

Welsh Government consultation on the Statutory guidance on securing sufficient play opportunities

Sustrans submission

May 2014

Introduction

Sustrans is a leading UK charity enabling people to travel by foot, bike or public transport for more of the journeys we make every day. We work with families, communities, policy-makers and partner organisations so that people are able to choose healthier, cleaner and cheaper journeys, with better places and spaces to move through and live in.

As a charity, Sustrans delivers practical projects that aid children's ability to play, particularly through re-designing streets and communities to make them places where people come first. We believe that communities can and should be places for play.

The built environment has a major role to play not only in supporting the sustainability of a community but also can positively impact on other considerations, such as public health outcomes.¹

Q1: Does the statutory guidance clearly set out how local authorities and their partners can secure play opportunities for children?

While Sustrans Cymru welcomes the guidance, we believe it could be broadened out to include more information as to how streets and communities can become places for play, through projects such as street re-design.

The ways our residential areas are designed are crucial to determining our lifestyle and our wider sustainability. Traffic speed, traffic volume and the physical quality of a street can have a real impact on people's sense of community and what activities the street can support. People are more likely to spend time interacting with family and neighbours on a street where traffic is less dominant and the street is a more interesting and engaging place to be. This engenders a positive sense of space, ownership and community cohesion. Too often, urban dwellings have become designed around the private car – with ever increasing parking, faster moving cars and lowering air quality.

Residential areas used to be places for people, where children played in the street, but across Wales and the UK this is no longer the case, as illustrated by Sustrans Cymru last year through video evidence as part of our research into Street Play in 2013.² Other research backs this up, such as the "One Poll" survey, commissioned by Play Wales and its sister bodies across the UK in August 2013,³ revealing that over 50% of adults reported playing out at least seven times a week when they were growing up, compared to less than a quarter of children (23%) today, with 40% of children saying they want to play out more.

Community-led street design projects can increase levels of walking and cycling, slow down traffic and lead to streets being a place to socialise and play – leading to a more sustainable community for all.

We also believe the guidance would benefit from a section describing the learning for local authorities and others that has been accrued from the Play Sufficiency Assessment process.

Q2: Do you have any further suggestions on how local authorities can secure sufficient play opportunities?

Sustrans believes that our streets are a vital element in increasing levels of play, but also that our communities should be safe for children to travel to other locations for play (such as play grounds) – and that parents can feel confident letting their children travel independently. Having 20mph limits across wide areas has been shown to increase levels of walking and cycling – modes of transport available to children.⁴

In collisions with cars at 30mph, small children are killed in most cases, yet at 20mph there is a high chance they will survive.⁵ Sustrans believes that 20mph limits in wide areas across Welsh communities will improve children’s access to play, as well as making streets themselves safer for play.

Q3: Do you have examples of good practice in securing sufficient play opportunities?

The Home Zone concept, called woonerf, was pioneered in the 1970s in the Netherlands, in an attempt to strike a balance between vehicular traffic and other road users. Its purpose is to physically alter the streets and roads in an area, in order to force motorists to drive with greater care and at lower speeds. These are usually led by local authorities and government.

Sustrans has developed a cost-effective alternative to the Home Zone concept, developing street design projects that are community-led. These projects, such as DIY Streets, have been found to foster greater overall buy-in for project vision, while simultaneously bringing neighbours together. Involving people from the start to engender ownership is an essential element of project success.

Sustrans has successfully worked with communities across the UK to support local people to re-design their own residential space in order to make them safer, more liveable and people-centred (see Ashton Gate School opposite).

Community-led street design ensures that local people take an ongoing role in their residential area, for example taking

Case Study: Ashton Gate School, Bristol

- Ashton Gate School in Bristol situated on a busy cut-through
- Barrier to walking, cycling or scooting to school
- School is on two-site location, with regular crossing of road
- Sustrans ran a series of workshops and street activities with the school community, generating design proposals that were innovative, low-cost but importantly effective
- Drivers now more aware of school community, safer environment to play
- School community taken on maintenance and ownership of the planters.

Funded by Bristol City Council: **less than £10,000**



responsibility for green spaces and basic environmental maintenance tasks. Giving residents the opportunity to be responsible for their area can help develop long term sustainability for the changes that are made.

When creating similar liveable neighbourhoods in Wales, it is imperative that safe and enjoyable walking and cycling routes, together with well-located amenities such as local shops, schools and green open spaces, are integrated into the new design proposal. As they promote active travel, it means these communities are able to enjoy good health.

Q6: Do you have anything else to add?

Access to play opportunities is a socio-economic issue, as evidenced in the 'Child Poverty Strategy, 2012 Onwards', published by the Children's Commissioner for Wales, which states: "children and young people from low income households are restricted in their access to structured play and leisure opportunities because of transport and access costs".⁶

Sustrans strongly supports the Welsh Government's commitment to tackle child poverty, and acknowledges the Welsh Government's public commitment to fully implement the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in Wales, including the child's right to rest, leisure, play and recreational activities (Article 31).

With a quarter of households in Wales having no access to a car,⁷ and many people finding public transport unaffordable, inaccessible and inappropriate to their needs,⁸ supporting families to take up more affordable transport options, such as walking and cycling, is an equitable solution that will also combat spiralling NHS costs related to physical inactivity.⁹

Wales is unique in having the world's first Active Travel Act, a piece of legislation that Welsh Government intends to transform the way people travel for their everyday journeys. Ensuring that each local authority upholds its duties under the Active Travel (Wales) Act 2013 will establish a comprehensive cycling and walking network across Wales, which will allow children and young people to access leisure and other facilities, such as swimming pools, play grounds and other play opportunities, regardless of their families' financial circumstances.

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¹ Faculty of Public Health, 'Built environment and physical activity: a briefing statement'
<http://www.fph.org.uk/uploads/briefing%20statement%20-%20built%20environment%20and%20physical%20activity.pdf>

² Sustrans Cymru, Street Play Then and Now in Wales, 2013 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h-VuB131sFo>

³ Play Wales “Unwelcoming communities stop children playing out” 7 August 2013
<http://www.playday.org.uk/media/media-releases/7-august-2013.aspx>

⁴ 20s Plenty for Us Briefing Paper

http://www.20splentyforus.org.uk/BriefingSheets/20mphLimits_encourage_cycling_and_walking_Nov12.pdf

⁵ 20mph limits for cars in residential areas, by schools and shops; Dorling, D

<http://www.roadsafetygb.org.uk/misc/fckeditorFiles/file/Danny%20Dorling%20-%2020mph%20Speed%20Limits%20for%20Cars%20in%20Residential%20Areas%20by%20Shops%20and%20Schools.pdf>

⁶ Child Poverty Strategy 2012 Onwards, Children’s Commissioner for Wales

<http://www.childcomwales.org.uk/uploads/publications/307.pdf>

⁷ Census 2011

<https://www.google.co.uk/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=2&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0CDcQFjAB&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.ons.gov.uk%2Fons%2Frel%2Fcensus%2F2011-census%2Fkey-statistics-for-local-authorities-in-england-and-wales%2Frft-table-ks404ew.xls&ei=0GuEU6ezMYaPO8zugagL&usg=AFQjCNEtsGqJ6FYxnBvm-xa5LqDJTbj7A&bvm=bv.67720277,d.ZWU>

⁸ Welsh Consumer Council, 2004, People Without Cars

⁹ The NHS in Wales spends £70 million a year dealing the costs of obesity.