

PE1595/JJ

Mike Nixon Email of 20 January 2016

Dear Sir/Madam

On hearing that you are to be thinking of building and allowing shared spaces to be developed in your area and in Scotland, having experience of this road design in my own city in the recent past, I would like to present some facts to you. Firstly, the entire concept of shared space is flawed. Hans Monderman, the original designer of shared space himself admits that the problems that the blind from using shared space are insurmountable in that they could not independently access and travel safely through shared space (they have to make eye contact to negotiate with motorists). If you feel that in your city and Scotland, you have found a way to overcome these difficulties I salute you and no doubt you will be able to make huge amounts of money educating the rest of the world. If however, the situation is that you do not, then experimenting shared space areas is an abuse of human right for blind people. In building these areas you are effectively saying to the blind 'you don't exist, you have no human worth'. Following on from this you are also saying that the 'Duty of Care' that a council has towards its citizens DO NOT include the blind. You are also in fact saying your council WILL NOT be providing equal services to all people. As if somebody cannot access the city centre such as now if the case in my home town of Stoke on Trent, then that person cannot be said to be receiving services that the city freely makes available to all others. In fact the situation is in my city centre the foot fall has dropped in the shared space scheme, by an amount not accounted for just by the number of blind people who do not access it and others stopping away.

What is happening is the people have been told they have a new transport system in the centre of their city which they have to use and yet no one has yet published the rules concerning shared space. This has meant many people, including ordinary able bodied people, becoming confused in shared space. Again increasing the number of accidents and also reducing peoples' desire to visit the city and town centres. People want to shop in a familiar environment in a non-threatening environment.

I do not know if you have obtained money for your scheme and any other schemes across Scotland through European Grant Aid, as did my local city council. But if you did I can tell you that the procedure is illegal, all European money that is grant given have a codicil that states the money has to be used to at least maintain living conditions and most defiantly CANNOT be used for schemes that excludes any group of disabled people. European Parliament would be completely in its rights to demand any such grants to be given back from such schemes that have excluded any group of disabled people, and so I would question any consultant's advice that you have been given which says to the contrary. Because councils appear to have

got away with this so far this does not mean that there is not legal cases being prepared against councils.

To summarize so far you are thinking of developing areas with dubiously acquired money, which immediately institutes a regime of DISABILITY APARTHEID. And in the same time causing general disenchantment in the population leading to the reduction in the amount of trade conducted in that area. All of this you intend to do is in order to allow people from one side of the street to the other. Patrick McLoughlin, the Secretary of State for Transport immediately prior to the last election and visiting shared space in North Staffordshire declared that 'shared space is safe to use as long as you know how to use it' and yet has still failed to produce national guidelines on how shared space is to be used, accordingly he and anyone else involved in such schemes is guilty of totally misrepresenting the fact of the matter. His Minister Robert Goodwill MP stated in a letter that pedestrians had no priority at informal crossings which are used in shared space road schemes making it very difficult for people to share the space. What he should have said is that 'shared space is perfectly safe to use if we can invent ways people can use it which we which do not know at this present time'; this is a something he will NOT BE ABLE be able to do and I strongly suspect that government reticence in producing such guidelines is due to national politicians waiting for local politicians to make their decisions for them and thereby making it seem that any blame attached to the incompetent design of shared space is down to local politicians. Effectively it will be the local politicians who receive the blame for buying into these schemes, which demonstrate totally the failure to understand form over function.

Shared space is in effect the modern day horizontal equivalent of the architects dystopian dream last seen in the 1960's with the development o high rise accommodation blocks; which even the Prime Minister has within the last two weeks stated to finish by tearing them down. I fact, you intend to develop an area that probably has its own charms by replacing them by putting in a new road arrangement that does not work, will not attract new businesses to the area and may well lead the council with an area who's unique selling point it looks exactly like every other town center with the same shops, the same road layout and the same problems.

The elephant in the room with shared space is that people's human rights are being breached. It basically says to blind people that our city does not want you to go home, stay there and ROT. Or, at least, that is the message that myself and a fair number of my disabled colleagues think and feel. When you add this to the increased number of accidents and deaths, there is also a large number of people whose lives have been shattered by them being told by the area they live their lives and naturally in areas which generate great affinity and they love is now a no go area for them forcing them to lead segregated lives.

And so I think even the politicians will be able to see that the main cost of shared space is the cost that we will all have to pay, by our humanity being debased by the exclusion of perfectly worthy individuals from main stream society. In particular, it shows the dehumanization process that politicians and the greedy undergo in order to justify their decisions to themselves.

Surely, issues such as the removal of human rights from whole sections of society should not be made by architects, planners and engineers, nor should they be allowed to use live human beings in the trialing of their philosophical utopia. Lessons should have been learnt that society should not be shaped by those who have purely selfish and solipsistic interest.

If you do go ahead with your scheme and allow the development of shared space across Scotland without regard for the above issues the scheme WILL FAIL and you are the prime integrators in the development, and will have the deaths and injuries that will occur on your conscience; in fact to paraphrase the 'Road to Hell' is paved with shared space.

To prevent this from occurring in Scotland I fully support Alexander Taylor's petition PE1595 to get a moratorium on shared spaces.

Mike Nixon