

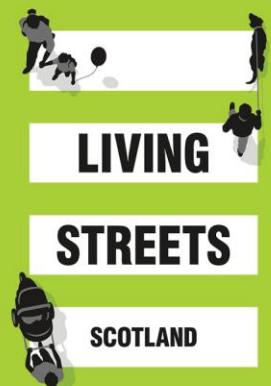
Living Streets

Aberdeenshire Summary Report

March 2018



We are Living Streets Scotland, part of the UK charity for everyday walking. We want to create a walking nation where people of all generations enjoy the benefits that this simple act brings, on streets fit for walking.



Contents page

Page 3 – Living Streets Scotland

Page 3 – Introduction

Page 4 – Aberdeenshire wide themes

Page 7 – Contacts

Living Streets Scotland

We are Living Streets Scotland, part of the UK charity for everyday walking. We want to create a walking nation, free from congested roads and pollution, reducing the risk of preventable illness and social isolation and making walking the natural choice. We believe that a walking nation means progress for everyone. Our ambition is to enable people of all generations to enjoy the benefits that this simple act brings and to ensure all our streets are fit for walking.

Introduction

Living Streets Scotland, LSS, was asked to speak to local communities in Aberdeenshire to gather evidence supporting the development of Integrated Travel Town Masterplans for 5 settlements in the county. Each Masterplan looks at different aspects of active travel and public transport within that community, and across Aberdeenshire. Our work looked more specifically at the needs of local residents in each settlement with regards to making every day utility journeys on foot, and also considered access to public transport for longer journeys. LSS Project Coordinator used a Community Street Audit approach to engage local residents to identify key routes linking amenities and facilities they considered most important, and then to walk the routes to record assets and barriers for walking, and make recommendations for improvements. Levels of participation from local residents varied from town to town, however efforts were made by the LSS project Coordinator to engage residents via community councils, and other active local groups. The project Coordinator actively sought participation from local residents who could be considered to be more vulnerable as pedestrians, including older residents living in sheltered housing facilities or attending day services and lunch clubs, and residents with a mobility or sensory disability. Activity also targeted young people living in each settlement. These groups of residents were specifically targeted for participation as being least likely to have access to a car, and to be most reliant on and affected by the quality of streets and spaces for walking to keep connected to their communities and to be able to access essential facilities.

Separate Community Street Audit reports have been written for each town, however a number of themes have emerged from our activities that cut across different settlements and reflect broader issues for residents in Aberdeenshire, including more vulnerable residents. There is scope within the ITT Master planning process to take action on these emerging themes at a local level; and to inform decision making with regards to active travel and public transport access across the local authority area.

Aberdeenshire wide themes

Need for improved cross departmental working with a joint focus on delivering more walkable communities

It was clear from speaking to local communities that some of the barriers to walking for short local journeys could only be resolved by several Aberdeenshire Council teams working more closely together. For example, to reduce the effect of badly replaced bins on collection day would need cooperation from the refuse team. To reduce the amount of and/or perception of anti-social behaviour in the evenings would need cooperation from Police Scotland, Community safety team, Education and Culture and Leisure.

At the workshops it became apparent from speaking to council officers supporting community planning activity at Area Partnership level that there was already work being taken forward focusing on some of the themes emerging from LSS Community Street Audit activity. For example, an extensive programme of Place Standard workshops had recently been taken forward across Banff and Buchan, feeding in to the development of Community Action Plans¹. It would be useful to speak to council colleagues working at a local level to map out their current focus and activity, in order to coordinate both engagement activity, and align ITT masterplans to Community Action Plans and Locality plans. There are some useful local contacts in the contacts section below.

Understanding the impact of Planning and development of local services for those walking, cycling, and using public transport

There were several communities that spoke about new housing being built on the edges of existing communities and new community centres, schools and supermarkets being built beside them. This was causing issues for some residents because these were seen as being too far away. This was apparent in Banff where the community centre had moved from the town centre to the edge of the town, meaning the residents from the sheltered housing stopped attending activities as they couldn't make it up the hill. Banchory residents said that the town feels divided into two halves, the old town and new town. They also said that services were being skewed away from the residents that had been there the longest. Having services on the outskirts unfairly hits the least mobile within the community and may mean they have to drive or take taxis to access services, incurring an additional expense that may be out of the reach of some in these groups.

¹ <http://www.ouraberdeenshire.org.uk/your-area/buchan/community-planning-in-action/place-standard-assessments/>

Further education and culture change around 'Active Travel'

Culture promotion and education around 'Active Travel' and what the Integrated Travel Town Masterplan aims to deliver. In general residents had not heard about the ITTM and did not have an understanding of what behaviour changes it was aimed at achieving. The term active travel can itself be a barrier as it is not recognised by most people as meaning walking and cycling for short journeys. It may be worth considering a marketing campaign to increase public understanding of 'Active Travel' or rebranding it to 'Walking and Cycling for everyday journeys'. This could be with bus and bus stop adverts in local communities. In addition, working more closely with council colleagues supporting community planning to promote the ITTM work locally.

Further education and culture change around parking

Culture change is needed around parking. Residents reported many parking issues involving double yellow lines and double parking and the feeling that drivers 'need' to park at the front of the shop they are visiting or school during pick up and drop off. This was especially evident in Banchory where there were many empty free parking spaces within a 5 minute walk of the High Street and yet people still double parked or parked on double yellow lines.

Trialling Park and Stride² in schools or setting a walking zone³ around schools can encourage children and parents to walk more and reduce congestion around the schools.

Further education around issue reporting

Participants felt that since Aberdeenshire council changed their phone systems to a general call centre they don't know how to contact local services. This was mainly due to the lack of promotion of the new call centre number. Many older people did not have internet access to report issues and phoning would be their main way to contact the council. One workshop thought it would be useful to have the contact centre number on the side of council vehicles.

Closer working with local disabled residents and Access Panels

People with mobility issues feel that the council officers have little understanding of what it feels like to walk around towns using a walking aid or wheelchair. Several communities commented that 'If they tried walking along there with a walker or wheelchair they wouldn't have built it like that'. Working closely with disabled residents and access panels would improve communication and may help residents feel involved in the process.

² <https://www.livingstreets.org.uk/media/2954/park-and-stride.pdf>

³ <https://www.livingstreets.org.uk/media/2031/walking-zones-guide-print.pdf>

Loss or lack of local voluntary transport service

There is a lack of transport options for the most rural communities, especially since the loss of many volunteer transport schemes. This was mentioned by people with health conditions that had to attend essential hospital appointments in Aberdeen. The only options were to drive or take the bus, or taxi. If you couldn't drive it may mean a long bus journey, often with a very early start to attend appointments. There are fairly regular bus services to Aberdeen from Westhill, Stonehaven, Oldmeldrum and Banchory. Services from Macduff and Banff can take round 2 hours. Depending on health issues this was sometimes not an option. The recent closure of volunteer driving schemes has left many people to rely on friends and family to take them or expensive taxi trips.

Loss of local banking facilities

Bank closures are affecting older residents more than the rest of community as they are less likely to use internet or mobile banking. Also in the communities that have a visiting mobile bank, these are impossible for wheelchair users to access and it can be uncomfortable to wait outside in inclement weather. The ITTM process could help look at local public transport routes to remaining bank services.

Anti-Social behaviour

Anti-social behaviour was mentioned by several communities as a reason they didn't feel safe going out at night. This anti-social behaviour usually took the form of young people in cars either racing along streets or congregating in the town and being loud late at night. Residents felt that the Police and local authority did little to stop this behaviour.

New LED street Lighting

Low lighting levels given out by newly installed LED street lighting was highlighted as a safety issue for older and more vulnerable pedestrians. They reported that they didn't feel safe going out at night in certain areas or streets. There was also a lack of knowledge of how to report lighting issues to the Council.

Running the gauntlet on bin day

Wheelie bins blocking pavements were a common theme across all towns. Local residents felt excluded from some streets on bin days. Some thought that the bins should be left on the carriageway by the kerb rather than on the footway, especially if there was a narrow footway. Although not directly applicable to the ITTM process this is maybe an issue that should be highlighted to council colleagues in the Refuse Department, so that they can work with communities to find solutions.

Contacts

This report is being submitted to:

- Aberdeenshire Council Transport team
- Local Councillors and workshop participants

Contacts

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