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TOOLKIT SECTION 1

INFLUENCING THE
DEVELOPMENT OF
WALKING & CYCLING
PATHS IN YOUR AREA

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LINKING
UP

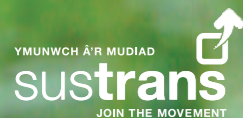




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INFLUENCING THE DEVELOPMENT OF WALKING AND CYCLING PATHS IN YOUR AREA

Have you ever thought that the walking and cycling network in your area could be improved? Are there paths that you wished existed but don't know how to go about influencing or changing things? You're not alone, and across the country Sustrans have been working with communities to help them to take forward plans for new walking and cycling links as part of their Linking Up project. This toolkit builds on the work done as part of Linking Up and sets out five easy steps packed with hints and tips, and links to online resources that can help you and your community make a difference in your area too.



WORK TOGETHER – FIND LIKE-MINDED PEOPLE AND SET UP A STEERING GROUP

STEP 1

Things are always easier when you work together and this is especially true when you are trying to improve your community. By working with other people you are far more likely to develop schemes and ideas that will work and be used.

The first thing to do is **identify the people in your community who are interested in improving things.** This could include walkers and cyclists (both clubs and individuals), those who would like to do more walking and cycling, councillors, businesses and relevant local authority officers such as the officer in charge of Active Travel in your area. It might be appropriate to include landowners, especially if you would like to establish new paths. They will have a vested interest in what you are looking at and by involving them from the beginning you will know if some of your ideas are workable or not. Sustrans Cymru may also be able to help you, providing an officer or volunteer to join your group. It is also advisable to **consider what skills your group might need and look out for people in the community who might be willing to help you.** Useful specialist skills could include: engineering, planning, ecology or even negotiation. However, the most important element is motivation!

Draw up a **list of people in your community who might be willing to get involved and a plan to contact them.** Once you have identified the people who are interested in helping you can form a steering group to guide what you do to improve your community.



Usk Trail Access Group (UTAG) was formed in 2014 by a group of mums and dads to try and improve local cycling and walking provision to link the Community of Usk with other communities and the wider National Cycle Network. In particular, UTAG has been looking at re-opening sections of the Pontypool to Monmouth disused railway line.



Since the beginning, local families and other groups supported the Group and membership increased quickly. The group drafted a Constitution to enable access to potential funding and acquired support from Town Council, Community Councils, Chamber of Commerce, Civic Society, local schools, MPs and AMs.

A major challenge for UTAG has been overcoming the requirements for ecology surveys and pulling together detailed plans to obtain planning consent. By liaising with the planning authority, UTAG obtained formal written pre-application advice, which was useful to structure the planning application (i.e. submit two separate applications, one for each section of the route) and identify the supporting information required. Regular contacts with the case officer dealing with the applications ensured issues arising from the consultations could be dealt with promptly. Sustrans provided support through the 'Linking Up' Project, commissioning dormouse and great crested newt surveys which contributed to acquiring planning consent on one section.

UTAG is the main driving force for this project, with about a thousand hours committed by volunteers since 2014. Through persistence and use of social media, the Group managed to move forward at a steady pace and raise resources and support for the delivery of the path.

For more information:

www.facebook.com/usktrail

REVIEW EXISTING PROVISION IN YOUR AREA

STEP 2

Once you have your steering group established, start by **looking at the current provision for walking and cycling in your area.** This should include mapping all of the public rights of way, noting who is allowed to use them. For example, only walkers can use a public footpath, but walkers, horse riders and cyclists can use a public bridleway. Are there any permissive paths? Are there any existing cycle paths such as part of the National Cycle Network (NCN) locally? Also look at quiet roads in your area that might be suitable for promotion for walking and cycling.

Once you have identified your network, you need to **review the quality of existing paths.** Do they need maintenance such as clearance of vegetation or replacement of signs or other furniture for better access? This information will be useful when you speak to the Rights of Way Officer in your local authority to see what can be done to improve existing paths, or what you can do yourselves to do this.

As part of this process it is also important to look at how people currently use the network and how they move around the area. Think about undertaking some local public consultation giving people the chance to tell you their ideas and where they currently walk and cycle. Which routes are most important to people and used most often? Which would they like to use but can't because of their poor state? Where else would they like to be able to walk or cycle? It is also important to think of the needs of the whole community. For example, could you devise safe routes for children to get to and from school or to the park, or is there something you could do to make things easier for people with mobility problems? This is especially notable when you are designing a path to make sure you don't include any unnecessary barriers.



REVIEW EXISTING PROVISION IN YOUR AREA

STEP 2

The key people to talk to whilst you are reviewing your existing network are:

The Active Travel Officer at your local council. They can tell you about any Active Travel work planned for your area. Since the introduction of the Active Travel Act in Wales in 2013 all local Councils are required to map existing walking and cycling routes in their area (Existing Route Map or ERM) and to produce a map showing their proposals for developing these and additional new routes in the future (Integrated Network Map or INM). Both the ERM and the INM should be available for view on your local Council's website.

The Rights of Way Officer at your local council. They can tell you how you can view the 'definitive plan' which shows all of the existing public rights of way in your area. This will include public footpaths, bridleways, restricted byways and byways open to all traffic. The ROW Officer can also tell you of any plans to undertake maintenance work in your area, or tell you how you can volunteer to undertake maintenance work yourselves.

The Ecology or Biodiversity Officer in your local Council. They can advise you on any areas of nature conservation interest and how to undertake any necessary ecological surveys.

Your local town or community council, as they may have taken on responsibility for the maintenance of rights of way in their area.

Sustrans Cymru. They can tell you what they are doing in your area and have lots of online resources to help you with your planning.

Groups representing people with physical impairments.

Groups representing other interests, eg: horse riders.

CASE STUDY

COMMON LAND COMMON INTERESTS BRYNMAWR



When completed the Heads of the Valley cycle path will be 25 miles long and will connect Brynmawr to Neath, using traffic free paths as well as on road sections. Within the Linking Up project we looked at improving the section between Brynmawr and Garnlydan, which currently is unsuitable for all users.

A stakeholder group was established comprising the County Council, local town Councillors, the Beaufort Hill Ponds and Woodlands Natural Reserve and Brynmawr business forum. The group agreed that the best option identified for the traffic free section would be using an existing track running across the Beaufort Common, located in a beautiful area at the edge of the Brecon Beacons National Park. Cattle grazing is the main activity, but the track is currently walked by local people and provides links with local nature reserves.

The group engaged immediately with the Duke of Beaufort's Breconshire Estate Commoner's Association and found common interests, mainly based around expanding opportunities for resident and visitors to enjoy the countryside and learn from it. The Commoners' association accepted the proposal very positively and was extremely supportive throughout the whole process, providing background knowledge, technical information and precious help to run the process of submission of the application to obtain consent from the Welsh Government to conduct the works.

This experience highlights how land owners and groups having rights on land are important partners and need to be engaged since the initial stages of our work.



Pembrokeshire County Council have been looking at developing a walking and cycling path between Narberth and Haverfordwest. This link sits into the Council's strategic priorities to improve walking and cycling links in rural Pembrokeshire, which will ultimately link with the existing Brunel Trail, part of National Cycle Network Route 4 in Haverfordwest.

The proposal for the suggested path was mainly to look at upgrading existing bridleways and forestry tracks. This attracted the attention of the horse riding and carriage driving community in Pembrokeshire, who soon joined the steering group discussing the delivery of the path.

The initial sessions were characterised by some tensions and animated discussions around the shared use of the path. The horse riders were concerned about losing bridleways and opportunities to enjoy the countryside. Nevertheless, the group soon started to look at common interest and technical solutions to accommodate different users.

The final report produced as a result of these discussions took these discussions on board and focused on providing solutions about suitable surface and width of the path. Useful information about users' attitude was also shared and will be part of the learning generated by this process.

Pembrokeshire CC has now secured funding to start construction of the first section of this path, which will be used as an opportunity to test some of the solutions the group has come up with. We hope that early discussions involving different users will help to reduce conflicts once the path will be in place.



MAKE A PLAN



Having reviewed all of the existing network, you can draw up a plan identifying the paths you would like to see improved and the new links you would like to see developed to fill in the gaps.

Your plan should consider:

Will the alignment of proposed new paths make it easier for people to walk and cycle as part of their daily lives? Are they paths that people will want to use?

Starting and finishing points for paths.

Do they link in with public transport hubs such as train stations? Are they easy for the local community to access?

What improvements could be made to existing paths to make them more user friendly?

A maintenance schedule could form part of your plan, but remember you might have to do some of this work yourselves with the agreement of the local council.

Do proposed new paths go across private land?

Have you identified the land ownership and engaged with the landowner to see if they are happy with the proposal or willing to discuss it with you? It's really important to take land owners along with you they need to be involved at an early stage and although they may not like the idea they may offer some acceptable alternatives. Dealing with land owners is a very delicate matter. Put yourself in their position, and think about what could a new path give them? Maybe shared access?

Will your ideas need planning permission?

Are there any new developments planned for your area that might influence your ideas? Or is the Local Development Plan up for review? Sustrans has helpful advice on how to engage with the planning process.

Do you need to undertake any ecological surveys? Are there any protected species such as dormice, or bats present? Ecological surveys are crucial to getting planning permission!

Have you considered the needs of all users?

What about people with mobility problems? Or horse riders?

Will your plans create any conflicts between users? For example if you would like to improve a bridleway to better accommodate cyclists, what impact would this have upon horse riders who already use the path? Check out the guidance to see how horse riders and cyclists can safely use the same shared space.



ENGAGE WITH THE LOCAL COMMUNITY AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS

STEP 4

Once you have your plan it is important that you consult the local community and other stakeholders on your ideas.

It might be an idea to draw up a stakeholder engagement plan. This is an easy thing to do and starts with mapping your stakeholders in terms of influence and interest using a simple matrix.



ENGAGE WITH THE LOCAL COMMUNITY AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS

Think of all the potential stakeholders in your area, everyone who might be affected by your plan in some way. This includes users and providers and some of the groups you might be targeting include:

- Landowners
- Your Town or Community Council
- Your local County Borough or City Council
- Local politicians including your Councillors, AM and MP
- Local schools
- Local businesses and business forums
- Your local tourism association
- Local community groups
- Your local GP surgeries
- Local walking and cycling groups, including Ramblers groups
- Network Rail
- Natural Resources Wales
- CADW

Also think about how to engage with them. Each type of stakeholder might need a different type of engagement. For example, you might want to set up a meeting with the local Council to discuss your plans with the local Rights of Way Officer and/or Cycling Officer amongst others, or have a site visit to look at specific ideas and suggestions. However, to engage with the wider community you might want to hold a drop in event where lots of people can come along and see what you are proposing and give you their thoughts and ideas. The use of social media or even creating a website for your project are also great ways of connecting with people and letting them know what you are trying to do and what progress you are making.

Stakeholder engagement is the best way to make sure your plans are the best they can be and meet the needs of as many people as possible. Collecting local information will help to guide your plan and so make sure you provide plenty of opportunity for people to provide feedback. This can be done as part of community events or you might want to consider undertaking an online survey for interested people. Get in touch with Sustrans to check what support and tools are available for this task.

Once you have identified your stakeholders and mapped them you can start to think about how to get them involved. Think about what information they might need to understand why you have drawn up your plan, explaining the benefits to them and to others. There are many benefits to walking and cycling and this toolkit contains a fact sheet on the economic and health benefits that might help you here.

Often funders want the ideas for new paths to come from the community. Keeping a record of your consultation and being able to show community involvement could be crucial evidence for funding bids.



CASE STUDY

COMMUNITY COUNTS PONTARDDULAIS



For quite some time, residents of Pontarddulais have been looking at two local issues: Improving the link to National Cycle Network Route 4, and improving walking and cycling provision around the town.

Sustrans facilitated the set up of a very active group, working with members from Friends of Coed Bach Park, local residents, landowners, councillors from the town and county councils, officers from City and County of Swansea, Sustrans as well as members of the cycling charity Wheelrights.

Having identified two possible routes to link the town with Grovesend to the South, and then on into Swansea, the group undertook consultation to see which people would prefer, and how they would access each route.



The group held drop in sessions at the local produce market and supermarket where people were able to come along, find out more about the proposals and give their views. These were captured on a simple questionnaire, and by asking people to draw on a large map, identifying problem areas and how they would access the routes from their homes, as well as the routes they regularly use to get around town. Views were fairly evenly balanced between the two routes, but one emerged as preferable because the landowner was willing to be part of the group and allow a new route to cross his land.

The group met for site visits were held also to look at the improvements needed into town, in order to make it easier to access the future link to Grovesend.

The information and ideas generated through the consultations were reported back to the Active Travel Officers in Swansea CC. Valuing the level of community engagement and the progress achieved through it, the officers decided to include the Pontarddulais path in Swansea CC's priority for the delivery of the Active Travel Act. The Council's officers have currently stepped in, taking land negotiations forward and including this project in their strategic plans for funding.

CASE STUDY

EGRETS WAY SOUTH DOWNS



The Egrets Way Project is a community based project started in 2010 to create a safe multi-use path connecting Lewes and Newhaven to the villages of the lower Ouse Valley. With support from the South Downs National Park and a start-up grant from their Sustainable Communities Fund the group was formally constituted in 2011 and became a Registered Charity in 2014.



On the top of all the work to build the path, the charity has focused on communicating progress and achievements through their website. The website provides information about the progress related to the delivery but also talks about the benefits of the future path and promotes local destinations along the route.

For more information:

www.egretsway.org.uk



FINALISING AND IMPLEMENTING YOUR PLANS

STEP 5

Once you have collated all of the feedback from your consultations its time to review your plans. How can they be improved as a result of the feedback, and how can they be amended to take people's views and ideas into consideration? Did the landowners involved engage with you and are they happy with your proposals?

Your consultations might also have highlighted some potential conflicts that you didn't initially anticipate. How can these be resolved? Remember that the plans you draw up should benefit the wider community and not just a smaller set of priorities.

It is important to let your consultees know the outcome so make sure you take the time to publicise your findings.

Once you have decided upon your paths then you need to look at the feasibility of implementing it. Some of the key questions to ask are:

Does the path use existing rights of way?

Are these rights suitable for the type of path proposed? For example are you proposing a cycle path along a public footpath? Would the landowner be willing to see rights improved? For example would they be willing to see a public footpath upgraded to a bridleway so cyclists and horses can use it as well?

If the path doesn't use existing public rights of way, is the landowner willing to provide access over their land to allow the path?

What work needs to be done to implement the path? This could range from simple signposting, resurfacing of a path, installation of new structures such as gates or larger engineering works.

What is the area of land that needs to be acquired and are the land owners supportive of the project?

How much are the works likely to cost?

FINALISING AND IMPLEMENTING YOUR PLANS

By ensuring that the local Council and Sustrans are involved in your steering group, they might be able to help you prepare a feasibility study for your proposed paths.

Now all that's left is implementation. Have a think about what parts of your plan you could implement yourselves with little financial input. For example, could you work with your Rights of Way Officer to establish a volunteer group in the area to undertake path clearance work? You need to make sure you get permission from the Council before you start doing this sort of work as only they have the legal right to undertake work to a public right of way, as remember these go over private land.

You might want to consider making your Steering Group more official. By setting yourselves up as a charitable organisation you will be able to apply for funding and seek donations, putting you more in charge of the implementation process.

Draw up an implementation plan. Identify who needs to be involved in each aspect of the plan and how much each will cost to deliver. Have a think about realistic timescales as well. Applying for funding takes time so don't expect to do everything immediately. However, for those things that are easy to implement work with the relevant parties to get them completed.

For the larger areas of work, funding will be needed. There are a number of potential funders out there, and Sustrans have a useful guidance note on potential funders which will help you out.

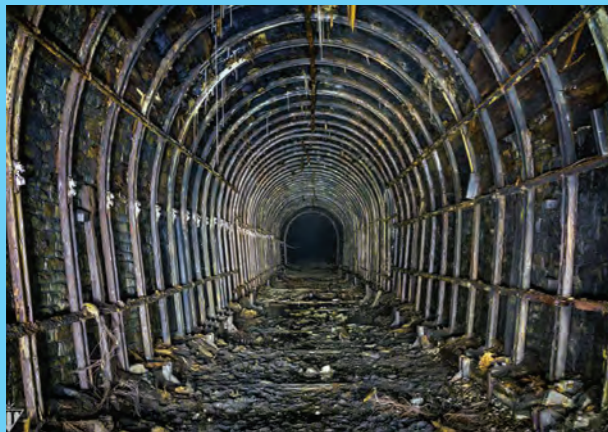


CASE STUDY

THE RHONDDA TUNNEL SOCIETY



The Rhondda Tunnel Society is a campaigning charity aiming to restore a gem of Victorian engineering in an area that has suffered from the demise of the coal industry. It is a community project with different groups coming together to re-open it to become Europe's longest walking/cycling tunnel, a huge asset for the people of Wales.



With the end of the coal industry, the Rhondda Tunnel fell victim to a policy of erasing the scars of coal mining so by 1980, both approach cuttings had been filled in and it was effectively sealed up to be abandoned and forgotten. The Society was formed in 2014 when the recently re-discovered headstone was put on display in Treherbert, raising completely unexpected enthusiasm. The first inspection in 33 years followed and found the tunnel in remarkably good condition.



The chairman has quite a flair for publicity which has led to the tunnel campaign reaching national television and the London press. The Society approached the Institute of Civil Engineers for technical support, and formed a committee of retired civil and mining engineers. Their expertise coupled with community support enabled the Society to win a £90k grant from the Pen y Cymoedd Wind Farm Community Fund to pay for a detailed examination, which indicated that there were no 'showstoppers' although repairs were needed. The Welsh Government and local authorities were also becoming aware of its potential to create regeneration and employment so they have given a grant to pay for preliminary work towards re-opening it which is currently on-going.

For more information:

www.rhonddatunnelsociety.co.uk



CASE STUDY

MISSING LINKS FROME



Frome's Missing Links project started in 2010 to campaign for better and safer walking and cycling routes in Frome and better connections to neighbouring towns and villages. The goal was to develop traffic-free routes with gentle gradients suitable for all ages and abilities.

Initially part of Sustainable Frome, Frome's Missing Links was established as an independent charitable organisation in 2016. As a result they can now take donations and apply for funding and claim gift aid. The structure and requirements of the charity are very simple, allowing focus on building the links and reducing bureaucracy. Since becoming a charity they have discovered that people and businesses are more likely to donate to local good causes and have obtained funding and donations of materials and services such as tool hire.

Frome's Missing Links would like to see more family-friendly routes in both directions, and is doing this by campaigning, commenting on planning applications, and raising funds to build these routes.

Volunteers have been very involved with the development of the route. There is the very active Friday Group, set up to help make the most efficient use of contractors, and save some money in the process, by doing the preparation jobs such as rail removal, digging of drainage ditches, putting up fences and even complete path building in some instances.

There is also the Ecology Group who have been involved in the Sustrans Greener Greenways project, helping to improve the ecology along the route. This group was especially good in ensuring there was something for volunteers to do whilst waiting for new path creation works to start.

For more information:

www.fromesmissinglinks.org.uk

