



**LIVING**



**STREETS**



# National Walking Summit

## 2023 - A review



The 2023 National Walking Summit was held at Nexus in Leeds on 23 March. The venue was sold out, with hundreds of attendees also participating online. Over the course of the day, a broad range of speakers shared insights on the active travel policy environment.

The morning panel was a practical session, designed to share best practice on how we deliver walking targets across the UK. It was opened with a keynote from Danny Williams, CEO of Active Travel England, who pointed to the importance of increased walking rates if national active travel targets would be met. 90% of the national active travel target would be met by an increase in walking and wheeling, not cycling.

Following the keynote, local authorities were invited to share best practice on the steps taken to reach walking targets in their respective LAs. The speakers covered England, Scotland and Wales as well as both urban and rural settings. Their presentations addressed the scale of the challenges that confront them: City of Edinburgh Council have found 17,000 drop kerbs in need of tactile paving, Leeds City Council are working to overcome 1980s policy to become the motorway city, while Monmouthshire County Council consider how to promote active travel in a rural area with poorly maintained footpaths and residents who must make long commutes.

While the challenges vary across different areas, common themes can be found in the way local authorities have worked to increase walking rates. From all speakers, we heard the importance of setting ambitious targets with a clear strategy to reach them. The Bradford Council Plan sets out a clear vision to tackle health inequalities in the city, and four of the seven key aims stand to benefit from increased walking rates. In Edinburgh, the city leadership has signed off three key strategies: the City Mobility Plan, the Climate Strategy and the 20-Minute Neighbourhood Programme. These place walking at the top of the transport hierarchy, to create a city for people of all ages and abilities – and address the barriers on the city's 2,100-mile pavement network.

Another key approach to increase walking rates has been an emphasis on creating safe streets that ensure pedestrians feel safe to walk. In Monmouthshire, Abergavenney was host to two 20mph pilot zones, which have produced both a decrease in speed and an increase in walking and cycling. Pavements have also been widened which is particularly important in a rural setting. In Leeds, the Council have committed to vision zero. As part of their work towards this, the Council have increased the number of pedestrianised areas in the city centre and undertaken a review of crossings.

In contrast to the practical nature of the morning session, the afternoon panel saw a more abstract discussion on inclusive placemaking. The panel provided a range of perspectives often overlooked in active travel policy, including those of disabled people, racial minorities, women and girls, and older adults.

The need for an intersectional approach to policy threaded through the discussion. To create truly inclusive places, we must design them for the most marginalised in society. These groups are too often consulted only when schemes are fully developed and have received significant investment, making it difficult for meaningful changes to take place. Consultation must come at every stage of a project or scheme, with marginalised groups participating from the outset.

The experiences of racial minorities and women and girls demonstrate the need to centre equity in active travel policymaking. For women and girls, the fear of male violence is a key barrier to active travel that is rarely discussed in policymaking. While steps can be taken to improve safety such as CCTV or additional policing, they often dehumanise our places, making them less enjoyable spaces in which to live or play. These measures can also present barriers to other groups, particularly racial minorities. The intentional and deliberate targeting and over-policing of Black people means that it is more difficult for minorities to access different forms of transportation, including walking, cycling, and public transport

The notes below provides an overview of the key points raised by each speaker during the event. In doing so, it offers insights into the work that is being done to increase walking rates at the national and regional level. The notes also build out from the addresses given by each speaker, with case studies providing specific examples of good practice to promote active travel and create inclusive places. We hope the summary will be useful for anyone with an interest in active travel, but particularly those working at the local authority level.

The next National Walking Summit will be held in Sheffield on 7 March 2024 and we hope you will join us.

## Sponsor Spotlight: Arup

Arup has proudly sponsored Living Streets' annual Walking Summit for several years and the event held in Leeds in March 2023 was arguably the best yet. The quality of speakers was outstanding, and it was both well-organised and attended (in person and online), which generated a tangible buzz around the event and stimulated countless positive conversations. Leeds City Council and the West Yorkshire Combined Authority added to the occasion by enthusiastically getting behind the event to provide led walks for attendees and to showcase some of the best practice on offer in the region.

As a collective we understand that making walking and wheeling an attractive, convenient and safe choice for everyone is crucial to meeting our key policy objectives, not least improving physical and mental health and helping to tackle the climate emergency. The summit brought together some of the leading thinkers and practitioners in the country to firstly discuss how we can fund and deliver the necessary projects and initiatives to increase walking and wheeling, and secondly to ensure that these are inclusive and accessible for all. Having worked together on various best practice publications such as [Walking for Everyone: Making walking and wheeling more inclusive](#), Arup and Living Streets were well-placed to convene this important national conversation, which helped to successfully inform, include and inspire attendees.

Arup has a long history of championing walking and wheeling as a mode of travel and providing thought leadership on how best to build and adapt our towns and cities to ensure that they are inclusive for all users. Our key publications include:

- [Cities Alive: Towards a walking world](#);
- [Cities Alive: Designing cities that work for women](#);
- [Cities Alive: Designing for urban childhoods](#); and
- [Travelling in a woman's shoes](#).

At the summit we showcased our new uMove digital toolkit, which we have developed to support and enrich our capabilities on walking and wheeling projects. This is an open source data-led tool that helps clients to understand route choices, demand and journey quality (a cycling version of the tool is also in development). The tool is already being used on a variety of projects and has been used in a number of ways – such as identifying locations to introduce walking improvements as part of a [Walkability Study in Manchester City Centre](#), informing station access plans in Amsterdam and to supporting benefits realisation of LWCIPs in various locations.

We are already looking ahead to 2024 and considering the emerging challenges that our clients will face and how we can best support them. We hope that our continued collaboration with Living Streets will help to provide knowledge and support that people across the industry and beyond can utilise to help increase walking and wheeling and make it accessible for all.

## Sponsor Spotlight: Starling Technologies

If we want to encourage people to walk or wheel more of their local journeys, we must ensure they feel safer doing so. This is the focus of Walking Summit exhibitor and sponsor, Starling Technologies.

Starling is an AI technology company whose mission is to improve safety, reduce collisions, and make our towns and cities more vibrant places. Starling offers advanced behavioural analytics to provide rich intelligence about pedestrians. Sophisticated predictive approaches enable Starling to optimise signals, minimising pedestrian wait times whilst avoiding a commensurate impact on vehicular traffic.

[Visit their website to find out more including case studies of their work in action.](#)

If you want to get involved with shaping the metrics by which we measure pedestrian experience, let Starling know by emailing [info@starlingtech.co.uk](mailto:info@starlingtech.co.uk).

## Summit notes

### **Professor Chris Whitty Chief Medical Officer (CMO) for England, 'Public health opportunities for active travel'**

Professor Whitty opened the Summit. His statement reminded the audience that any form of physical exercise is 'enormously beneficial' to physical and mental health, and the best forms of exercise are those that people enjoy and find easy to fit into their daily lives. Walking is a good fit – and is especially helpful for those who do not lead active lifestyles where any increase in activity can make a big difference.

In setting the scene for the conference, the CMO highlighted the correlation between the areas of highest deprivation in England with poor health outcomes for under 75-year mortality. The same areas have the lowest levels of walking. Walking as an activity has a great advantage over cycling (the other main form of active travel) because it is something that we do throughout our lives and some of the highest distances walked are by people in their middle years (40-50).

We need to make it easier for people to walk and create situations where they want to walk – as a form of transport or for leisure. The most recent data from the National Attitudes Survey (2021)<sup>1</sup> showed that the biggest barrier to walking – or the one thing that would make the most difference – is well maintained pavements. This is extremely important for urban or semi-urban areas where the lowest rates of walking coincide with high levels of deprivation.

## **Morning Panel: How can we deliver walking targets?**

The morning panel was a practical session, designed to share best practice on how we deliver walking targets across the UK. It spanned England, Scotland, and Wales, offering insights into steps taken to encourage walking in both urban and rural areas.

### **Danny Williams, CEO Active Travel England - 'How can we deliver national walking targets?'**

Danny Williams, CEO, Active Travel England (ATE), opened the panel. His speech asked how we deliver national walking targets, with a focus on the target that 50% of all local journeys be made by walking, wheeling or cycling by 2030. Williams outlined four key ways ATE will aim to achieve this:

1. Directly fund local authorities and other delivery partners to deliver infrastructure schemes.
2. Consult to ensure that planned developments help rather than hinder active travel targets. As a statutory consultee in the planning system, with the right to interfere in any new development over 150 housing units or over 1,500m<sup>2</sup>, the body is well-placed to ensure that new developments are within walkable distance of key amenities, or good public transport links are available.
3. Offer training programmes for local transport officers, with plans to roll out bespoke training for councillors in the future.
4. Provide datasets and toolkits for local authorities, local transport authorities, and the wider sector.

There were two key messages to take away from the address. First, increased walking rates would be crucial to meet national active travel targets. Active Travel England was not only a body to promote cycling, and 90% of the national active travel target would be met by an increase in walking and wheeling, not cycling. Williams finished with a call to action which became one of the key messages of the day: if national targets are to be reached, campaign groups needed to be clear and persistent in their messaging. It was time to “bang on the tables”!

### **Perspectives from Edinburgh: Daisy Narayanan - Senior Mobility Manager, City of Edinburgh Council**

Edinburgh City Council is taking a new approach to urban development examining the crossovers, for example, between health, economy, transport, education, social justice and air quality. This needs to be addressed now in the context of the Climate Emergency and the City Council's commitment to be carbon neutral by 2030.

Two years ago, the city leadership signed off three key strategies: the City Mobility Plan, the Climate Strategy and the 20-Minute Neighbourhood Programme. These seek transformational change, placing walking at the top of the transport hierarchy, to create a city for people of all ages and abilities – and address the barriers on the city's 2,100-mile pavement network.

There are six action plans (covering air quality, active travel, biodiversity, parking, public transport and road safety), all sitting together representing the transport and place eco-system. The active transport plan has been fully costed (ranging from £850m-£1.2bn). It includes big capital expenditure (e.g., six bridges, a walkable city centre and the redesign of 40 junctions), but smaller items too. There are 17,000 dropped kerbs in need of tactile paving, the pavement parking ban needs to be enforced, with less clutter, better crossings and more places to sit and rest. This can only be achieved through “Collaboration, Collaboration, Collaboration”.

### **Perspectives from Leeds: Councillor Peter Carlill – Active Travel lead, Leeds City Council and West Yorkshire Combined Authority**

Leeds Transport Strategy published in late 2021 sets out a bold vision to make Leeds ‘a city where you don't need a car’. This is in stark contrast to its ambition to become the ‘Motorway City of the Seventies’, hallmarked by pedestrian walkways in the sky leaving roads clear for cars. Leeds is the first city in the UK to set a target to reduce vehicle mileage (by 30%). Its transport strategy supports vision zero and commits to increase walking rates by 33%. A review of pedestrian crossing and waiting times is just one step towards improving the walking experience (see Leeds case study – crossings).

Councillor Carlill noted the importance of local volunteer groups, citing Leeds Living Streets Local Group as a valuable partner when developing schemes. He highlighted the need to improve consultation processes to achieve more equitable outcomes. Knocking on doors can give a different perspective to online consultation, often revealing more support for an initiative than the feedback received online. Councillor Carlill recognised that the voices of women have often been overlooked in consultations in the transport sector, so it was a Council priority to ensure an equal number of responses from women and men.

Equality is a key consideration when developing schemes; poorer areas of the city have both the lowest car ownership and the worst health outcomes. Improving active and public transport will benefit residents there most, by enabling access to opportunities previously accessible by car.

### **Leeds case study – Crossings**

Leeds Council has implemented a review of pedestrian crossing timings and wait times. The review aims to encourage walking and speed up walking journeys through more sophisticated traffic signal control strategies, namely by introducing signal controls that are more responsive to pedestrian demand at standalone crossings. The new technology will be introduced as and when new crossings are installed or when existing signal controls are refurbished, so there is very little cost to the changes.

There are multiple design features included to make crossings more pedestrian friendly. First, the Council has reduced waiting times at crossings and increased the time allocated to cross. These were key calls in Living Streets' ['better crossings' campaign](#) from earlier this year, as polling has shown that more than a quarter of people would walk more if their local area had more and better crossings. In Leeds, the walking speed used to calculate the 'green' time at pedestrian crossings has been reduced to support people with a slower walking speed and allow a greater flow of pedestrians to cross. The Council has adopted the mean walking speed for those aged over 65, meaning a reduction from 1.2 m/s to 0.8 m/s. The wait time at standalone pedestrian crossings has also been reduced to a maximum of 25 seconds, speeding up walking journeys around the district. This comes alongside the introduction of a pre-timed maximum wait, meaning that if nobody has used the crossing recently, it changes much sooner than it would otherwise.

Other changes are more directly concerned to ensure that crossings are designed to meet pedestrian demand. The default signals in the city centre will be changed to green for pedestrians and red for vehicles, so that in the absence of any vehicles people can cross instantly with no delay or need to press the button. This will also be introduced as a trial throughout the rest of the district.

The Council is looking to include innovative technology at its crossings, as conventional kerbside detection – used to detect the presence of pedestrians – used radar technology which was initially developed for other applications. The Council is in the process of installing newer thermal imaging sensors at new and refurbished sites, with thermal detection of pedestrians in order to register demand to cross without the need to press a button. Taken together with reduced time to wait, these changes should improve compliance with the displayed signal and reduce the number of pedestrians who risk crossing when the red man is displayed.

The full report which outlines the technical changes to crossings in Leeds can be found [here](#). Living Streets also have a number of relevant resources available [here](#), including a checklist to assess local crossings and a guide to running a campaign to improve crossings in your area.

### **Perspectives from Bradford: Saira Ali – Team Leader Landscape Design and Conservation, City of Bradford Council**

The Bradford Council Plan (2021-2025) seeks to tackle health and educational inequalities in the city, where the poorest children are disadvantaged in education and can expect to live shorter and less healthy lives than the wealthiest children. Four of the seven key aims outlined in the plan stand to benefit from increased walking rates: 'good start, great schools', 'better health, better lives', 'safe, strong and active communities', and 'a sustainable district'.

In Bradford, efforts to encourage walking start at the planning stage. The Council will ensure that all new developments are connected to the existing street and path network, enjoy links to new and existing cycle routes, and have good access to bus stops and train stations where feasible. This is included in planning guidance to developers and housebuilders (see Bradford case study – planning). Through URBACT EU Healthy Cities Funding, the Council have used the Healthy Cities Generator to develop an evidence-based approach to urban master-planning. The tool helps ensure planning decisions are directly informed by desired public health outcomes.<sup>2</sup>

Bradford Council are working with several partners to increase walking rates, with a particular focus on children and young people. First, the Council has been working with the Sport England-funded pilot scheme JU:MP to create a whole system approach to get young people and families more active. This includes measures to encourage active travel. To more specifically get more young people walking to school or nursery, the council are working with Living Streets to identify schools with the greatest need for our Little Feet and WOW initiatives. Alongside these behaviour change schemes, the Council has also created playful infrastructure with Better Places, aimed to encourage walking in families with children aged 0-3. This work all builds on a foundation of infrastructure change including school streets, active travel neighbourhoods, and healthy high streets.

### **Bradford Case Study – planning**

Bradford Council's Homes and Neighbourhoods Design Guide was adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) on 4 February 2020. It shows how the planning system can be used to provide more high-quality built environments and well-designed homes, in order to improve health outcomes and reduce health inequalities.

Bradford Council developed the guide after consultation with a range of relevant stakeholders, including a public consultation with residents, Bradford's Older and Disabled People Group, and all relevant departments within the Council. It seeks to deliver a step change in the quality of new housing in the authority, based on a vision for 'green, safe, inclusive and distinctive neighbourhoods that create healthy communities for all'.

The guide also encourages developers to ensure that amenities are within walking distance of new developments. Research shows that people are generally happy to walk for 20 minutes to get to and from the places they need to go, and 65% of UK adults agree that people should be able to meet most of their everyday needs within a 20-minute walk of their home. The guidance advises developers and house builders that, “development should contribute to making walkable, well-connected neighbourhoods where homes are close to community amenities, shops, green space and workplace; and where footpaths give priority to pedestrians, wheelchair users, buggies and people with impairments”. Through increased walking rates and reduced car dependency, creating places with amenities close at hand can increase physical activity, reduce pollution and combat social isolation.

The full guide can be found [here](#).

### **Perspectives from Monmouthshire: Cllr Sara Burch – Cabinet Member for Inclusive and Active Communities, Monmouthshire County Council**

Active travel can be difficult to promote in a rural setting. In Monmouthshire, 85% of households own a car, 40% of residents travel outside of the county for work, and 75% of all journeys are made by car. The four main towns are linked to smaller settlements by narrow roads with narrow bridges, making walking or cycling dangerous on some roads. Many parents drive their children to school as they do not feel safe letting them walk or cycle. Add poorly maintained footpath networks and pavements that have deteriorated due to floods, heatwaves, and pavement parking, and there are a whole host of challenges to overcome.

The strengths for Monmouthshire come in the form of policy. All public bodies in Wales are legally obliged to put the future wellbeing of people and planet over all other considerations (Wellbeing of Future Generations Act 2015). Under the Active Travel Act 2013, local authorities must also plan for the improvement of walking and cycling routes in their area. The Welsh Government has also cut roads investment, with funding only made available if it can be proven new roads will decrease traffic.



At a local level, Monmouthshire have looked to increase active travel rates while recognising that many residents do need to drive, not only for issues around accessibility, but also due to the realities of a rural setting. Abergavenny was host to two 20mph pilot zones, which have produced both a decrease in speed and an increase in walking and cycling. This works alongside changes in physical infrastructure to encourage active travel, such as current works to build active travel bridges over some of the fastest rising rivers. Other measures have been useful legacies from Covid-19 – widened pavements and pedestrianised town centres have been left in place where residents supported their continued use. Particularly in rural settings where car dependency is high, there is a critical need to establish community buy-in and ensure the speed of change is appropriate: in some cases, success will be lowering a household's number of cars from three to two.

### **Afternoon panel – ‘Placemaking for all to encourage active travel’**

The afternoon panel provided an international as well as a local focus on inclusive placemaking. Speakers were invited to offer their perspectives on issues often overlooked in the discussion on active travel, including disabled people, racial minorities, women and girls, and older adults.

### **Charles T Brown – CEO and Founder of Equitable Cities, ‘The importance of centering racial equity in active transportation locally and globally’**

Charles T. Brown's theory of arrested mobility asserts that Black people [and other minorities] have been historically and presently denied by legal and illegal authority, the inalienable right to move, to be moved, or to simply exist in public space. This results in adverse social, political, economic, and health effects that are widespread, preventable, and intergenerational.

Arrested Mobility is a direct manifestation of racism across four distinct realms: personal realm, interpersonal realm, institutional realm, and cultural realm. These collective realms of racism have resulted in the social construct of race, locally and globally, and have thus led to the intentional and deliberate targeting and over-policing of Black people, including their physical mobility (direct) and social mobility (indirect) in the US. With regards to their physical mobility, Charles demonstrates that Black people have their mobility arrested across different forms of transportation, including walking, cycling and public transport.

Charles shared the story of Raquel Nelson, a Black single mother and college student from Georgia who lost her son in a hit-and-run. Raquel and her son were crossing the street to their apartment after getting off the bus at the stop located across the divided highway. Raquel was convicted by an all-white jury of reckless conduct, improperly crossing a roadway, and second-degree homicide. The man who killed her son was later found and admitted to drinking and taking painkillers on the night he killed Raquel's son. Thankfully, the charges were dropped in exchange for a guilty plea on jaywalking charges and a \$200 fine.

This case demonstrates the importance of centering racial equity in active travel. Black pedestrians are disproportionately likely to be stopped by police. In England and Wales, the latest stop and search data published in May 2022 shows that there were 7.5 stop and searches for every 1,000 white people, compared with 52.6 for every 1,000 Black people.

### **Cllr Eve Holt – Strategic Director at Greater Manchester Moving, ‘Safer streets for women and girls’**

GM Moving is Greater Manchester’s ‘movement for movement’, working to positively change the lives of people across Greater Manchester through a mission to enable more active lives for all. Part of GM Moving’s work to increase activity levels is the ‘Right to the Streets’ project. This Home Office funded project is designed to change our approach to women’s safety on the streets.

Before starting the project, GM Moving consulted women across Greater Manchester and found that fear of male violence is a key barrier to walking for many women. The project looks to tackle a number of key problems that make our streets less welcoming to women and girls. We need to change the way we frame male violence against women and girls as a women’s safety issue. It puts the onus on women and girls to avoid certain areas or walking at certain times of day and exacerbates a victim-blaming culture. This is particularly problematic as public spaces are often designed by men with men’s journeys in mind, so women and girls can already feel unwelcome in public spaces.

We must go beyond creating ‘safe’ spaces to create spaces that allow women and girls to belong and be joyful (see case study – GM Walking Month). When spaces are designed through the lens of safety, we turn to CCTV, policing, and removing greenery, all of which only strengthen barriers to feeling a sense of belonging. GM Moving are currently building a toolkit to help design streets from this approach. The toolkit will include national and international learning, adding in neighbourhood level examples from the project in Trafford. More information can be found on the [GM Moving podcast](#), where series 3 is dedicated to the Right to the Streets project.

## **CASE STUDY – GM Walking Month**

Throughout May's National Walking Month, 120 walking groups hosted over 300 walks across Greater Manchester to share the opportunity to explore local places and spread the joy of walking. The 2023 edition of the festival saw a huge variety of walks, with everything from wellbeing walks hosted by Sale Sharks Foundation and wildflower walks with the Manchester and Salford Ramblers to dawn chorus birdsong walks led by the Woodland Trust and an Eid walk and picnic with MACFEST

As part of this year's GM Walking Festival, the team behind the 'Right to the Streets' project led a community walk in Trafford in collaboration with The Loiterer's Resistance Movement. The Home Office funded project is designed to change our approach to women's safety on the streets, noting that we all have an active role to play to shift culture, design, systems and behaviour

Fourteen attendees participated in a variety of creative walking activities or 'recipes' taken from the #WalkCreate WalkBook designed by artists, Living Streets and the Arts and Humanities Research Council. The book aims to inspire and encourage people to walk more through sharing insights, stories, and 'recipes' about overcoming barriers and challenges to walking.

Participants then had the opportunity to create their own walking recipes based on their experiences, perceptions, and aspirations for walking and wheeling in their communities. One of the participants Dorretta Maynard, part of the Trafford Age Well Board, described the walk as "one of the best walks [she'd] been on in a long time".

The walk was also featured in the GM Walking Festival 2023 video - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UdCsg2CPPI8&t=2s>

### **Caroline Stickland – CEO at Transport for All, 'placemaking for disabled people'**

Published earlier this year, the Disabled Citizens' Inquiry gave disabled people the opportunity to share their lived experiences with decision makers, in order to make walking and wheeling more inclusive and accessible. Transport for All and Sustrans held workshops across the UK and invited disabled people with different impairments and health conditions, helping to determine solutions that work for everyone. The inquiry also commissioned Ipsos to survey over 1,100 disabled people across the UK. The polling data demonstrated that pavement parking, pavement condition, and poor planning were key barriers to walking and wheeling for disabled people. The inquiry produced nine solutions to the barriers to walking and wheeling, each with practical policy suggestions to both national and local government. These included:

1. Introduce paid panels of disabled experts to inform walking and wheeling policy, at both local and national levels. 78% of disabled people said that introducing a representative panel of disabled people to advise on policy would help them walk or wheel more.
2. Introduce a long-term dedicated pavement fund for pavement maintenance and accessibility. 79% of disabled people said funding to maintain pavement condition would help them walk or wheel more.
3. A national prohibition of pavement parking. 73% of disabled people said stopping vehicles parking on pavements would help them walk or wheel more.

**Tanya Braun – Director of Policy and Communications at Living Streets,  
'Lessons from working with young people and older adults'**

At Living Streets, we have long talked about streets designed around those aged 9 or 90 being better for all. We need to create spaces which are safe from fast vehicles, with easy to access road crossings, wide well-maintained pavements, and plenty of places to stop, rest and socialise. These are places which instill an independent mobility and maintain users' confidence.

We work with children of all ages across the UK. When we carry out School Route Audits or other engagement work with young people, we see that too often children are not considered in, or consulted on, the design of our streets. There is a lack of access to safe spaces for them to play or socialise, inadequate places for them to walk independently and a lack of interesting spaces or opportunities for them to feel like they belong to their local community. Our intensive work with schools, and communities of young people, has provided this insight and we make recommendations on changing our streets to make them better. We want young people to see their voices belong in the planning process.

Poor street design also discourages older adults from walking, as one third say they are put off walking more or at all by cracked and uneven pavements (31%), and over 20% are put off walking by pavement obstructions such as pavement parking. For older adults, the social connection walking can bring to their lives is incredibly powerful.

Our Walking Connects project (see case study – Walking Connects in Wigan), funded by the Department for Transport's Tackling Loneliness with Transport Fund, engages people over 50 in Bolton, Wigan, Lancashire and Stoke on Trent, where we know there are higher levels of loneliness and deprivation and lower walking rates. The project has trained volunteer walk leaders and empowered older adults to conduct Community Street Reviews, ensuring that communities are equipped with the skills and knowledge to make recommendations about their local walking environment.

## **CASE STUDY – WALKING CONNECTS in Wigan**

Walking Connects has helped inspire over 50s to get active and provided the opportunity for older adults to voice the need for changes to their local walking environment. This case study describes a specific workshop held in Wigan, designed to provide insights into creating safer streets.

In Wigan, our work included a Community Street Review in partnership with the Safer Streets Team at Wigan Council, working with local residents in the Scholes area of the town. The event started with a training session for the group of older adults, equipping them with all the tools to set out on the Community Street Review. As the group followed our Walking Connects coordinator around their community, they followed a new approach to collecting evidence, as an artist from Mindful Photo Lab was invited to provide the team with Polaroid cameras and some direction on how to document their observations visually. This gave participants a creative way to express themselves without the use of words, making the review more accessible and fun.

The participants noticed numerous issues along the route: uneven or broken pavements, making it difficult to use the footway with a wheelchair or trolley; litter and a general lack of green space; and concerns around road safety due to poorly designed crossings and concerns around speed. After the led walk around their community, the group were encouraged to look over their photos or notes and compile a list of suggested improvements, as well as elements of the environment that encouraged them to walk. These points were used to form a collective manifesto for change for the area, providing a positive vision for how the walking environment in Scholes could be changed to encourage more of the community to walk.

We were joined on the day by the local MP, Lisa Nandy, the Shadow Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. This provided an opportunity for residents to voice their findings directly to an official with a relevant cabinet brief, which facilitated some very useful discussion throughout the day. A full report is currently being compiled and will be shared with Wigan Council to work towards making improvements for walking in and around Scholes.

### **Dr Amit Patel, 'Making Streets fit for everyone'**

Amit, who is severely sight impaired (blind), has three routes when taking his kids to school, accessing local shops, or getting to the train station. The first route, the 'dry route', is the most direct, taking around eight minutes to get his kids to school on an ordinary day. The second route, the 'rainy route', takes an additional 15 to 20 minutes as Amit must take a longer loop to avoid the puddles and slippery surfaces that are caused by poorly maintained pavements. The third route, the 'bin day route', is the least direct of the three, as Amit has to avoid the bins that have been left in the pavement for collection. As a blind man, these are considerations that Amit makes every day in order to access basic services in Greenwich.

The school route previously had no tactiles in place, but these were installed by the council after a year of campaigning. When the tactiles were first installed, the council were happy to let Amit know, but they had been placed in a position that meant a blind person would miss them and walk out into the road. This reflects a wider culture that the lived experiences of disabled people are often sought once a project is complete, or when planning has been finalised. It is not enough to have a disabled person sign off on plans that have already been written, we must engage with the people who will use a piece of infrastructure or a service from the outset.

Even in the face of ambivalence or hostility, we must continue to campaign for the streets we want to see. If one person has a poor experience, it is likely this will be felt by others too, and our voices are strongest when we work as a community to seek positive change.

