

Living Streets is the national charity that stands up for pedestrians. With our supporters we work to create safe, attractive and enjoyable streets, where people want to walk.

## **Living Streets' response to the White Paper – Listening to you: Your health matters**

### **Introduction**

We are the national charity that stands up for pedestrians. With our supporters we work to create safe, attractive and enjoyable streets, where people want to walk. We work with communities, professionals and politicians to make sure every community can enjoy vibrant streets and public spaces.

We started life in 1929 as the Pedestrians Association and have been the national voice for pedestrians throughout our history. In the early years, our campaigning led to the introduction of the driving test, pedestrian crossings and 30 mph speed limits. Since then our ambition has grown. Today we influence decision makers nationally and locally, run successful projects to encourage people to walk and provide specialist consultancy services to help reduce congestion and carbon emissions, improve public health, and make sure every community can enjoy the benefits of walking.

### **Response to the consultation questions:**

#### **Question 33**

We welcome the proposals contained within the White Paper to require local authorities to develop a strategy for the provision of access to toilets for public use in their area.

The Active Travel Act Design Guidance section on pedestrian related facilities highlights the importance of public toilets for pedestrians to improve the public realm and make streets accessible for all.

Section 8.4 of the guidance notes that:

*A lack of clean, accessible and safe toilets impacts on all pedestrians but can disproportionately affect the most vulnerable pedestrians. Older people, parents and carers with young children, disabled people and people with chronic health problems all need easy access to suitably equipped public toilet facilities. Some people may feel unable or reluctant to leave their homes and visit areas where they fear they will not be able to find a public toilet. A lack of toilet facilities at the right time in the right place contributes to dirty streets that are unsanitary, unpleasant and can spread infection. Public toilets in places like parks and promenades help to encourage people who may need regular toilet access to take exercise and stay physically active. However, public toilets that are badly designed, badly maintained, and poorly located generate a sense of neglect.*

#### **Question 47**

Living Streets is concerned that the White Paper and consultation, looks at physical activity only as a part of tackling obesity. Physical inactivity is in itself a major public health issue, which is costing Wales over £650million a year. While there are links, obesity and physical inactivity are separate public health issues – it is perfectly possible to be of a healthy weight and suffer from issues linked to lack of physical activity.

Living Streets believes that with no specific questions on physical activity in the consultation questionnaire, there is a real risk that bodies outside the health sector, but which contribute

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towards physical activity, may not provide their valuable insights through the consultation. This is a particular concern because so much of the practical work to promote physical activity is executed by organisations beyond public health policy, who may be dissuaded from submission as there is no natural point of entry to the process.

We believe the issues relating to physical inactivity and sedentary lifestyles should be given greater prominence as the legislation moves forward. Together with other organisations we have asked Welsh Government to take corrective action on this specific part of the consultation, for example by highlighting the issue at consultation events.

We are very keen to work with Welsh Government officials to determine how existing plans (for example Active Travel Action Plan and Creating an Active Wales) could best be integrated with the White Paper. We will also want to work closely with Government to develop solutions and approaches to increasing population wide physical activity throughout the life course in Wales.

It is important that the health implications of leading a physically inactive and sedentary lifestyle are properly reflected as this process moves forward. This will help to ensure that all Government departments (including Ministers and local government) and other regulatory bodies see tackling these issues as their responsibilities.

We are concerned that as things stands - very often the department funding active travel initiatives will not count the cross-sector benefits. In Wales, the Department for Economy, Science and Transport (EST) is the main funder of walking and cycling projects, yet assessment of the health impacts of these schemes is limited in favour of an attempt to express the economic benefits. For any future legislation on public health within Wales, it is vital that the Finance Minister and Department are fully involved, to ensure that health costs and benefits are considered across all projects and departments. In our view, this means a future Bill must consider all elements of policy and not merely a select few.

The setting up of the Active Travel Board within the Welsh Government (chaired by the Minister for Culture and Sport) is a positive step in delivering collaborative working. The main focus of the Board appears to be overseeing the Active Travel Action Plan – Living Streets analysis of the action plan is that there is very little cross departmental commitment at a strategic level. Other than listing short term project specific initiatives, there is a lack of intention articulating how health improvement approaches will respond to the Active Travel Act by aligning resources alongside transport infrastructure spend to help people overcome the barriers that prevent them from travelling actively. New public health legislation is a great opportunity to ensure these issues are considered across portfolios well into the future.

**For more details please contact:**

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