

## USE traffic calming awards

Judges' comments on the entries and the six finalists presented at the conference by chairman of the judges, Tim Pharoah

### **General remarks on the competition**

The judges discussed all the entries at length, but in the end were unanimous in picking the six finalists and the two winners.

No one scheme fully satisfied the two main criteria on which the judges made their choices. These were a bold approach to the solution of a significant problem, and a high quality of design and execution.

Traffic calming needs to tackle multiple objectives, including townscape improvement, and reduction of noise and air pollution, as well as improved safety and accident reduction. A major problem, especially for residential traffic calming schemes appears to be that funding mechanisms do not match these objectives. A local authority can often get money to reduce a known accident problem, but will have much more difficulty finding money to plant a tree, or to specify high quality paving. Too much residential calming is done on the cheap. Moreover, many schemes are poorly thought out, with money being wasted on inappropriate materials and street furniture. Designers should realise that "blockwork doth not a good scheme make".

This may go some way to explaining why in the two years of the traffic calming awards, the judges have yet to be presented with a really first class residential traffic calming scheme. It must be possible to combine good safety design with good environmental design, and this is the challenge for future competition entrants.

Too many schemes are still designed from the driver viewpoint, and must be viewed as highway or traffic management designs rather than the desirable outcome which is the conversion of streets to places for people. This fundamental opportunity of traffic calming is being missed in most schemes.

There is real danger of a backlash against traffic calming unless the standards of design, landscape and construction are improved. There is an urgent need to incorporate good traffic calming practice into mainstream work, including new estate roads, area enhancements, and routine maintenance and repair work.

The judges were aware of many difficulties which local authorities face in implementing traffic calming schemes. Ultimately, however, they were judging the quality of outcomes, not the quality of intentions.

### **Comments of the 6 finalists**

#### **Borehamwood**

This scheme was regarded as a breakthrough, in achieving calm driving behaviour on a main road carrying 18,000 vehicles a day. Priority for pedestrians is achieved not by traffic lights or regulations, but by the design of the measures installed, namely flat-topped humps and a divided two-lane carriageway. The judges were impressed with how well the scheme functions, and believe it to be the boldest main road traffic calming scheme in Europe. (10,000 vehicles per day is regarded usually as the maximum flow which can be integrated successfully with pedestrians.)

The judges also approved of many of the design features, including the feature lighting which has provided an element of continuity in a street with unremarkable architecture. It was felt, nevertheless, that the detailed design including materials and colour choices could have been simplified. More consideration could also have been given to the overall appearance of the street, including the alignment and scale of the various elements.

In terms of a bold approach to a difficult problem, the Borehamwood scheme was considered to be exceptional, and the judges urged people to visit the scheme to experience at first hand the way in which drivers have been persuaded to give way to pedestrians.

#### Godalming

Unlike Borehamwood, Godalming High Street has a by-pass. The traffic problem was therefore less of a challenge. However, as an historic town the promoters of the scheme succeeded in achieving a design which is both functionally effective and environmentally attractive. The design is sophisticated and complements the historic buildings without being intrusive. The judges particularly liked the attention to construction detail and the choice of paving materials. Public consultation had clearly been important in achieving the high quality result.

The absence of yellow lines and other markings and signs within the High Street is an important contribution to the overall appearance of the scheme.

The judges only reservation was the almost immediate reversion to "bog standard" road and traffic design immediately beyond the scheme boundary. They would have liked to see better integration of the scheme with the adjacent parts of the town.

#### Avon (Bristol)

This was thought to be a good example of the type of treatment which should be mainstream practice in non-core shopping streets and other town centre streets not suitable for pedestrianisation. The judges had reservations about the construction quality and also the appropriateness of some of scheme elements, for example bus laybys and fairly "open" junction spaces.

#### Glasgow, York Hill

This scheme was a streetscape enhancement in a residential area, submitted by the designers. A dramatic improvement of this tenement area had been achieved, with the introduction of attractive materials and some soft landscaping, and renewal of some earlier traffic management features. While the overall appearance was applauded, the judges felt that some elements of the design could have been better thought through. In some cases expensive street furniture had been installed with little if any benefit, for example tree grills in locations where people cannot walk, and block paving in permanently occupied parking bays.

#### Nuneaton (Camp Hill and Black a tree estates)

This scheme entered the list of finalists on account of its ambitious scale for a residential calming scheme, and the efforts made to achieve a design which satisfied local interests. It was somewhat too early to judge how effective and popular the various measures were, though the judges were told that the chicanes (a small element of the scheme) had proved unpopular.

The judges felt that the design reflected the somewhat limited expenditure in

relation to the population and size of the area. It was felt also that the money could in some cases have been spent to better effect by adopting a simpler approach to the design of traffic calming features.

#### Petersfield

This scheme was somewhat unusual in being one of the six Department of Transport demonstration projects for by-passed towns on the Trunk Road network. This meant that considerable funds were available for the project. The judges were impressed with the transformation of Dragon street from a traffic dominated area to a pleasant town distributor. The overall appearance of the street was applauded.

The judges had some reservations, however, both on the scheme conception and on the detailed design elements. It was felt that the scheme could have been planned in relation to adjacent streets with greater pedestrian-vehicle conflicts but which have yet to be improved. The down-sizing of the carriageway, while considerable compared with the situation before, was thought to be less radical than could have been achieved. The judges would also have liked a firmer rejection of the "through road" character by removal of a pelican crossing, which considerably marred the final design. A further element over which the judges had reservations was a rather large undifferentiated space at a "T" junction, where safety appeared to depend on uncertainties over which driver has priority. This approach was thought to create problems for pedestrians, and possibly drivers as well, but was seen to be an interesting item to monitor. Finally, the judges felt that the details of paving work could have been better thought through and executed.