

Scottish Health Policy Briefing

Encouraging and enabling everyday walking

Humans are designed to be physically active, but the past fifty years have seen our built and cultural environment design physical activity out of our lives. The dominance of private transport has played a significant part in the rise of obesity as a public health concern. However, by increasing everyday walking we can drastically improve the health of the Scottish public.

Living Streets proudly promotes walking, and campaigns for safe, pedestrian-friendly streets. This policy briefing sets out what we do and what we believe needs to change to encourage and enable more walking as a catalyst for improving public health.

The unhealthy state we're in

Scotland is getting fatter: Almost two-thirds of men (64%) and more than half of women (57%) were overweight (including obese) in 2003. Furthermore it was estimated that around 22% of men and 24% of women were clinically obese. This is a growing trend: there has been a marked increase in the prevalence of obesity since 1995 when 16% of men and 17% of women were obese. (source: Scottish health survey 2003).

The 2007 Foresight report into obesity in the whole of the UK paints a starker picture:

“By 2050 60% of men and 40% of women could be clinically obese. Without action, obesity-related diseases will cost an extra £45.5 billion per year... The obesity epidemic cannot be prevented by individual action alone and demands a societal approach.”

This recognition that the epidemic must be addressed by a *societal approach* demonstrates how Living Streets' arguments are now being accepted by government.

Walking, a straightforward, carbon-neutral, and completely free form of transport – which has been shamefully neglected over the past 50 years – has the power to address the obesity problem. Walking one mile (1.6km) can burn up at least 100kcal (420kJ) of energy and walking two miles (3.2km) a day, three times a week, can help reduce weight by one pound (0.5kg) every three weeks. Therefore everyday walking needs to be both *encouraged* and *enabled* – we need to build it back into our lives.

1. Encouraging walking

Living Streets campaigns

Our campaigns focus on overcoming perceived 'barriers' to walking in every day life.

Living Streets works with the *Paths to Health* project in Scotland, offering advice on how to set up walking projects and providing training, grants and resources to help to promote walking.

Over 50% of children do not walk to school regularly. The *Walk to School* campaign asks parents, pupils and teachers to think about their journey to and from school, and the many benefits of making it on foot instead of simply jumping into the car each morning.

Walking Works encourages the nation's workforce to walk for all or part of their regular commute. Awareness events such as national Walk to Work day, and targeted work in specific cities help to publicise the campaign.

The *Fitter for Walking* project enables communities to take a look at their local environment, and make practical changes to create a more attractive environment for walking.

Living Streets recommendations

- To help fight childhood obesity, there must be a firm financial commitment to support school travel plans beyond the current 2010 cut-off date.
- Regular walking should be one of the first things any GP prescribes for obesity: this is consistent with National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) guidelines for inactive adults, recommending 30 minutes of moderate physical activity at least 5 times per week.

2. Enabling walking

While our own promotional work is effective and important, it must be recognised that the built environment plays an enormous part in whether or not people choose to walk. From the basic design principles of connected, sustainable communities, to more everyday issues such as safe, even, and well-lit pavements, there are numerous opportunities to build walking back into our lives.

Living Streets campaigns

Through our networks of committed local volunteers and our regional and national offices, we campaign actively to enable walking:

- **Safer streets**
 - We call for a default 20mph limit in all residential areas
 - Our 'Green Man' campaign argues for safe crossing points where people want them
 - All pavements and other walking routes must be safe, well lit, and free from obstruction

- **Walkable neighbourhoods**
 - Through our community street audits we bring together local people's knowledge of their own neighbourhoods with the expertise of Living Streets. We identify what needs to change to make the neighbourhood more pedestrian-friendly.
- **Manifesto for Scottish Streets**
 - Launched in February 2007, the Manifesto for Scottish Streets sets out our ten point plan for enabling streets that are better for walking and better for living in: where we can all feel safe, spend time, and meet other people. For a copy of this please contact us using the details below.

Living Streets recommendations

To realise sustained improvements to walking conditions, government **must** take a lead. Therefore we keep walking issues high on the agenda in all our meetings, consultation responses, and events with both local and national government and the civil service. This section outlines our recommendations.

Recommendations for central government

In 2007 Living Streets, jointly with the National Heart Forum and the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE), produced *Building Health*, a blueprint for action to create and enhance public spaces for healthy, active lives. While it is an English document, the recommendations in this report set out our general views on what needs to change for the built environment to assist the improvement of public health, whether north or south of the border. Some of these recommendations are reproduced here.

The Scottish Executive must:

- Carry out a review of guidelines for the design of streets, public spaces and rural lanes. This should emphasise the principles of shared space (in which different street users have equal entitlement and priority to the space), and the creation of a public realm free of barriers for simple day-to-day movement.
- Push forward with plans to develop a Scottish equivalent to the English *Manual for Streets*, and expand it to cover “higher order” streets and roads: the Manual applies only to new-build, lightly trafficked residential streets.
- Require all departments to apply a ‘health check’ to every investment programme they initiate, focusing on the impact that the programme will have on levels of physical activity and other aspects of health.
- Change the remit of quangos and non-departmental government bodies to include an obligation to promote active living and reduce greenhouse emissions.
- Promote, with professional organisations and universities, the integration of health-promoting principles in education and training for professionals such as transport engineers, town planners and environmental scientists.
- Update Planning Policy Guidance SPP17 to provide a much more robust basis for limiting car-dependent development.

Recommendations for local government

Meanwhile, every local authority must:

- Adopt a policy of prioritising pedestrians and cyclists in their transport policy statements, and also produce an assessment of whether they have delivered that aspect of the policy as part of their annual plan.
- Require promoters of residential developments above a certain threshold size to prepare a statement explaining how residents would be able to walk, within a specified time, to a specified range of local services and facilities – for example, to a food shop, primary school or health centre. In due course, it should no longer be possible to build new homes in or on the edge of urban areas where the private car would be the only genuinely attractive option for travel for such basic needs.
- Develop an integrated walking network, linking residential areas with shops, public transport, and other everyday services
- Publish a ‘public realm strategy’, which encourages the informal and unconstrained use of streets and public spaces.

Information and contact details

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Useful links

Architecture and Design Scotland:

<http://www.ads.org.uk>

CABE (for *Building Health* report):

<http://www.cabe.org.uk>

National Health Service:

<http://www.show.scot.nhs.uk>

The Scottish Government:

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk>

National Institute for Clinical Excellence:

<http://www.nice.org.uk>