents had frequently projected their fears onto their children. In the consultation interviews that followed the surveys, a lot of the children said that their parents had warned them of stranger danger, and explained recent high-profile cases of children being abducted and killed (Stockdale *et al.*, 2003a).

There is also evidence that many children themselves are also afraid to be outside on the streets and areas around their homes. A report carried out by Demos and Green Alliance, which involved research with children around the UK, found that the majority of children no longer considered the street a safe place to play (Thompson and

Thomas, 2004). Danger was often the first thing mentioned when the children talked about being outside their homes, and this was particularly associated with being on the street.

It would seem that as well as traffic causing fear of playing in the street among children, fears of potential dangers from people are also common. The 2003 Home Office Citizenship survey found that 89 per cent of children aged 8 to 10 said that they liked living in their street or block a lot or quite a lot, and 66 per cent said that they felt safe walking around or playing in their street or block. However, 30 per cent did not feel safe and the remaining 4 per cent never went out alone (Home Office, 2003).

Although the majority of the respondents felt safe in their neighbourhoods, a proportion of children did not, and this could have an effect on their opportunities for play and recreational use of the street. Among the children who did not feel safe, the most commonly cited reasons were fear of abduction or kidnapping, which accounted for 59 per cent of respondents. Also 23 per cent of the children who felt unsafe stated their fears were because of cars and traffic, and 20 per cent said they were scared of other children or teenagers (Home Office, 2003). Only around one-third (33 per cent) of the children surveyed said that they went to the shops or park on their own.

There was variation in how safe the children in the study felt according to age and to social economic factors. The older children felt safer, with 81 per cent of 10-year-olds feeling safe when walking or playing alone in their street or block compared to only 50 per cent of 8-year-olds. Children living in affluent areas were also more likely to feel safe and to report positive views about their neighbourhood than those in deprived areas. Children living in the 20 per cent least deprived areas were twice as likely as those in the 20 per cent most deprived areas to say that they felt very safe walking alone in their street or block during the day (38 per cent compared with 19 per cent) (Home Office, 2003).

Public attitudes to children playing in the street

Matthews and Limb (2000) report on research carried with 9 16-year-olds around their use of public space. They argue that there are two popular views of children and young people's use of the street in public discourse. The first being that outdoor places are dangerous, and that children and young people are under threat, and the second that there is a problem with children on the street particularly older children, and that their presence in public space is undesirable.

In 2004 the Department for Transport and the Office for National Statistics published an omnibus survey that included a section, exploring people's attitudes to streetscapes and street uses. The respondents were asked for their thoughts on the improvement of different attributes of the street environment and whether they would be prepared to forego convenient parking and do some work

themselves to attain these features. They were also asked if they would be interested in getting involved in a potential redesign of their street.

The key findings were that over half the respondents thought that traffic in their area was dangerous to pedestrians and other road users. If their street was to be redesigned, the three activities that most residents thought should have priority were parking for residents, children playing, and walking. The majority agreed that the streets should be somewhere safe for children to play, and should be somewhere enjoyable to be, with soft landscaping such as trees and green areas. However, over half of these respondents said that they would not be prepared to park an extra 50 metres away from their homes in order for street design to accommodate these things (Department for Transport and the Office for National Statistics, 2004).

Overall 85 per cent of all respondents agreed that it was important that children should be able to play safely in the road or street where they live, with only one in ten disagreeing (Department for Transport and the Office for National Statistics, 2004). Respondents who had children were more concerned that the street should be somewhere that their children could play safely, over 90 per cent of respondents with children agreed with this, compared to 82 per cent of respondents without children. The more children in the household the more likely the respondents were to think that installing traffic calming schemes would solve the problems associated with street use.

Forty-three per cent of the respondents said that children playing should have priority if the street or road was to be redesigned; this was higher than walking, which was 42 per cent but was lower than parking, which 46 per cent of the respondents said should be the top priority. Not surprisingly the majority of people with children thought that children playing should have priority in their street. Also people living in residential cul-de-sacs or on a road or estate in a town, city or village were more likely than those living on main roads to think that children playing should have priority.

The survey shows that in general adults want children to be able to play safely in the streets; this is a huge proportion of adults even for those who do not have children. However, there is a lack of willingness to change the way the streets work in order for children to use them safely.

The Barnardo's and Transport 2000 study highlighted some areas of adult intolerance to children playing in the street. They cited research carried out by the Department of the Environment and the regions in 1999, which stated that 80 per cent of children are told off by adults when playing outside (Department for Environment Transport and the Regions, 1999b).

This intolerance on the part of adults is also outlined in research carried out as part of preparation for Playday 2003 by Young Voice

and The Children's Society (Stockdale *et al.*, 2003a). The young people they spoke to described being told off, told they were a nuisance and told to move on when they were playing outside; they saw this as a barrier to their play opportunities. Another report carried out by the same researchers, but specifically with 11 18-year-olds, found that one in four of the young people they spoke to had been told off by the police when playing outside (Stockdale, Katz, and Brook, 2003b).

Negative attitudes of adults are often focused on older children or teenagers. Gill Valentine argues that there is a moral panic in today's society surrounding young people on the streets (Valentine, 2004). This is backed up by research; a MORI survey in 2003 found that 75 per cent of the adult population supported a legally enforceable curfew on teenagers (Thomas and Hocking, 2003).

Anti-social behaviour and street use

Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (Asbos) were introduced as part of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, and came into force on 1 April 1999. The legal definition for anti-social behaviour as outlined in section one of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 is behaving 'in a manner that caused or was likely to cause harassment, alarm or distress to one or more persons not of the same household as himself', and 'that such an order is necessary to protect persons in the local government area in which the harassment, alarm or distress was caused or was likely to be caused from further anti-social acts' (HMSO, 1998). The orders can be issued to anyone over 10 years of age, and although they are a civil and not criminal sanction, breaching the order is a criminal offence and carries a maximum of five years' imprisonment. The government's aim

for Asbos is to prevent intimidating behaviour affecting communities and often includes restrictions on young people from entering a geographical area, or bans on certain behaviours.

The media often portray children and young people in a bad light when referring to Asbos. However, there have been recent news stories commenting on what many would consider the ridiculous nature of some anti-social behaviour orders. For example a recent article in a local London paper reported on a 5-year-old boy being told off by the police for drawing hopscotch markings on the pavement near his home because it was 'anti-social' behaviour (*Evening Standard*, April 2007). Peter Squires and Dawn Stephen (2005) argue that children and young people playing in the street was once seen as a normal, healthy and pro-social activity but has now become anti-social behaviour (Squires and Stephen, 2005). They argue that the street was once an ideal setting for children's play and recreation and that anti-social behaviour orders are a symptom of increasingly negative attitudes in society towards children and young people's place in the public realm.

A research study into anti-social behaviour carried out by the Youth Justice Board found that 49 per cent of young people in their sample (aged 10 17) had breached their anti-social behaviour order (Solanki, 2006). This suggests that frequently anti-social behaviour orders are ineffective and that they often draw young people into the criminal justice system through breach of them. Human rights groups have criticised Asbos for restricting the liberty of children and young people, as they can be issued to any child over 10 years of age. A Home Office press release in 2002 said that 58 per cent of anti-social behaviour orders were issued to people under the age of 18 (Home Office, 12 November 2002).

The Crime and Disorder Act 1998 also introduced 'Local child curfew schemes', which allow a ban on children or young people from being in a public space in a specified area between specified hours, usually between 9pm and 6am. This initially applied to children of 10 years old and under, but the age was increased to 15 in the Criminal Justice and Police Act 2001. The legislation is designed to be flexible and the police or local authority can decide the area of the curfew, and during which hours they want it to operate. The scheme gives police clear powers to take any child found in breach of a local child curfew, or who they believe to be at risk, home to their parents (Home Office, 2001). Although there is no criminal penalty associated with 'Local child curfews', they do greatly reduce the freedom children and young people have in public space.

The Anti Social Behaviour Act 2003 brought another order that further limits the freedom of young people to use the street. Part four of the Act provides the police with the power to designate an area where there has been significant and persistent anti-social behaviour. This area can be as small as a cash point or shopping centre or as wide as a local authority area. Within these designated areas police or

community support officers have the power to issue a 'dispersal order' that enables them to disperse what they see as 'intimidating' groups, and exclude people from the area for up to 24 hours. A 'group' is defined as two or more people so even where a few young people are gathered together they can be moved on.

Although a young person hanging out on the street with their friends is not explicitly outlined in statute as anti-social behaviour, the British Crime Survey does define it as such. The survey asks around 50,000 adults about their experiences of criminal victimisation in the past twelve months, and also asks about their perception of anti-social behaviour. The survey covers a range of so called anti-social behaviours and includes 'teenagers hanging around on the streets' along with, 'vandalism', 'people using or dealing drugs', and 'abandoned cars' (Home Office, 2004).

The Home Office document 'Defining and Measuring Anti-social Behaviour' (2004) states that while they recognise that a group of young people can be intimidating to members of the public, gathering in a group is not in itself anti-social. However, the issue of dispersal orders and the definition in the British Crime Survey would suggest otherwise.

4 Initiatives that have changed the way children can use streets

Home zones

Home zones were pioneered in the 1970s in the Netherlands, and come from the concept 'woonerf' meaning 'residential yard'. In short the idea is to attempt to create a balance between vehicular traffic and others using the street. Consultant Tim Gill describes home zones as a group of residential streets designed so that street space is available for social use such as children's play (Gill, 2006).

Home zones gained prominence in the UK in the 1990s with a campaign led by the Children's Play Council and Transport 2000. In 1999 the government announced a modest pilot programme for England and Wales, with eight pilots in England and one in Wales. The pilots were designed to shape future development of the home zones model, but political support for them grew and government launched a £30 million programme in England.

In 2001 the prime minister announced a home zone Challenge fund and local authorities in England were invited to bid competitively for funding for home zone schemes. Sixty-one schemes were selected, each scheme receiving an average of £500,000 (Gill, 2006).

The independent consultancy firm the Transport Research Laboratory (TRL) evaluated the schemes and gathered before and after information on traffic speeds and volumes, accidents and attitudes and views of children and adults. All the TRL evaluations found consistent support from adult and child residents for the measures introduced in their streets. They also found that traffic volumes had gone down after implementing schemes and that accidents had declined.

Five out of the seven evaluations suggested a positive impact on children's play opportunities. The strongest evidence for this being in Leeds (Gill, 2006); this pilot found that the proportion of children who said they played in the street increased in the 'after' survey. Over two-thirds of the adults interviewed thought that the home zone had made it safer for children walking and cycling and just over half thought that children should play in the street now that it was a home zone (Layfield, Chinn, and Nicholls, 2003).

When the evaluation had been carried out the benefits of home zones were clear, but with the challenge fund closed to bids there was no dedicated funding available from central government. This meant that local authorities or other public agencies wanting to take forward schemes needed to identify other sources of funding and use their

powers under the planning system to stimulate new build schemes (Gill, 2007).

In 2003 the then Association of London Government (now renamed London Councils) funded London Play's Home Zones for London project (HZfL). This project started some months after the funding was given and continued until summer 2007. The project has aimed to work in one designated neighbourhood in each of the five London boroughs chosen for their diversity and geographical spread.

The HZfL project aimed to build partnerships and other collaborative activity involving residents, community groups, local authorities and other development agencies in each of the target boroughs, in order to promote and develop proposals for schemes. The aim of the schemes were to create safer and greener living environments, enable children's access to safe play areas in their own neighbourhoods, and reduce road traffic accidents particularly among children. The project also aimed to strengthen the involvement of local communities in the design of their neighbourhood environments, and to influence public policy and urban planning to increase the development of home zones across London (Gill, 2007).

Writer and consultant, Tim Gill, carried out an evaluation of the work of London Play's Home Zones for London project, along with that of other home zone schemes. As part of his evaluation he focused on gaining the perspectives of the adults involved in taking forward, or trying to take forward home zones in London and other parts of the country. Twenty-two interviews were conducted, just over half by telephone and the rest face-to-face, and selected sites were visited. As well as this data, the report is also based on findings from other evaluations and studies of home zones (Gill, 2007). The report has been published by London Play and is available on their website.

One of the key findings of the report was that home zones make a real difference to children's outdoor play: children play in the street more, and adults say streets are safer for children's play. This also has an effect on levels of contact between adults, which increase, creating a stronger sense of community and making it more likely that parents will feel happy about giving their children greater freedom outside the home as they grow up (Gill, 2007).

Unlike the Dutch equivalent, there are no legal requirements regarding the design of home zones in the United Kingdom. The government has given local authorities in England the power to designate home zones under the 2000 Transport Act, but the term is not defined in statute.

However, there are signs, if not dedicated resources, of official support for home zones. The recently published *Manual for Streets* by the Department for Transport, and Communities and Local Government (2007), has outlined the benefits that home zones can have to the community. The manual highlights the importance of community

involvement in this process to meet the needs of residents and advocates effective consultation with young people.

Sustrans DIY streets

Home zones are successful in providing a body of practical examples of how streets can be made more accessible for community use, and in particular children's play. However, they have all involved significant capital investment and with the ending of the Challenge fund it is unlikely that such a large budget will continue to be available on a wide basis. Therefore, the sustainable transport charity Sustrans has come up with a way of realising some of the benefits of home zones at a much lower cost.

Sustrans DIY streets project is a pilot of an innovative approach to creating affordable home zone-type areas. They aim to work with local communities to develop low-cost changes that make their streets safer and more attractive, aiming to find simple interventions and materials, which can be both effective and durable (Sustrans, 2007).

Using funding from the Esmee Fairbairn foundation, the approach will initially be piloted with 10 communities, with the intention that it will then become replicable on a national scale, delivering the benefits of people-friendly streets at a fraction of the typical cost of a home zone (Sustrans, 2007). Sustrans believe it is important to work with residents based on what they want to change in their street. Their objectives are to provide support for these communities, in helping them to work with key partners and identify additional funding, and to monitor and evaluate the projects.

Sustrans are aiming to achieve a number of outcomes through the projects. First, they want to create safer streets through reducing traffic speeds and returning priority to pedestrians. Second, they also aim to increase community capacity as people are trained to work together. Third, of central importance is increasing opportunities for physical activity by encouraging active travel modes and creating safe play space for children (Sustrans, 2007).

Traffic calming schemes

There is evidence to suggest that the introduction of traffic calming schemes significantly reduces child pedestrian and cycling injuries and creates safer places for children and young people to play. The Child Accident Prevention Trust has pointed to speed as a key factor influencing the number of child pedestrian accidents. Pilkington argues that speed is a major factor in road accidents in the United Kingdom and that this poses a major threat to the health of the nation's children (Pilkington, 2000). Lack of speed restrictions rather than increased exposure to traffic has been shown to account for the excess deaths among child pedestrians in the UK compared to other European

countries such as France and the Netherlands (Department for Environment Transport and the Regions, 1999a).

Since 1999 Local Authorities have had the power to create 20mph speed limits in urban areas. There is strong evidence of an increase in safety to pedestrians in 20mph zones. Pilkington (2000) draws attention to government research which shows that the introduction of 20mph zones reduced the number of child pedestrian and cycling injuries by 67 per cent (Department of Environment Transport and the Regions, 1996). Research by local councils has produced similar results, for example Havant Borough Council imposed a 20mph limit on 20 miles of road and saw traffic casualties drop by 40 per cent (Pilkington, 2000).

Where calming schemes are put into place and traffic is forced to slow down, it is safer for children to use the street for play. Parental fears may be lessened in areas where the traffic is slower, and there are more opportunities for play and recreational use of the street area.

5 Government initiatives

In 2000 the UK government said they wanted children to feel safe enough to walk and cycle more, and acknowledged that children's social development, health and fitness depended on their freedom to use the street safely (Department of Environment Transport and the Regions, 2000).

The Department for Transport's child road safety strategy for 2007 includes encouraging wider use of 20mph zones in areas where children are active, and increasing road safety education. Also the 2007 Audit Commission report *Changing Lanes: Evolving roles in road safety*, suggests that road safety should be an issue for all schools and colleges as part of the 'stay safe' outcome in the Every Child Matters programme (Audit Commission, 2007).

The Department for Transport (DfT) is also promoting and funding a number of initiatives aimed at improving the quality of public spaces. These include clear zones that use innovative technologies to reduce road traffic and making places that are clean and safe for people to use. DfT has also targeted school travel and has undertaken a raft of initiatives designed to improve safety and reduce car use on the journey to school. These have included funding-dedicated school-travel advisors in local authorities, capital funding for schools on completion of a school travel plan, revenue funding for walk to school initiatives such as walking buses, and disseminating best practice through published guides.

In 2006, the Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) said that 'Successful, thriving and prosperous communities are characterised by streets, parks and open spaces that are safe clean and attractive' (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2006a). In the White Paper *Strong and Prosperous Communities* (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2006b), the government stated that when they deliver on basic issues like clean and safe streets then public satisfaction levels rise and people's pride in and commitment to where they live also rises. As a result communities become stronger and more confident.

The Department for Communities and Local Government has a lead role in coordinating the delivery of the 'cleaner, safer, greener' programme across government. Living Places sets out the government's vision and programme of action for improving the quality of local environments and public spaces. The government's aim is for everyone to have access to attractive, high quality and sustainable public spaces and local environments that cater for the diverse needs of communities. This means ensuring that public spaces are cleaner by improving how they are maintained and how services are managed and delivered, safer by improving how they are planned, designed and looked after, and greener by ensuring access to high-quality parks and more attractive public spaces.

In 2004, Home Office and ODPM (now CLG) funding was merged into the Safer and Stronger Communities Fund, worth at least £660 million over three years, with a specific outcome to make cleaner, safer, greener public spaces. This investment could have an impact on the quality of streets for children's play.

Most recently the Department for Transport (DfT), along with the Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG), have published a *Manual for Streets*. The manual does not set out new policy or legislation, but it does show how the design of residential streets can be enhanced.

The manual says that the public realm should be designed to encourage the activities intended to take place within it. Streets should be designed to accommodate a range of users, create visual interest and amenity and encourage social interaction (Department for Transport and Communities and Local Government, 2007). There is recognition that streets are used for a mixture of activity, not just to get from A to B, and that they should be designed to enable this. Streets should be provided in a mixture of dimensions including, 'squares, and courtyards, with associated "pocket parks", play spaces, resting places, and shelter' (Department for Transport and Communities and Local Government, 2007). The manual also states that enabling local children to walk and cycle unaccompanied is a key objective when designing streets.

6 Discussion

The findings from these studies reinforce that the street has consistently been a popular place for children's play. However, there are increasing barriers to this, and children and young people's freedom to use the street has been restricted in the past three decades. Increased traffic and parental fears have interacted with other factors to reduce children's use of the street.

Children's play in the streets and areas around their homes has changed over the past thirty years. As outlined in this review there are a number of reasons for this and none of them are straightforward. Children's access to the street is greatly restricted by traffic; we live in a society where increasingly streets are designed with motorists in mind and not other street users, including children and this has had a huge effect on children's use of the street.

Parents' fears also restrict children's use of the streets; these fears may come from worries over speeding traffic, bullies, or strangers who may harm their child. Arguably the sensationalism of modern media reporting has contributed to these fears and continues to do so. However, as Matthews and Limb (2000) argue there are two main discourses in public opinion on children and young people. One is that of the child or young person as vulnerable and in need of protection from the dangers of the street, and the other is a view of them as a nuisance indulging in anti-social behaviour.

This negative view of children and young people as an undesirable presence in public space is echoed in legislation that can remove them from public space, such as dispersal orders and anti-social behaviour orders. Arguably the legal definition of anti-social behaviour is subjective. What constitutes 'harassment, alarm or distress' is open to interpretation and could lead to children and young people being punished for playing in the streets if their acts are seen to affect adults in their neighbourhood in a negative way. Negative attitude towards children and young people being out on the streets in their community places the emphasis on removing them in order to protect the community. But they are part of that community and arguably dispersing or banning them from these areas does nothing for community cohesion, and can alienate young people.

Children and young people today are missing out on the essential benefits that playing and spending time outdoors near to their homes can bring. There needs to be greater awareness of this fact, and an effort on the part of local and national government to take action. The *Manual for Streets* is a positive step in highlighting the importance of child-friendly street design to the whole community. This shows that there is an increasing awareness that streets that are friendly for children and young people not only benefit them but also benefit the whole community. This is positive and suggests a realisation on the

part of government that streets need to be used for a variety of things, including children's play.

However as mentioned earlier in this review, the most recent Department for Transport figures for 2005, suggest that only 15 per cent of children played in the street (Department for Transport 2006). This is a very small proportion of children, and it is important to ask why this is the case. It is essential to continue carrying out research into why children and young people spend less time out and about on the streets near their homes and what would help them to do so more. To understand this it is essential to look at both their attitudes and experiences and those of their parents and other adults in their communities.

Many thinkers claim that the health and civilisation of a society can be measured by the way its children and young people are treated and the freedoms they enjoy. In our society children and young people are so restricted, often through legal sanctions, that they are missing out on their right to play and spend time outdoors in their communities. This is not a symptom of a healthy society and it is essential to work towards healing this.

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