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## **“Watching out for Walking: Using new developments to secure better walking conditions”**

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### **Abstract**

This paper argues that urban planning needs to take a pro-active approach to securing more walking through the control of new development. At the very least the local authority planning mechanisms must ensure that conditions for walking are made no worse, but for best practice they should ensure that opportunities are grasped for positive improvements. In Britain, these opportunities include securing money from developers to help to fund off-site improvements.

It shows how new development can be used to encourage a higher mode share for walking, and to enhance the quality of the walking experience.

It includes examples of places where new developments have been used to provide or improve routes and spaces for pedestrians, either providing the physical opportunities or providing funding, or both.

The inspiration for this is a project recently completed for Transport for London, which has this month been published as good practice guidance for local authorities.

## **Biography**

TIM PHAROAH, MSc, MRTPI, MCILT, MIHT.

works independently and for Llewelyn Davies Yeang. He previously worked as an academic and in local government.

His work spans both planning and transport. Major projects include strategies for speed management, traffic reduction and multi-modal integration. His experience extends to Europe, the USA and Australia as well as the UK.

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## **Introduction - the threat to walking**

Walking often fails to attract the attention of planners and developers because it is such an everyday activity. During a major Government enquiry into walking, the minister responsible for transport at the time said “I do not see what will be gained by having a national strategy on walking”. In some cities there are mode share targets for vehicle modes of travel, but walking is often left out. But what is the benefit of increasing the share of trips by bicycle and public transport if this is at the expense of people walking less? Walking and other activity on foot is valuable to our towns and cities and should be preserved and encouraged. Walking is the only truly “sustainable” mode of travel.

At the moment walking is under threat and in some places it is declining.

*In Great Britain walking trips have declined from 30% to 24% of all trips since 1990.*

Journeys are lengthening as people switch more and more to the use of vehicles. Provision for vehicles also makes walking less pleasant and less safe. We know the dangers, because in North American cities walking often accounts for less than 5% of all trips. In European cities we usually expect to see at least 20% of trips entirely on foot. This difference almost by itself defines the difference in character between American and European cities. For a wide variety of reasons, including health, environmental sustainability, social equality, we need to set the trend towards less vehicle trips, not more.

The move towards more motorised trips is not just because people choose to switch mode. The very nature of trips is changing, and often this change is brought about by new developments. Compared with older buildings, new developments are provided with more parking, and may be designed to attract people from a wide area, making walking less feasible as an option. New developments may also be designed and laid out from the perspective of people arriving by car rather than on foot. All of this discourages walking, and bit by bit, gradually over time, the option for people to carry out their activities on foot evaporates.

The urban environment changes only slowly of course, with just a few percent of the land area developed in any one year. But there is a much bigger “churn” of people within the built areas. In many parts of Europe 10% of people move home each year. A larger percentage of workers change their place of employment. So we can see that the impact on travel over a period of years is potentially quite significant. It should be noted that commercial districts (offices, industry and shopping) have a much faster turnover of development than residential districts.

## **Making the case**

It is hardly necessary to provide justification for walking improvements to a Walk21 conference audience, but walking should be encouraged because it is the most beneficial mode of travel.

Improved walking conditions can:

- Reverse the decline in walking
- Increase the proportion of travel made on foot
- Improve personal health
- Help those who have least travel choices
- Benefit the environment
- Encourage trade and competitiveness
- Encourage local business, and hence reduce travel
- Increase land and property values

In making the case for more attention to be paid to walking improvements, the importance of walking as a mode of travel should be stressed. For example:

- A short walk can replace a longer car trip if different destinations are chosen.
- Walking accounts for the majority of non-car trips (in Britain). It rarely accounts for less than 25% of all trips. Compare this with public transport, which rarely accounts for more than 10% of all trips, except in the big cities.

There is also a social value to walking which is barely recognised, let alone planned for. The recent study by Gehl Architects for Transport for London helps to rectify this as far as London is concerned. People on foot provide more “active eyes” that are valuable if streets and spaces are to be convivial and safe, and if local commercial and community activities are to be successful. People on foot are more valuable than people in vehicles because:

- They travel slowly and pause, and so see far more than those in vehicles
- They are unencumbered and so can respond quickly when help or assistance is needed (they don’t have to park first!)
- In terms of their presence in the street, people on foot are often more numerous than people in vehicles. Take a photograph of a street and count the number of people on foot and the number of people in vehicles. People on foot will often outnumber those in vehicles. This gives quite a different impression from comparing vehicle and pedestrian flows.
- So although the vehicle flow may be higher than the pedestrian flow, pedestrians may account for the majority of people present at any given time. Thus people on foot provide more “eyes and ears” than people in vehicles.

Once the case is made, and there is wide acceptance of the priority that walking needs to attract, then a watching brief should be kept on the opportunities that may be presented to achieve improvements as and when new develop is planned. Below we deal first with “opportunities” and then with “requirements” of new developments.

Table 1 The “Five Cs” quality criteria for walking networks

The Five Cs	Brief description
<i>Connected</i>	Walking routes should connect each area with other areas and with key ‘attractors’ such as public transport stops, schools, work, and leisure destinations. Routes should connect at the local and district level, forming a comprehensive network.
<i>Convivial</i>	Walking routes and public spaces should be pleasant to use, allowing social interaction between people, including other road users. They should be safe and inviting, with diversity of activity and continuous interest at ground floor level.
<i>Conspicuous</i>	Routes should be clear and legible, if necessary with the help of signposting and waymarking. Street names and property numbers should be comprehensively provided.
<i>Comfortable</i>	Walking should be enjoyed with high quality pavement surfaces, attractive landscaping and architecture, and freedom from the noise and fumes and harassment arising from proximity to motor traffic. Opportunities for rest and shelter should be provided.
<i>Convenient</i>	Routes should be direct, and designed for the convenience of those on foot, not those in vehicles. This should apply to all users, including those whose mobility is impaired. Road crossing opportunities should be provided as of right, located in relation to desire lines.

### ***Opportunities through new developments***

First, make sure that the paths and networks connect people to the places, facilities and other people that they need to reach. If not, new connections should be incorporated in the scheme. To get the networks and paths right, we can follow the “Five Cs” criteria (see Table 1).

Second, ensure that activities are spatially distributed in such a way that it is possible for them to be reached on foot. This means attention to density and mixing of activities.

Third, it means examination of the activities themselves, through economic and land use planning. An activity which serves or attracts a large number of people (office, shop, leisure centre) is not reachable on foot except for a small proportion of users. For big attractors, they must be reachable not just on foot but by public transport. In this case it is the public transport access points that must be reachable on foot (bus and tram stops and railway stations).

Fourth, developments can be examined for the potential to secure funding for off-site improvements

*What sort of improvements can be achieved?*

Many types of improvement are possible when new development occurs. Except in larger new developments, most opportunities will be improvements to existing streets and spaces, rather than the creation of wholly new ones.

New developments will often bring opportunities to overcome barriers to walking, such as railway lines, busy roads, canals and large industrial areas. New links from A to B can be created in order to make the network more “fine grain”. Urban designers refer to the “permeability” of areas, and the walking network is the principal means of achieving it. But a plan identifying the missing links needs to be ready at hand when development proposals are being drawn up.

Schemes for specified routes or areas to which new developments should conform and contribute also need to be drawn up, at least for areas where change is anticipated. Such policies will need to be backed with plans showing the location of specific schemes. Examples might be:

- The conversion of main streets to mixed use boulevards
- The creation of new public space
- The creation of new avenues of trees, or other landscape features
- The conversion of streets for speed management, for example the creation of traffic calmed areas (Home Zones or 20 mph zones)
- The creation or improvement of leisure walking routes

Measures to manage the speed of vehicle traffic can be incorporated into the design of new developments, in order to make walking routes safer and more agreeable. Too often one finds speed humps and other traffic calming measures retrofitted into new developments because nobody thought to address the road safety issue at the design stage.

There may also be opportunities for creating new quality spaces where activities and social interaction can take place. Adding interest and safety to walking routes can encourage more use, and this in turn makes routes more attractive.

The term “walking improvements” should be taken to mean the full range of improvements to life in public spaces and places:

- Walking from A to B (whether as the sole method of travel, or as part of a journey involving public transport or car);
- Circulation and social exchange, involving a range of activities on foot including window shopping, meeting people;
- Recreation and enjoyment of outdoor space, including walking for pleasure, dog walking, and local activities such as children playing, or people sitting at pavement cafes.

Because there is a wide variety of a potential improvement that planners can watch out for, a checklist will be useful to make the task easier. An example of such a checklist is given below.

### ***An example design checklist***

#### *On-site arrangements*

- Are the buildings arranged on site to minimise walking distance between front doors and the local network?
- Do all front doors face directly onto the street or public space?
- Is all frontage to the street “active frontage”, e.g. overlooked by windows especially at ground floor level?
- Does the layout avoid “dead” spaces that have no function and which can become the focus of unsocial behaviour including litter and graffiti?
- Are all entrances to the development compliant with disability design codes?
- In large developments, are there good quality arrangements for internal movement on foot?

#### *Off-site provision*

- Is the proposed development connected to all adjacent areas with footways and footpaths?
- Are there opportunities to create new connections?
- Are new footway vehicle crossovers proposed, if so can the additional inconvenience to pedestrians be justified?
- Will the development itself lead to an increase in walking activity?
- Are footways leading to the development adequate in width for the volume of pedestrian and other activity? If not, is widening proposed?
- Is all existing footway space retained or enhanced?
- Is there scope for the provision of a “quality margin” of extra space for walking and sitting, or for tree planting, or for other public realm activity?
- Are there plans and proposals for improving walking conditions in the vicinity, and if so does the scheme contribute towards their achievement?
- Are the spaces to be retained in private ownership clearly demarcated from those to be adopted by the Borough for maintenance?
- If re-instatement work is required following construction, have all opportunities been taken to build-in improvements?

### ***Requirements from new developments***

Negotiating improvements with developers is important, but some aspects will probably need to be specified as requirements rather than optional. Such requirements could include for example:

- Full reinstatement of footway paving and equipment damaged during the construction period
- Quality and safety of pedestrian movement made no worse than before
- Conversion of private gardens to hard standing and provision of new crossovers. There should be a presumption against such conversion;

- Protection of footway space. Footway space should not be reduced as a result of new development. Increases should be considered when the opportunity arises. Policy could be accompanied by plans indicating where increased footway space is required or desirable;
- For larger developments ensure that the mode of travel to and from will be consistent with policy objectives, and make sure that this is monitored after the development is up and running. Measures can be required in the Travel Plan for the development to maximise walking to and from the new development;
- Mechanisms should be required for the ongoing maintenance of areas accessible to the public.

## **The process**

Who needs to act and when?

1. Local authorities when making plans and policies, and when producing design codes or frameworks
2. Local planning authorities when deciding on specific development proposals
3. Developers when preparing proposals.

Two things need to be done periodically

1. Audits of route quality (against the 5Cs plus any other criteria)
2. Identify improvements that can be made as a result of new development – developers should be certain about what is wanted when preparing their schemes. These should be mapped and made available to developers.

For example, the following could be prepared:

- A map showing locations where improvements are wanted (based on the walking audits);
- Design standards or codes covering footways, crossings, public spaces, access to public transport facilities, etc;
- Construction and materials standards for reinstatement works, whether or not these are required as part of a legal requirement;
- Area or route-based special policies such as “green chain” or riverside walks.

Three things need to be done on an ongoing basis

1. Pro-actively check all development proposals and plans for opportunities to realise identified improvements, including funding contribution
2. Make sure people on foot actually gain from the scheme (and resist counter-productive traffic measures such as roundabouts, guard railings, split crossings that may be demanded by traffic planners to cope with additional traffic)
3. Larger developments need to have ongoing “Travel Plans” to ensure maximum walking mode share of trips by people using or occupying the scheme when complete



## **Conclusion**

This paper has identified the types of opportunity for improving the walking environment, and the way in which local city councils can achieve them through the planning and development process. This may be separate from the role and responsibilities for maintaining and improving footways and footpaths as part of highway and traffic responsibilities. Where new buildings and re-developments are created, there should be a watching brief to ensure that opportunities for creating better walking conditions are not lost. The new development itself can also be the spur to improvements, not least by providing the necessary money to achieve them. Such actions are now to be actively promoted in London, and it will be interesting at the Walk21 conference in Zürich to discover whether similar actions are taken in other European cities.

This paper concludes with nine illustrated case examples of where the planning of new development has had an impact on the quality of the walking environment. Some references and further reading are also provided.

## Case examples

Case 1: (Bad practice example) Sometimes so-called pedestrian improvements in fact make walking conditions worse, as in this case where pedestrians now have to cross in two stages instead of one, and at each stage must use a push button to gain permission. (*Tesco superstore, Lambeth, London*)

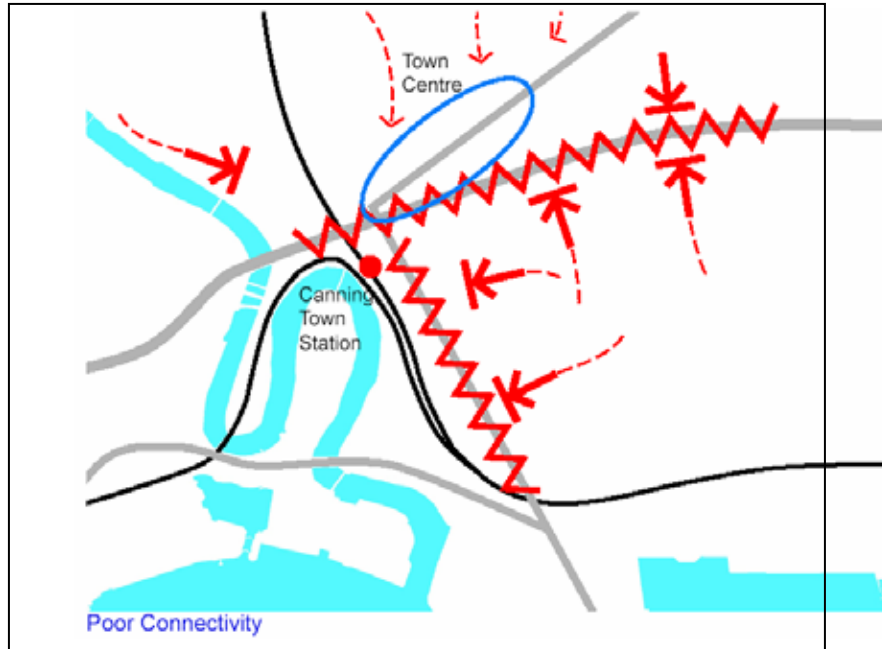


Case 2: Popular new square created on developer's initiative. Provided as part of a new shopping area on the site of a former barracks (*Chelsea, London*).

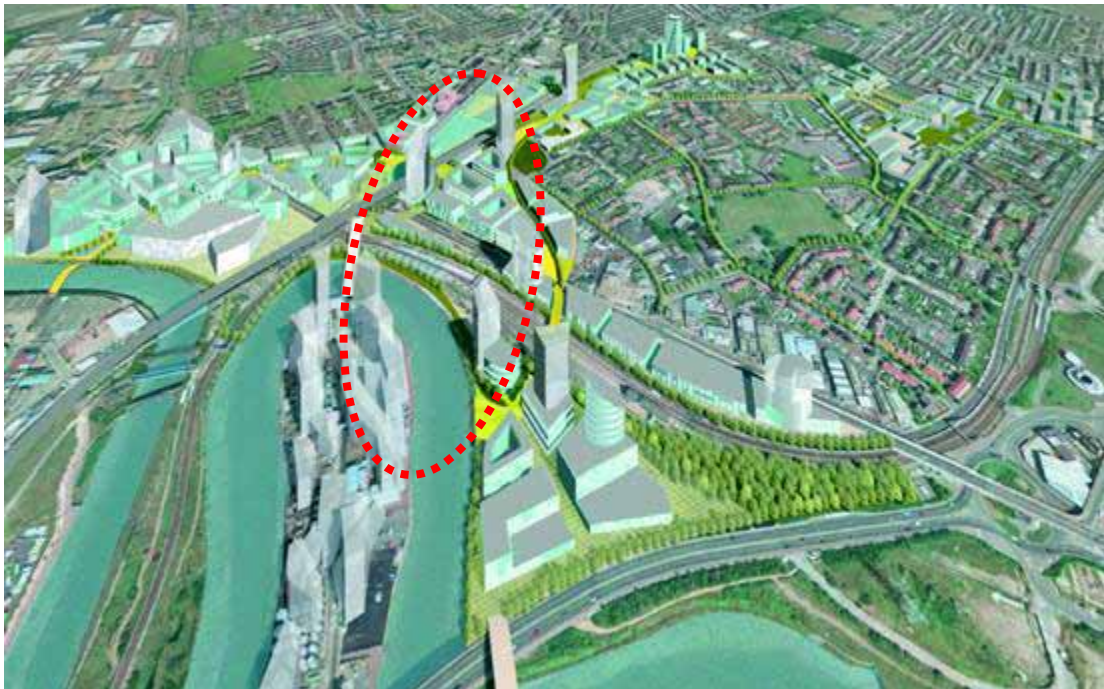


Case 3: Greater public transport accessibility creates the potential for a more thriving centre at *Canning Town, East London*. But new connections are needed to realise the potential, and these can be achieved through major redevelopment of outworn housing and commercial areas, as shown in the 3D graphic below.

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New connections to the town centre at *Canning Town, East London*



Case 4: (Bad practice) Construction traffic for a new school development caused major damage to the footway, but a requirement to repair the damage was either forgotten or was not enforced.  
(*Streatham, South London*)



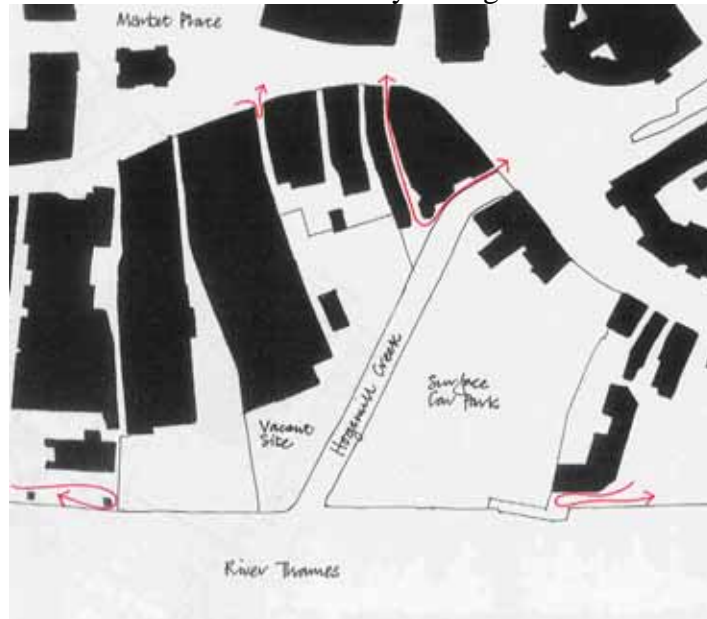
Case 5: New residential mixed use development, adjacent to Chelsea Bridge, London, provided the opportunity to complete a major riverside walk. The developer also funded a lift to allow full access from the bridge to the walkway.



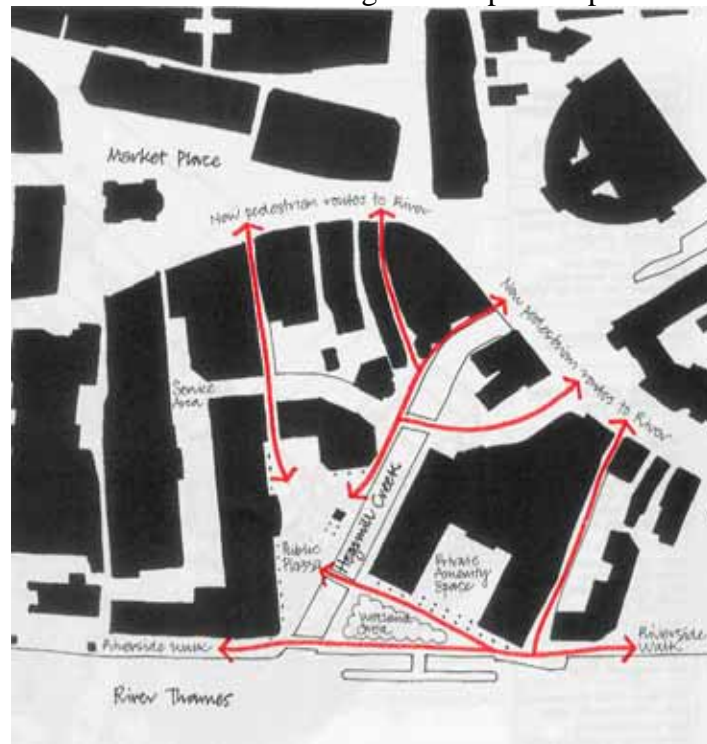


Case 6: *Kingston town centre and riverside, London*. Improvements as part of mixed-use residential scheme reconfigured this previously impermeable area that turned its back on the riverside. The riverside walk was completed and new links and spaces were created between the town centre and riverfront.

Before: no way through



After: New walking routes opened up



Case 7: Small scale improvements are also worthwhile. Here a constrained footway at a junction was resolved when new apartments provided the opportunity. Now there is more space for pedestrians, and for a tree also

Before



After



Case 8: New link created between two important town centre streets by the creation of a new shopping mall off *Upper Street, in Islington, London*.



Case 9: The new development in Case 8 also funded improvements to the adjacent footway in the form of removing a steep crossfall, and paving in high quality materials (*Islington, London*)



## Further reading and references

### Policies and documents

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*Evidence of economic and commercial benefits of good walking conditions, with 15 central London case studies.*

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