



Walk Assessment Toolkit

How to use Guidance



Purpose

This toolkit has been developed to enable people of all ages and organisations to independently undertake a walk assessment. The resources supports individuals, communities, and organisations to:

1. **Facilitate discussions about the quality of walking in the local area and identify priority areas for action.**
2. **Develop an evidence base that can inform and influence projects, plans and decision makers that are shaping the local area.**
3. **Identify suitable and preferred routes for walking.**

Using the checklist

The walk assessment considers six core themes of a walking friendly street. These focus on:

1. PERCEPTIONS OF PLACE

- Cleanliness
- Natural features
- Overall appeal

2. QUALITY OF PAVEMENTS

- Well maintained with few cracks
- Free of obstruction e.g. cars or bins
- Non-slip
- Wide enough for wheelchairs, or for safely passing other pedestrians
- Dropped curbs to road level at crossings

3. OUTDOOR SAFETY

- Drivers give way at crossings
- Separate cycle paths
- Good street lighting
- Good visibility with no high hedges or dark corners
- Street is used by others, feels busy

4. PEDESTRIAN CROSSINGS

- Available at busy locations and at local shops and services
- Safe for people with different levels of ability
- Appropriate tactile surfacing at crossings
- Traffic lights are clearly visible
- Sound signal clear
- Adequate crossing time

5. SEATING

- Available at suitable intervals (approximately 800m)
- Well maintained
- Comfortable

6. ACCESS TO AND USE OF SHOPS AND SERVICES

- Shops and services are situated together and are accessible
- Public toilets are available and well maintained
- Streets link me to where I want to go e.g. local businesses, parks, or places to meet friends

In total, there are 25 criteria used to assess whether these six key features of walking have been achieved. Participants should identify a route they wish to assess. These could be routes to work or school, to nearby shops and services, or in and between parks and green spaces.



The assessment works best if participants undertake a group walk along the route, and come to a collective view on the walk scores.

This can be supported by **printing out the walk assessment survey**.

This will allow individuals to make notes of their own scores and comments as they walk along the route to help inform the group discussion. The same print out survey can also be used by the group to record the outcomes of a collective discussion on the walk scores.

The scores agreed by the group can then be inputted into the **walk assessment results excel sheet**.

Useful information to consider when undertaking a group walk can be found here: https://niopa.qub.ac.uk/bitstream/NIOPA/2633/1/Walking_for_Health_manual_2016_0.pdf

Completing the walk assessment and inputting the results into the excel sheets will provide the group with a score for each walking theme of very poor, poor, average, good and excellent. This is shown in a bar diagram. An overall score for the walk is also provided. There is additional space to add summarised comments and suggestions made by individuals and the group.



Combined results sheet

If participants are unable to undertake a group walk, then individuals can walk the route themselves and write down their scores using the walk assessment survey print out. Individuals can then input the results into the walk assessment results excel sheet. These results can then be sent to a nominated person, who can combine these results by using the **combined results excel sheet**. This will work out and show the average walk scores for the group.

Next steps

The findings of the walk assessment, including diagrams, can each be easily printed. These can be used to:

- Facilitate a discussion on the priority areas for action for improving walking in the area.
- Act as an evidence base that can help inform decision makers of the current quality of the walking environment in the area.
- Support walk leaders and groups to identify suitable and preferred walking routes.

This can be supported by a map of the walking route that has been assessed, alongside images taken on the walk to illustrate some of the key issues identified.



Belfast Healthy Cities Walk Assessment

The Walk Assessment for Healthy Ageing (WAHA) tool was designed for use by older people and organisations to evaluate the age-friendliness of a place, and local features such as streets or parks. Using the WHO Checklist of Essential Features of Age-friendly Cities and existing walk assessment tools as a guide for the criteria, a questionnaire was developed which enabled older people to perform self-assessments of their local area. The checklist has been piloted in several areas within Belfast. This was facilitated by guided walks led by Belfast Healthy Cities.

Further information of these walking assessments and the results are available in the Walkability Assessment for Healthy Ageing Report https://www.belfasthealthycities.com/sites/default/files/Healthy_Ageing_Walkability_Report_March2014-02.pdf and Walking Belfast: Older People's Views https://www.belfasthealthycities.com/sites/default/files/publications/3142_Walking_Belfast-LR_%281%29.PDF

The Public Health Agency Community Active Travel initiative is a three-year project aimed at encouraging communities to travel more actively, both for transport and leisure purposes. As part of the project, Belfast Healthy Cities completed walk assessments in communities across Belfast to provide a baseline insight into the community's perceptions regarding walking in the local neighbourhood.

Further information about the initiative and its results can be found here: <https://www.belfasthealthycities.com/walkability-assessments>

Importance of walking

A walk friendly environment supports and encourages people of all ages to use their local neighbourhood and undertake the recommended 20-30 minutes of brisk walking daily or 150 minutes across a week (Department of Health and Social Care, 2019). In turn, this enables people to maintain social networks and their independence, children and parents to walk to school together, and people of all abilities to access local shops, services and places of work. Social networks and community involvement support both physical and mental health, for example through reduced isolation, increased sense of personal safety, higher levels of physical activity and a sense of belonging. The benefits can be significant, enabling older people and people of all ages to remain active in their communities.





Health

- Walking frequently often leads to a healthier lifestyle and less health problems overall (Public Health England, 2018).
- Walking does not contribute to air pollution. Poor air quality is linked to various illnesses including asthma, cancer, diabetes and dementia (Public Health England, 2018).
- Walking more could prevent 1 in 10 cases of stroke or heart disease and 1 in 6 deaths of any cause (Claris, 2019).
- Walking for just ten minutes can boost your mood (Public Health England, 2017).
- Walking can reduce levels of depression, and decrease the risk of dementia, by 30% (Claris, 2019).
- Chief medical officers recommend 150 minutes of brisk walking a week (Department of Health and Social Care, 2019).

Social/Community Cohesion

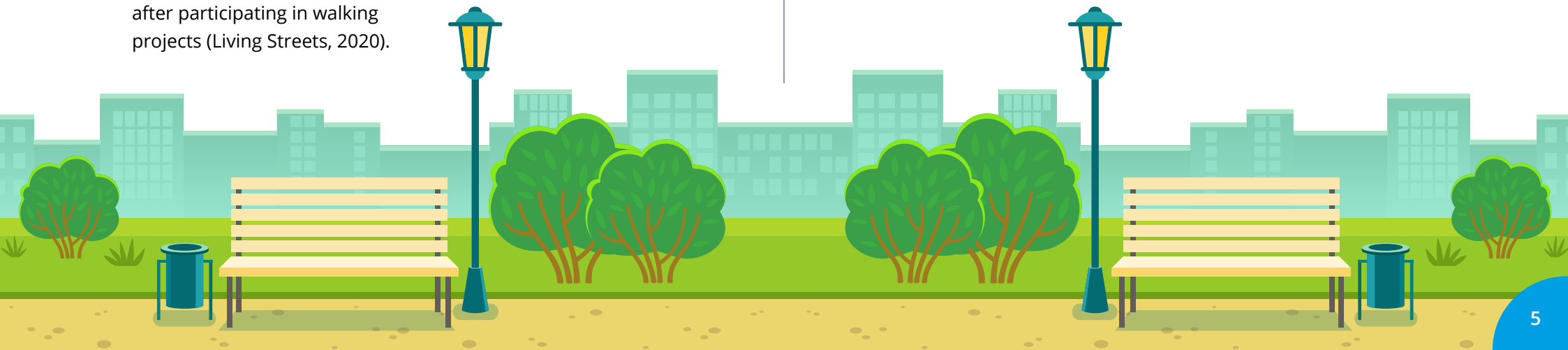
- In a UK study with over 700 adults, 70% felt less lonely and isolated, and 68% more connected with their community, after participating in walking projects (Living Streets, 2020).

Environmental

- Walking reduces congestion which improves air quality (Sustrans, 2020).
- Walking reduces the number of motor vehicles using the roads, lowering the amount of noise that is coming from engines. Less noise from vehicles and idle traffic helps local wildlife to stay and thrive (Sustrans, 2020).

Economic

- Walking is one of the cheapest modes of transport.
- Case studies across the world have shown that high street walking and cycling improvements can increase retail sales by up to 30% (Living Streets, 2018).
- Pedestrian shoppers tend to spend more over a month, compared to those who drive (Living Streets, 2018).
- Physical inactivity costs the NHS more than £450 million a year at Clinical Commissioning Group level (Public Health England, 2018).



References

Claris, S. (2019) ***Walk this way: the path to cleaner, healthier cities.***

Available at: <https://www.rics.org/uk/news-insight/future-of-surveying/sustainability/walk-this-way-the-road-to-cleaner-healthier-cities/>

Department of Health and Social Care (2019) ***UK Chief Medical Officers' Physical Activity Guidelines.*** Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/physical-activity-guidelines-uk-chief-medical-officers-report>

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Public Health England (2017) ***10 minutes brisk walking each day in mid-life for health benefits and towards achieving physical activity recommendations Evidence summary.*** Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/639030/Health_benefits_of_10_mins_brisk_walking_evidence_summary.pdf

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Sustrans (2020) ***How does walking and cycling help to protect the environment?*** Available at: <https://www.sustrans.org.uk/our-blog/get-active/2020/in-your-community/how-does-walking-and-cycling-help-to-protect-the-environment>



Location of assessment: _____

Name (Individual/Group): _____

Theme	Walk Indicator	Score (0-4)	Comments
PERCEPTIONS OF PLACE	Cleanliness		
	Natural features		
	Overall appeal		
QUALITY OF PAVEMENTS	Well maintained with few cracks		
	Free of obstruction e.g. cars or bins		
	Non-slip		
	Wide enough for wheelchairs, or for safely passing other pedestrians		
	Dropped curbs to road level at crossings		
OUTDOOR SAFETY	Drivers give way at crossings		
	Separate cycle paths		
	Good street lighting		
	Good visibility with no high hedges or dark corners		
	Street is used by others, feels busy		
PEDESTRIAN CROSSINGS	Available at busy locations and at local shops and services		
	Safe for people with different levels of ability		
	Appropriate tactile surfacing at crossings		
	Traffic lights are clearly visible		
	Sound signal clear		
	Adequate crossing time		
SEATING	Available at suitable intervals (approximately 800m)		
	Well maintained		
	Comfortable		
ACCESS TO AND USE OF SHOPS AND SERVICES	Shops and services are situated together and are accessible		
	Public toilets are available and well maintained		
	Streets link me to where I want to go e.g. local businesses, parks, or places to meet friends		
		Overall Score	

Please score each walk indicator on a scale of 0- 4. **Excellent = 4, Good = 3, Average = 2, Poor = 1, Very Poor = 0, Not Applicable = N/A**

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