



Neighbourhood Vitality

Policy Briefing 6

Walking is about much more than getting from A to B. Communities work best when they meet together in public spaces on foot - to talk and play, to stop and shop, to sit and to enjoy being in the company of families, neighbours or even strangers.

We can't encourage walking if we don't provide public places in which it is enjoyable to linger. Only when we treat walking as much more than just a means of transport, will we get streets and spaces that are a pleasure to use.

Our policy

Providing for people when they arrive is just as important as making sure their walking journey is a safe and successful one. Living Streets believes we need spaces that are both attractive and interesting, to encourage walkers to linger and relax.

We call for more public seating in convenient places for walkers, not tucked out of the way in neglected corners. We want to see serious investment in new public art, street trees and planting, and high quality lighting, designed to meet the needs of pedestrians, not traffic.

Government policy

In his speech on Liveability in April 2001, the Prime Minister identified the quality of streets as vital to stronger local communities and an improved local quality of life:

"...the one public service we all use all the time is the streets where we

live. And in too many places, streets and public spaces have become dirty, ugly and dangerous. Britain needs to feel proud of its public spaces, not ashamed."

The detail of Government policy has tended to focus on making it easier and safer to walk. But the importance of making walking an enjoyable experience has not been overlooked:

"Creating an attractive environment is important both in encouraging people to walk and as part of the drive to improve the general urban environment." (Encouraging Walking, DETR, March 2000)

The Government, in its response to the Transport Select Committee's Report called "Walking in Towns and Cities", said:

"The Government agrees that good urban design and high quality urban environments, including well-designed and maintained streets, have a vital role to play in helping to make towns and cities places that people choose to live, work and relax in."

What you can do



Think about how your neighbourhood could be used socially - for street parties or street games, perhaps. Find out if local people - individuals or groups - are interested in putting local public space to better use. Together ask your local authority if grants are available for community activities like these, environmental clean-ups or other improvements.



Write to your local authority and ask them how they intend to make your streets and public spaces more attractive - do they intend to provide more seating, public art, street trees and planting? Are they prepared to install innovative lighting that can make places safer and striking, too. Make sure they understand that these things can encourage walking, and that more walking will be good for the health, harmony, safety and vitality of your community. Ask them to consider installing a network of high-quality seating on the main pedestrian routes, to enable all of us, especially those who need regular rest stops, to enjoy walking, too.



Report damaged and vandalized street furniture to your local authority.



Ask your local authority to commission a Community Street Audit from Living Streets.



Become a member of Living Streets and contact your Living Streets branch or local Contact. If there is no branch or local Contact nearby, why not consider becoming active on behalf of Living Streets yourself?

Fact Stats

1. Councils should be required to develop open space strategies based on local needs to facilitate provision of high quality civic areas, according to the Transport Local Government and the Regions Sub Committee (2002)
2. The total area of pedestrian streets and squares in Copenhagen tripled between 1968 and 1986...During the same period the number of people standing and sitting tripled as well. (Jan Gehl, 2001)
3. A society of coffee shops and cul-de-sacs should be created to combat growing mistrust between people, according to a Downing Street Think Tank. A report, published in April 2002 by the Cabinet Office's Performance and Innovation Unit, outlines how planning and design can improve the nation's 'social capital' and counter political apathy and mistrust in the community. (*Social Capital: A Discussion Paper*, PIU, 2002)
4. "The essence of a successful and liveable city is the energy and interest created through a rich mixture of activities and amenities in a compact setting. This generates the complex human interaction which has, for thousands of years, meant that cities have been the places where culture and wealth are created." (*Liveable Cities*, David Lunt, Urban Village Forum)



We need more seating, in the right places

For further information

Contact Living Streets information and advice hotline (020 7820 1010)

A useful publication:

Providing for Journeys on Foot (Institution of Highways and Transportation, 2000)

Website: www.livingstreets.org.uk