

**CIHT AWARDS 2013**  
**The CIHT Enterprise/Mouchel Streets Award**

**POYNTON TOWN CENTRE, CHESHIRE**

The major streetscape and place-making project to regenerate the retail and social centre of the small Cheshire town of Poynton was completed in March 2012, following five years of local discussion, consultation, fund assembly, planning and construction. The scheme was commissioned by Cheshire East Council with Poynton Town Council, with funding support from the SEMMS Programme, Sustrans, development funding and others. The project centred around improving accessibility and connectivity of the retail high street, Park Lane, to its surrounding community, and especially to the residential communities and local railway station formerly cut off by the very busy London Road, the north-south A523 Manchester to Stoke main road.

Poynton is a crossroads town on the London Road. Its centre, Fountain Place, consists of the intersection of London Road with Chester Road and Park Lane. The very high volume of traffic with significant numbers of HGV's (c. 26,000 vpd) had given rise over the years to a wide, cluttered, signal controlled multi-lane junction. Attempts to reduce congestion and delays to both drivers and pedestrians through adjusting signal timings had been unsuccessful, and the barrier effect of the junction was clearly having an adverse impact on the economic health of Park Lane and the town centre. With 16 void shops in 2010 and declining investment, there were concerns that a new supermarket development to the east would finally kill off the high street.



*Fountain Place, Poynton.(above), and Park Lane high street (below). January 2008*



Following extensive local discussions with residents and traders, a radical masterplan was drawn up in 2009 by Hamilton-Baillie Associates, with support from Arup. This involved both radical streetscape changes to Park Lane, as well as the decision to simplify and remove all traffic signals, road markings and barriers and the creation of a free-flow, low-speed integrated streetscape. A language of visually

narrowed carriageways, bold courtesy crossings, widened footways and very strong transitional gateways was developed, based on a distinctive approach to place-making. New paving materials, planting, lighting and street furniture all contributed to re-establishing a sense of place at the town's major and minor intersections.



*Poynton Town Centre masterplan. 2009*

Reassuring the transport engineers that the proposed scheme could cope with the volumes and traffic and pedestrians required extensive modelling via three different systems, combined with a trial switch-off of the former lights. Building support amongst residents with physical or visual disabilities required many months of option testing, sample material detailing and visits to precedent sites. With overall political leadership provided by the County ward and town councillor, Howard Murray, the first phase for Park Lane was completed in 2010.

Despite much anxiety surrounding such a radical approach to managing traffic and pedestrian movements, the second phase for Fountain Place began in July 2011. The heavy loading from 44-ton HGV's at full lock over the junction required very careful detailing and workmanship to minimise future maintenance of the granite blocks and 30 mm kerbs used in the twin roundel junctions that form the intersection. Lack of alternative routes meant maintaining traffic flows throughout the construction period. Progress was hindered by the discovery of a long-collapsed major sewer under Fountain Place, and the need to divert existing and plan for any future services.

Constant local input and support from the energetic Town Council ensured that an unusually wide cross-section of local traders and residents remained engaged and informed throughout the project, and the use of a local shop as a drop-in point provided an easy outlet for concerns, worries, suggestions and feedback. Initially few were convinced that the junction could cope with traffic volumes, although everyone recognised the urgent need to tackle the accessibility problems of the town centre and to restore confidence in the retail environment.

The Town Council took the decision before commencing Phase 2 to commission a film company to record the former traffic conditions, trading environment, and the views and fears of local residents. This exercise gradually expanded, thanks to volunteer input from the film company, into a 15 minute description of the project. This can be viewed via You-Tube at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-vzDDMzq7d0> (Title: "Poynton Regenerated").

The new arrangement fully reopened to traffic in March 2013. The immediate reduction in congestion and queue lengths surprised many observers, as did the speed of change in the pedestrian footfall in Park Lane. Although too early to draw full robust quantitative data on economic regeneration, road safety and pedestrian/cycle movements, the initial signs are very promising. There has been one minor personal injury accident in the first three years of Park Lane's operation, and none in Fountain Place, compared to 4-7 serious incidents in each of the three years leading up to the project. Average speeds have fallen to around 20 mph, despite the lack of any change in local speed limit. Journey times through the centre of Poynton have significantly reduced for traffic and pedestrian delays have dropped. As of February 2013, there was only one void trading premise in Park Lane, and 80% of retailers report increased footfall and turnover.

The scheme represents the first time that shared space principles have been applied to a major junction with such high volumes of traffic, and is providing much useful information to allow traffic models to be re-calibrated for low speed interactions and free-flowing junctions. The combination of psychological measures to influence driver behaviour appear to have succeeded in establishing a very different speed environment, and one that allows the informal interaction of pedestrians through courtesy and communication without generating significant traffic delays. Despite initial doubts, the new arrangements have been cautiously welcomed by the town's physically and visually disabled residents.

The total scheme cost of around £4 million includes around £1 million cost for the sewer repair. Main contractor was Casey Ltd.. Landscaping and detail design was by Planit Landscapes, with engineering support by Stockley. The overall scheme design was carried through by Hamilton-Baillie Associates on behalf of Cheshire East Council and Poynton Town Council.



*Park Lane, Poynton. June 2012*





Fountain Place. June 2012

