

# Plaid Cymru Sustainable Communities Commission

## Sustrans Cymru submission to Plaid Cymru Sustainable Communities Commission

January 2014

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.

Sustrans Cymru will limit this submission to deal with the Commission's areas of interest in:

- "Empowering communities to improve their quality of life"
- "Building an infrastructure for sustainable communities."

Current Sustrans projects, throughout the UK, encourage active and supportive communities to thrive through community-based activities that bring people together and foster community ownership. Sustrans delivers active travel infrastructure that supports sustainable communities, through engendering healthy and community inspired place making.

We have chosen to highlight interventions where communities have been able to:

- "take an active role to improve their quality of life"
- "attract new forms of investment or make better use of existing forms of investment"
- "benefit from an infrastructure that supports more sustainable options."

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.<sup>1</sup>

## Overview

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.

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<sup>1</sup> 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>

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.<sup>2</sup> 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,<sup>3</sup> 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.

## Sustainability through street design

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.

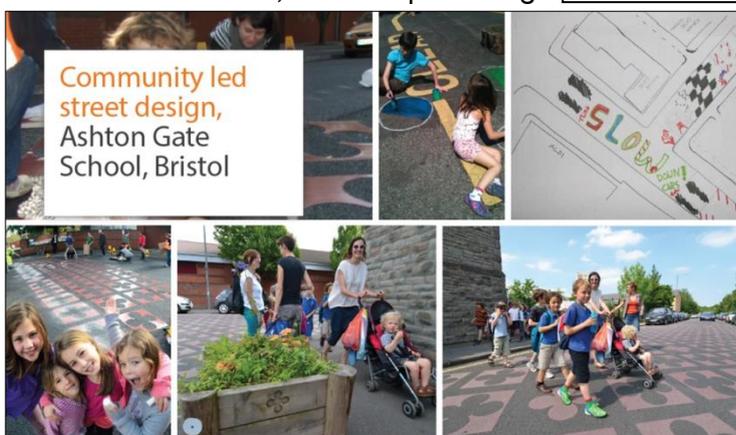
Sustrans has successfully worked with communities across the UK to support local people to re-design their own residential space in order to make them safer, more liveable and people-centred (see Ashton Gate School opposite).

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

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

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

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.

## Scotland

In Scotland, Sustrans receives a £20m annual grant from the Scottish Government for infrastructure works. Funded through Transport Scotland, the Community Links Programme for the 2014/5 and 2015/16 financial years, aims to link the places people live in with the places they want to get to.

This significant investment, delivered through the established principle of matched funding by Sustrans and grant recipients of 50-50, is designed to help successfully deliver the vision of the Cycling Action Plan for Scotland (CAPS): namely that 10% of trips will be by bike by 2020.

In Scotland, Sustrans works in partnership with local authorities across Scotland on a number of projects to help communities to redesign the residential streets they live on and travel through so that they can become better places to walk and cycle through, play, live and socialise on.

Worth noting are two community-led pilot projects, which re-designed residential streets on Cockmuir Place in Elgin<sup>4</sup> and Katrine Crescent in Kirkcaldy. These 18 month projects were led by urban designers who worked with residents and pupils at local schools to create new design proposals. These new street designs are also complemented by art projects.<sup>5</sup>

Sustrans was able to make relatively simple and low cost changes to both streets, calming traffic flows, adding colour to the streets and making it easier and more engaging for people to walk and cycle in their community. As a result of both projects, residents noted significant improvements in the quality of life and attractiveness of their streets.

## England

Street design projects often focus on a single road. While this is beneficial to one street, it potentially shifts the problem (such as a rat run) to an adjacent street. Recently, Sustrans has been working with neighbourhood zones to redesign bigger areas to even greater effect.<sup>6</sup>



Sustrans led a community street design project in Haringey, London, between 2010 and 2012, bringing residents together to address issues in their community. The area was suffering from high traffic speeds and rat running, which led to concerns over safety for pedestrians and cyclists. Walking and cycling infrastructure was disconnected and poor quality. There was also anti-

<sup>4</sup> More details at: <http://www.sustrans.org.uk/cockmuir-place-street-design-project>

<sup>5</sup> More details at: <http://www.sustrans.org.uk/scotland/what-we-do/urban-design/art-streets/bug-walk-kirkcaldy>

<sup>6</sup> There are many examples, including: <http://diyporterslodge.wordpress.com/> <http://diyhamp.wordpress.com/> <http://pocketplacessouthendonseaw.wordpress.com/> We have a wide range of examples; contact Sustrans Cymru office for details.

social behaviour, fly tipping and dog fouling, while many residents felt disempowered and disconnected from local decision-making.

Sustrans led the project, which culminated in the creation of high quality public spaces that made the area cleaner and more welcoming. Infrastructure improvements and better lighting resulted in a more joined up and safer local walking and cycling network. More than 40 trees were planted along the sides of streets, electric car charging points and public art were installed and drivers were encouraged to slow down. Residents felt so empowered that following the initiative they created a campaign group to continue making improvements to the area. The project led to:

- 10% reduction in traffic volume
- 23% increase at cars travelling at 20mph or below
- 61% increase in residents who thought their street was attractive
- 34% increase in people who thought their street was a good place to socialise.

## 20mph speed limits

Reducing traffic speeds to 20mph in residential areas can have a dramatic effect on people's lives and their neighbourhoods – preventing unnecessary deaths, boosting the local economy and encouraging residents to be more involved in their community, while becoming healthier and more active. Slower speeds create substantial savings in: Health (by reducing accidents and improving public health); Transport (by reducing the need to build more roads); and Pollution (by reducing carbon emissions).

Researchers have found that children struggle to judge speed when vehicles are doing more than 20mph<sup>7</sup>. Drivers' stopping distance at 30mph is almost double that of 20mph, leaving them with less time to react if a child steps out on to the road.<sup>8</sup> In the 250 of the 20mph schemes across Great Britain, accidents fell by 60%<sup>9</sup>, with the severity of accidents, when they do occur, decreasing (on average a 1% reduction in traffic speed leads to a 2% reduction in injury<sup>10</sup>).

20mph zones have also been found to make good economic sense. Utilising the World Health Organisation's Health Economic Assessment Tool<sup>11</sup>, it has been found that for every £1 spent in adopting 20mph in Bristol, the city enjoys a return of £24.72 through increased walking and £7.47 through increased cycling.<sup>12</sup> Other 20mph projects record similar results; in 2011 London town centres saw small and local businesses increasing their trade, with walkers spending £147 more per month than those travelling by car.<sup>13</sup>

It also positively impacts on the health of communities. In Wales, and elsewhere in the UK, we are in the grip of an inactivity epidemic, costing the NHS millions. However, there are solutions available, which would be relatively straightforward to implement but would have significant

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<sup>7</sup> Reduced sensitivity to visual looming inflates the risk posed by speeding vehicles when children try to cross the road, University of London, 2011

<sup>8</sup> The Highway Code, Driving Standards Agency, 2007

<sup>9</sup> WS Atkins Transport Planning (2001), European Best Practice in the Delivery of Integrated Transport, Report on Stage 3: Transferability

<http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20110304132839/http://cfit.independent.gov.uk/pubs/2001/ebp/ebp/stage3/index.htm>

<sup>10</sup> European Transport Safety Council, 'Managing Speed: Towards Safe and Sustainable Transport'

<http://www.etsc.eu/documents/Managing%20Speed%20Towards%20Safe%20and%20Sustainable%20Road%20Transport.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> World Health Organisation <http://heatwalkingcycling.org/>

<sup>12</sup> Citywide Rollout of 20mph speed limits, Bristol City Council Cabinet, 2012

[https://www.bristol.gov.uk/committee/2012/ua/ua000/0726\\_7.pdf](https://www.bristol.gov.uk/committee/2012/ua/ua000/0726_7.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> Living Streets Blog, June 2013 <http://www.livingstreets.org.uk/blog-our-high-streets-need-more-pedestrians-not-just-free-parking>

outcomes. For example, 20mph pilot schemes in Bristol found increases in counts for walking and cycling up as much as 37% in some areas.<sup>14</sup>

A Private Member's Bill is currently before the Northern Ireland Assembly, seeking legislation specifically in relation to a 20mph speed limit.<sup>15</sup> There appears to be a groundswell of support, with campaigns developing locally the length and breadth of the UK, calling on local authorities and city centres to introduce 20mph zones.<sup>16</sup> The 2012 British Social Attitudes Survey found that 72% were in favour of 20mph speed limits on residential streets,<sup>17</sup> with a specially commissioned YouGov poll in Wales, in March 2013,<sup>18</sup> also finding that nearly 60% of Welsh voters would support politicians campaigning for 20mph limits in residential areas.

## Master planning

Master planning is just one of a range of planning tools that can help to build sustainable communities. It is a holistic approach that goes beyond physical analysis of an area to determine what is needed, based on its strengths and weaknesses, through a series of priorities and proposals. Fundamentally, it provides an opportunity for local people to build consensus over the future of their local area – and to do so from the outset. This allows residents to take control of their neighbourhood by identifying priorities and pulling together a vision and set of design proposals.

Community engagement is at the heart of the master planning process, involving local people from start to finish. This process does not merely focus on physical attributes of an area, but also considers emerging socio-economic trends, including the examination of data related to land use data, footfall, vacancy rates and employment. Analysing this information allows for the key weaknesses and issues associated with an area to be identified, and to exploit opportunities that encourage investment and footfall.

The culmination of the master planning process is a series of proposals or projects for a neighbourhood, identifying delivery mechanisms and key stakeholders. Proposals could include a physical strength, such as exploiting a waterside location, opportunities to re-use a derelict site or removing barriers to pedestrian movements. Alternatively, it may be a proposal to develop a potential theme for an area based on local skills or industrial history.

A good example can be found in Scotland and the Masterplan of Kirkintilloch town centre, in East Dunbarton,<sup>19</sup> which identifies a range of interventions including the need for a branding strategy for the town centre. This Masterplan was developed in conjunction with a Champions Group, comprising residents keen to be involved in proposal developments, and through a series of information gathering events, including questionnaires, workshops and targeted stakeholder meetings.

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<sup>14</sup> Bristol City Council, '20mph Speed Limit Pilot Areas – Monitoring Report', 2012

<sup>15</sup> Information on the Road Traffic (Speed Limits) Bill can be found here:

<http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/Assembly-Business/Legislation/Current-Non-Executive-Bill-Proposals/Road-Traffic-Speed-Limits-Bill/Road-Traffic-Speed-Limits-Bill-Explanatory-and-Financial-Memorandum/>

<sup>16</sup> Campaign website here: [www.20splentyforus.org.uk](http://www.20splentyforus.org.uk)

<sup>17</sup> Department for Transport, 'British Social Attitudes Survey 2012: public attitudes towards transport' (p.21)

[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/209890/bsa-2012.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/209890/bsa-2012.pdf)

<sup>18</sup> Full results can be found here: <http://www.sustrans.org.uk/wales/policy>

<sup>19</sup> A copy of the Masterplan can be downloaded here:

[http://www.eastdunbarton.gov.uk/PDF/DE%20Enterprise/Kirkintilloch%20Master%20Plan%20APPROVED%20\(Low%20Res\).pdf](http://www.eastdunbarton.gov.uk/PDF/DE%20Enterprise/Kirkintilloch%20Master%20Plan%20APPROVED%20(Low%20Res).pdf)

## Active Travel Act 2013

It should be noted that the current National Assembly for Wales passed landmark Welsh legislation last year, with the Welsh Government sponsored Active Travel (Wales) Act 2013. It establishes a legal requirement on local authorities in Wales to map and plan for suitable routes for active travel, and to build and improve their infrastructure for walking and cycling every year. It creates new duties for highways authorities to consider the needs of walkers and cyclists and make better provision for them. It also requires both the Welsh Government and local authorities to promote walking and cycling as a mode of transport.

Local authorities will soon begin consulting (duties due to commence summer 2014) on their visions for a network of routes, suitable for active travel, that will connect workplaces, hospitals, schools and shopping areas. This offers an ideal opportunity to look at how our communities are set up to support active travel, alongside wider sustainability.

Adequate funding to implement this world first legislation is fundamental to its success. Similarly, Sustrans Cymru is supportive of transport funding being redirected to support projects that enable the use of sustainable transport, such as the 2009 Sustainable Travel Towns Initiative, spearheaded by Plaid Cymru's former Deputy First Minister and Minister for the Economy and Transport, Ieuan Wyn Jones.

## Conclusion

Current Sustrans projects, throughout the UK, encourage active and supportive communities to thrive through community-based activities that bring people together and foster community ownership. Sustrans delivers active travel infrastructure that supports sustainable communities, through engendering healthy and community inspired place making.

Traffic speed, traffic volume and the physical quality of a street can have a real impact on how people feel about their neighbours 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.

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.

In Scotland, Sustrans receives a £20m grant from the Scottish Government for infrastructure works. Funded through Transport Scotland, the Community Links Programme for the 2014/5 and 2015/16 financial years, aims to link the places people live in with the places they want to get to. This significant investment, delivered through the established principle of matched funding by Sustrans and grant recipients of 50-50, should help to successfully deliver the vision of the Cycling Action Plan for Scotland (CAPS): namely that 10% of trips will be by bike by 2020.

Reducing traffic speeds to 20mph in residential areas can also have a dramatic effect on people's lives and their neighbourhoods – preventing unnecessary deaths, boosting the local economy and encouraging residents to be more involved in their community, while becoming healthier and more active.

Master planning also offers an opportunity to build sustainable communities. It is a holistic approach that goes beyond physical analysis of an area to determine what is needed, based on its strengths and weaknesses, through a series of priorities and proposals. Fundamentally, it provides an opportunity for local people to build consensus over the future of their local area – and to do so from the outset.

The Welsh Government sponsored Active Travel (Wales) Act 2013 offers an ideal opportunity to look at how our communities are set up to support active travel, alongside wider sustainability. However, adequate funding to implement this world first legislation is fundamental to its success.

Sustainable communities contain people at their very heart. By re-designing our neighbourhoods, it is possible to empower and encourage more sustainable transport behaviour such as active travel. The built environment has the potential to support the sustainability of a community and positively impact on public health outcomes. 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.

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