

THE JECH GALLERY

An environmental face lift: the Dings Home-Zone project

Neighbourhood environments are likely to affect health outcomes in a variety of different ways. Previous submissions to the JECH Gallery have illustrated this fact. For example, Ellaway and McIntyre showed the stark differences in appearance of two local authority schools in Glasgow, one in a deprived area of the city and one in a more affluent area.¹ In a separate piece they used photographs to suggest that differences between affluent and deprived areas in retail outlets may contribute to reduce fruit consumption among residents of more deprived areas.² The photos here show important environmental changes to a deprived area of Bristol. The Dings (derived from old railway sidings) is a small community comprising of 117 houses in a clearly defined part of inner city Bristol. It is part of one of the three most deprived wards in Bristol and is in the bottom 10% of most deprived wards in the UK. The area has had minimal development by the council in the past 40 years and has been assigned over £1 million of funding for the development of a Home Zone largely funded by Vivaldi (European funds). Home Zones were first developed in the Netherlands and the aim of these developments is to encourage equity between pedestrians, cyclists, social use, and vehicles.

Photo 1 (top left) taken on a weekday in July 2004 shows the area before development. The area was blighted by rat running (colloquial British term that means speeding cars through narrow residential streets to avoid heavier traffic on main roads), which together with large amounts of commuter parking on the narrow streets during weekdays (the Dings being one of the few "convenient" city central free parking areas) created problems for the residents. Residents usually use cones or wheelie bins, to reserve parking spaces and/or prevent parking on both sides of the road, which made the rat running particularly hazardous. Photo 2 (top right), taken on a weekday in November 2004, shows construction in progress. Residents contended with four months of disruption during the development process. Finally, photos 3 and 4 (bottom left and right), taken on weekdays in January 2005, show areas where the Home Zone development has been recently completed. Pavements are no longer a step up from the road and, although cars are clearly allowed into the zone, pedestrians and non-motorised forms of transport have priority. Parking is by permit only and restricted to residents and once the development is completed it will not be possible to use the roads of the estate as rat runs. The shared surface consists of different coloured paving to differentiate between car parking bays, the road, and entrances to houses.

Will the disruption to the residents during this construction have been worthwhile? Will these changes to the neighbourhood make a difference to the health of the residents of the Dings? Through the collection of qualitative and quantitative data before, during, and after this development we hope to be able to answer these questions.



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