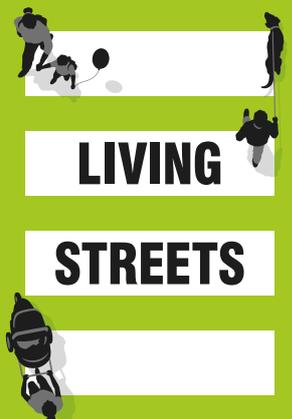




Walking Connects: Learning from Sutherland Street

June 2020

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Walking Connects

Walking Connects is a three-year project delivered by Living Streets through the Big Lottery's Accelerating Ideas Pilot Fund. The project aims to improve the wellbeing of older people by empowering them to act and be involved in decision making about streets, spaces and places for walking. Walking Connects enables older people to remain or become more physically active in the community, to stay socially connected, and to be active in improving the walking environment for everyone.



Sutherland Street

Living Streets Scotland worked together with a group of residents from a housing development in Sutherland Street to make improvements to their streets. This document covers some of the key things we learned from our work together.



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Sutherland Street

Example



The [Guide to Getting Better Streets and Pavements](#) was developed by Living Streets Scotland and Walking Connects project participants.

The Walking Connects project worked in partnership with older adults to identify barriers to walking for everyday journeys. Staying connected includes being able to get out and about, but often pavements are not designed to meet the needs of older adults.

Not everyone can be part of a project, but many people want to report issue or improve local places and spaces. To help people to report problems and ask for improvements, we have co-produced the Guide. This document highlights some of the things we have learned about what works well when trying to see changes made to local streets.

Sutherland Street

Example

WHAT WE HAVE LEARNED

1. Report!

Reporting issues can be easier than you might think. Sometimes a simple call to the local authority to tell them about a problem is all it takes to have a repair added to their maintenance list.

It helps if you keep a note of who you phoned and when you reported it. This way, you can follow up if action isn't taken or if the action taken isn't enough to solve the problem.

2. Don't give up!

Sometimes the problems you report are more complex and involve different local authority departments and other agencies. These issues can take longer to find a solution.

If you are told that there is no budget available, make sure you let people know WHY they should review that. You don't have to accept the first answer you get. It may take time, and you may need some patience, but don't give up!

3. Find the right person to speak to.

If you have reported the issue several times and nothing

has happened, contact your local councillor and/or community council. They will know who the best person to speak to in the council is and can act as a 'champion' to make sure your issue stays on the agenda. They can also ensure good lines of communication between your group and the right people. Complex issues can take time to resolve and knowing that your issue is progressing and what will happen next can be reassuring.

4. A cup of tea and a chat!

Inviting your local councillor to meet for a cup of tea and a chat will give you the opportunity to explain the issue and discuss possible solutions. The first solution you think of may not be the one that works, so it is worth keeping an open mind and being clear about what you want to be able to do (e.g. cross the road safely) rather than be sure you already have the answer (a new crossing) - there might be other ways to make crossing the road safe.

5. Tell them why.

Make it personal – explain why it is a problem for you. Sometimes the council are unaware that older residents often use that street, or the

problems you experience there. Often the guidelines that councils use to identify what needs to be fixed mean that the issues do not qualify as being "bad enough" to warrant repair. They don't always realise the impact this can have on day-to-day life and everyday walking, especially for older residents and for those using mobility aids or with sensory impairments. Your job is to tell them. One of the best ways to get people to understand is to organise a short Street Audit – walking the route with officers and residents to highlight the issues and making note of issues and solutions. This way everyone can see the issues first-hand and discuss options for improvements.

Explaining the impact made a big difference for our groups. It's not your fault for being "unsteady on your feet", you shouldn't have to negotiate trip hazards.

6. Keep in touch with your local councillor

We have learned that the communication between council departments can break down and community groups often don't know what is going on. If you have regular meetings, phone calls or emails with your local councillor, they can help you to find out what is happening.

Sutherland Street

Example



In 2019, a group of tenants living in a retirement development used the Guide to Getting Better Streets and Pavements to get local pavements resurfaced, and dropped kerbs provided, so they could walk safely in their neighbourhood.

Context

There are 40 retirement houses in Sutherland Street, managed by Manor Estates Housing Association. Sutherland Street is home to 46 tenants, ranging in age from 65 years old to 98 years old. Housing is comprised of a number of bungalows and gardens, arranged along residential streets culminating in a cul-de-sac where the development office and community centre are located. The community centre is well used for social activities.

The Tenants' Association runs weekly events including dominoes, bingo, seated exercise, and a coffee morning. They also have monthly lunches, seasonal events like Easter afternoon teas, St. Patrick's Day socials and Christmas Lunch. The community centre is also used by the tenants for informal get-togethers, and is very much the "heart" of the community.

For many tenants, getting to the Community Centre had become increasingly difficult over the years. Paving along pavements had become uneven, and the road surface had eroded leaving lots of small stones that proved to be a major cause of trips for people and damage to wheelchairs and other mobility aids. Many residents felt they could not walk the short journey to the centre to spend time with neighbours, with others becoming confined to their homes as they felt it too unsafe to walk along their street.



The power of the group

The tenants in Sutherland Street had reported their pavements to the council, many times, over many years. They were repeatedly told that there was nothing the council could do because the faults were not bad enough to warrant resurfacing. Whilst some individual faults were repaired, often these repairs

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Example

caused as many problems as they fixed. The pavements were not bad enough to warrant resurfacing according to council guidelines, but they were bad enough to cause falls and to impede the tenants from walking independently to the community centre.

As part of developing the Guide to Getting Better Streets and Pavements, the group used the draft Action Plan to identify how they might present the situation to the council.

They met together and discussed their experience of trying to get from their house to the community centre. They also started to record any falls experienced by residents walking along local streets.

A group of residents undertook a short Street Audit and identified and made a note of the specific places where there were trip hazards or issues that made walking difficult.

The group then invited their local councillor to come and meet with all the tenants to ask for her advice and support.

The local councillor was keen to support the tenants and to ensure their concerns were raised with the appropriate officers at the council. She also put the group in touch with the Senior Transport Team Leader as the best person for them to speak to.



The group invited the Senior Transport Team Leader along with an engineer to once more review the pavements and this time arranged for them to meet with all the tenants. The tenants told the council representatives clearly why the pavements made life so difficult. They explained that for those with visual impairments, in wheelchairs and using mobility aids, walking from their house to the community centre to join in with the social activities, was an “impossible journey”. They described how they wanted to stay connected, visit their friends and join in with others and that although the community centre is just at the end of their street, they simply could not get there because the pavements were in an unsafe state.

The council officers walked around with them and, saw the issues, which the tenants had marked with chalk.

As the tenants had been recording falls, they were able to tell the officers that in the last six months, 14 people had fallen, and one of these incidents resulted in one resident being in hospital for nine days. Although the problems were still not technically “actionable defects”, the Senior Transport Team Leader and the Engineer realised the importance of prioritising repairs at Sutherland Street. Three months later, the tenants had fully resurfaced pavements, and their lives have been transformed.



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Learning from Sutherland Street

The Guide to Getting Better Streets and Pavements describes the different ways to report issues and suggests finding people who can support you to do this. For smaller issue often a phone call to the right contact can be enough to ensure a problem is fixed. For bigger issues, or when you've reported a problem but no action has been taken, the Sutherland Street residents' experience provides some useful guidance.

1. Evidencing the issue

It is often useful to clearly describe the issue, being clear about what a successful outcome would be, and being open to different potential solutions. Success often depends on collecting evidence, so it can be important to bring people together and keep a record of their experiences.

The Sutherland Street residents came together to do a community street audit to identify the main problems they all agreed they wanted fixed. They kept a record of their experiences, including trips and falls and the impact on the community.

2. Action Planning

It is important to develop a plan to ensure that everyone involved knows what is happening.

Answering a series of questions together or individually can help you to form a clear plan for reporting any faults or maintenance issues, and to request a review of streets and pavements including crossings, speed of traffic and other issues that impact on being able to get out and about. The Sutherland Street group worked through the questions in the Action Plan template to help them identify the right local contacts and collect the evidence they needed to have action taken.

The Guide to Getting Better Streets and Pavements provides more information to which can help you to answer some of these questions, as well as some handy phone numbers for Scottish local authorities and other contacts who may be able to provide you with additional useful information.

3. Additional support

The Sutherland Street residents had tried to raise these issues a number of times but had not been able to reach a resolution that worked. Once they were able to bring together evidence of the impact of the problem on their community, they approached their local councillor, who acted as a 'champion' for them within the council and identified the appropriate senior officer for the group to speak with. The councillor was also able to ensure regular communication

between the group and council, and the group was always kept up to date on what actions were being taken. Finding the right 'champion' – often your local councillor – can make all the difference in ensuring the right officers and teams are available to help you address the issues you need action on. Councillors are easily contactable by phone, letter or email and their contact details are available on the council website or can be provided if you all the council switchboard. Councillors will also hold regular local surgeries where you can go along and speak with them directly about concerns.

If you struggle to get your local councillor to take notice, think about other local groups or organisations that might be able to help you. In Scotland, your community council can help ensure your councillors and officers are made aware of your issues. Community organisations such as a local development trust, Tenants and Residents Associations, or other community organisations may often share your concerns and can help guide your next action. Living Streets can also provide some guidance so please get in touch: scotland@livingstreets.org.uk

Below you will find a template example of how the Sutherland Street group answered questions and worked through a process of reporting, discussing, and informing everyone involved. You can download a template of your own [here](#).

Learning from

Sutherland Street

QUESTIONS

What are the problems?

The pavement along Sutherland Street has cracked paving slabs. Previous repairs have been poorly carried out. There are raised drainage covers and loose chippings at the crossing to the community centre.

All of these are trip hazards and together they make navigating the pavement extremely difficult.

Why is this a priority?

As a group of retired housing development tenants, with an age range of 65 years old to 98 years old, we are a priority group. There are 46 tenants directly affected, some to the point that they are not able to walk the short distance from their home to the community centre. This has caused loss of independence. In the last 6 months there have been 14 falls, with one resulting in a nine-day hospital admission.

Who else is affected?

Friends and family wishing to visit.

What solution do you want?

A review of the pavement and a solution that allows older people with mobility aids and in wheelchairs to get from their house to the Community Centre safely.

Who owns the land? Who can make the decision to make improvements?

City of Edinburgh Council

Have you reported the problem?

Letters and emails to and from the council from 2015. Some previous repairs.

How will we gather evidence?

Use the recording sheet in the Guide to Getting Better Streets and Pavements to note down what has been reported, to whom and by whom. Note the reference number (if appropriate).

Who do we need to speak to? Who can help us?

Not yet identified the best person to speak to.

We have invited a local councillor to meet with us and join us for a cup tea to discuss what we can do, and who the key decision makers are.

How will others affected by the issues know what is happening?

The Tenants Organisation Committee will co-ordinate our activity and will keep everyone informed.



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