

# active travel cymru news

Issue 10



Encouraging an active childhood –

creating the environment for active play

YMNWCH Â'R MUDIAD

**sustrans**

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# News in brief

## National Cycle Network expansion in Wales

The Valleys Cycle Network is an ambitious plan to double the length of the National Cycle Network (NCN) across the old South Wales coalfield. This will increase the NCN by 120 miles, link with existing paths and bring it to within two miles of a further 636,000 people. Further information: [www.sustrans.org.uk/vcn](http://www.sustrans.org.uk/vcn)

## Sustainable travel at three NHS Trusts

Cardiff and the Vale, Gwent, Velindre and Abertawe Bro Morgannwg NHS Trusts have each agreed to use one of their sites as a demonstration project. The Trusts will receive support in signing walking and cycling routes to site, events to promote active travel, provision of active travel instructions and site audits to assess the opportunities for improving the local walking and cycling environment. Further information: [www.activetravelcymru.org.uk/nhs](http://www.activetravelcymru.org.uk/nhs)

## Women Cycle Champions

A number of high profile female Cycle Champions will be joining Sustrans' Year of the Woman campaign to help promote cycling in Wales. The champions include an MP and two Assembly Members who will be either learning to ride a bike, or brushing up on their cycling skills to help encourage other women to do the same. Further information: [www.bikebelles.org.uk](http://www.bikebelles.org.uk)

## Bike It comes to Cardiff

As part of Cardiff's new status as Wales' first Sustainable Travel Town, a new Bike It officer will be funded to work with schools in the area to encourage children to cycle to school. Further information: [www.sustrans.org.uk/bikeit](http://www.sustrans.org.uk/bikeit)

**Active Travel Cymru** works with policy-makers and practitioners to promote walking and cycling as health-enhancing physical activity. Sustrans is the UK's leading sustainable transport charity and works on practical projects to encourage people to walk, cycle and use public transport to benefit health and the environment.

Photography credits: Sustrans staff.

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ISSN 1751-6943 (print) ISSN 1751-6951 (online)

Active Travel News Cymru is printed on environmentally friendly paper

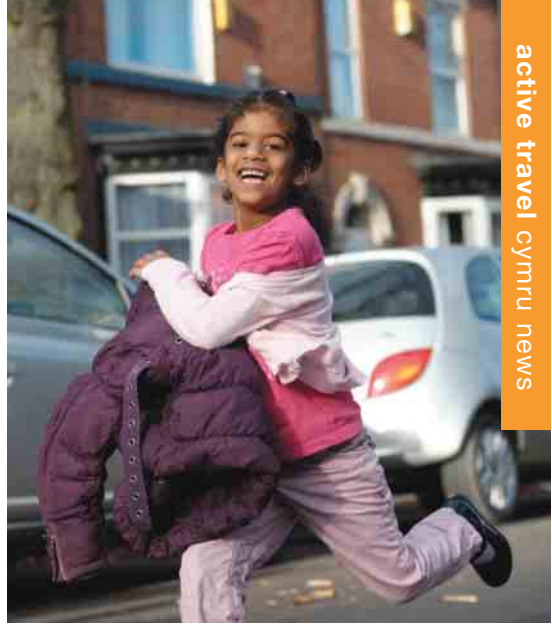
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**More people...more active...more often...in Wales**

# The importance of active, outdoor play

Play can loosely be defined as what ‘children do in their own time, for their own reasons’ and is an essential part of the healthy development of children and young people<sup>(1)</sup>. Play helps children reach the recommended 60 minutes of physical activity per day, encourages independence, learning, creativity, social interaction and overall physical and mental wellbeing.



Unfortunately, fewer children than ever before are spending time playing outdoors. Fears for safety from traffic and strangers as well as lack of play-friendly environments prohibit children from playing outdoors. Research has shown that children in Wales want to play but feel that there is a lack of opportunity, facilities and appropriate spaces available for them to do so freely<sup>(2)</sup>.

## Factors affecting active, outdoor play

There is often little to distinguish between active play and active travel as they usually incorporate each other. The most easily accessible spaces for these activities are often just outside the home. However, due to increasing car use these spaces which were once commonly accepted as community play places are now congested with parked cars or dominated by traffic. Environments that prioritise children and young people, pedestrians and cyclists over cars are more conducive to active play and travel.

Walking and cycling routes leading to designated play spaces that are easily accessible by children and allow them to travel independently without having to rely on other people for transport will also allow for more active, outdoor play. Distance, lack of appropriate infrastructure or safety concerns are all prohibiting features of routes to play.

Thus, designing residential areas which encourage active play and travel, ensuring routes to play are safe and attractive, and promoting the benefits of active play will help children and young people in Wales spend more time engaging in health enhancing active, outdoor play.

## References

- <sup>1</sup> *Play England, 2007, The Charter for Children's Play*
- <sup>2</sup> *Funky Dragon: The Children and Young People's Assembly for Wales, 2007, Our Rights, Our Story. An Executive Summary*

# Planning for play

Between 1973 and 2006, the proportion of children playing out on the streets fell from 75% to 15% – Places to Go research<sup>(1)</sup>



Local planning and engineering decisions often prioritise the car and car users' needs over those of pedestrians, cyclists and young people. This poses a barrier impeding outside play and independent travel.

Sustrans recently teamed up with Play Wales to debate the importance of new housing developments being designed to encourage active travel and play. Planners, health professionals, architects, developers and senior civil servants took part in the roundtable discussion chaired by Jane Davidson AM, the Minister responsible for Planning in Wales.

The discussion prompted an announcement that the Government will roll out training for local authority land-use and transport planners and will commission research to see if Councils have effectively attached travel planning conditions to new developments.

***"If that research and training provides conclusive evidence that our policy is not being effectively implemented by local authorities" the Minister told the Senedd, "I will introduce secondary legislation by 2011 to require transport assessments and travel plans for all major developments".***

Sustrans expects that the training and research package will expose the current

limited application of the Department for Transport's Manual for Streets guidance<sup>(2)</sup>.

The Wales Centre for Health are developing an online toolkit, which will help to highlight relevant guidance and share case studies. Involving input from a wide range of professionals, the toolkit will support the delivery of sustainable development and the health agenda through planning, transport and the built environment throughout Wales.

There are examples of good practice in other countries (Scandinavia, the Netherlands, Germany) and pockets within the UK (e.g. Home Zones and DIY Streets). These demonstrate a positive correlation between design features reducing the speed and volume of traffic and the frequency of young people's play and independent travel.

**For further information about the development of the online toolkit, contact [AnneMarie.BeresfordWebb@wch.wales.nhs.uk](mailto:AnneMarie.BeresfordWebb@wch.wales.nhs.uk)**

## References

<sup>1</sup> *Play England, 2008, Places to Go: A summary of research evidence*

<sup>2</sup> *Department for Transport, 2007, Manual for Streets, Available at <http://www.dft.gov.uk/pgr/sustainable/manforstreets/>*

**More people...more active...more often...in Wales**

# Encouraging active play and travel: best practice

## Active Travel and Play South West

Sustrans' Active Travel and Play South West project is running a demonstration project in Bournemouth and Poole to showcase new ways of encouraging active play and travel in the region.

The project works with Children's Centres to help incorporate more active play into their existing work, as well as creating a communications campaign targeting parents and carers which promotes the benefits of active play and travel. The project also works with the two borough councils and the Primary Care Trust to improve walking and cycling access to play spaces, as well as working directly with parents and carers to create a local active travel map.



## Lower Leas Coastal Park:

### The "Fun Zone" adventure playground

The "Fun Zone" adventure playground is located in a mile long stretch of landscaped undercliff parkland in Folkestone, Kent, and is good example of integrating active play and travel. National Cycle Network Route 2 runs adjacent to the adventure playground, allowing safe, direct, traffic-free access by foot and bike to the play space, with secure cycle parking also available. This allows children to safely engage in active travel as both access to the park independently and as a play activity itself.

### Further information:

[www.sustrans.org.uk/play](http://www.sustrans.org.uk/play)

## The Evidence!

The Evidence! is a regular information service identifying research evidence on the benefits of physically active travel.

### Neighbourhood design and physical activity in children

Research from Canada suggests that urban design can moderate children's perceptions of places to play and be physically active. The study indicates that children in high

walkability neighbourhoods exhibited higher levels of active travel. However, those from low walkability environments tended to play more around the home area.

*Holt et al, 2008, Neighborhood and developmental differences in children's perceptions of opportunities for play and physical activity. Health & Place 14*

Research papers are available to download from [www.the-evidence.org.uk](http://www.the-evidence.org.uk)



## Creating play-friendly DIY Streets

Sustrans' DIY Streets is a community driven project which helps residents re-design their own streets, making them safer and more attractive places to live and play.

DIY Streets is currently working with communities in three streets in Wales; in Bridgend, Port Talbot and Cardiff. Baseline surveys of residents show that they do not generally see their street as somewhere safe for children to play; for example, in Somerset Street in Cardiff, 81% of respondents felt that their street wasn't a safe place for children to play.

Heol Degwm in Bridgend and Castle Street in Port Talbot are currently in the design stage, which involves community meetings where residents discuss their priorities and possible solutions to issues. The reduction of traffic speed and volume was seen as the most important; thus creating more sociable and safe spaces for play and interaction. Heol Degwm has a higher than average proportion of green space in the form of road side verges, but this is often used as

informal car parking. As 48% of residents felt the street wasn't safe for children to play in, the parking layout on the street will be changed enabling the green spaces to be reclaimed. It is anticipated that these will become informal social and play spaces.

Construction of the new Somerset Street design began in August this year and aims to be completed by October 2009. The design includes chicanes planted with trees and narrowing the street entrance using paved areas planted with shrubs, which will slow traffic, helping improve driver behaviour and make the street more attractive. Public artworks will also form a part of Heol Degwm and Castle Street, to further improve the appearance of the streets and add an important sense of 'place'.

DIY Streets is a pilot project funded by the Esmee Fairbairn Foundation, partner local authorities and housing associations.

**Further information:**  
[www.sustrans.org.uk/diystreets](http://www.sustrans.org.uk/diystreets)