

Healthy Streets Qualitative Assessment

Assessing how healthy a street is

INTRODUCTION

A healthy street is one in which all people feel welcome, relaxed and safe, where people can choose to walk and cycle and spend time. There are different ways for assessing how healthy a street is, each has its strengths and weaknesses but they are all based on the 10 Healthy Streets Indicators. These are the aspects of the human experience of being on streets necessary for streets to be inclusive, healthy environments.

10 HEALTHY STREETS INDICATORS



HOW THIS TOOL WORKS

Anyone can use this tool. It is just a simple list of prompt questions to help you consider the aspects of how streets look and feel that influence each of the Healthy Streets Indicators. Each page provides a summary description of an Indicator and then a list of questions to get you thinking. If you like you can go out onto a street and make your own qualitative assessment of how healthy the street is using this tool. If you are planning on making changes to a street you may find this tool helps you to consider the range of important factors that you could influence with your changes.

People choose to walk and cycle

We all need to build regular activity into our daily routine and the most effective way to do this is to walk or cycle for short trips or as part of longer public transport trips. People will choose to walk and cycle if these are the most attractive options for them. This means making walking and cycling and public transport use more convenient, pleasant and appealing than private car use.

PROMPT QUESTIONS

General impressions

- Would people walking feel that the street has been designed to prioritise their needs?
- Would people cycling feel that the street has been designed to prioritise their needs?

Appeal of the walking and cycling environment

- Is there enough space for people walking and cycling at the busiest times?
- Are people walking and cycling expected to share the same space?
- If vehicles travel faster than 20 mph/30 kph then are people walking and cycling suitably protected from them?
- Does the street feel dominated by parked or moving vehicles?

Ease of car use for short journeys

- Would it be cheap, easy and convenient to park locally?
- When observing people driving, are they giving this task their full attention?
- Is it just as easy to drive through local streets as it is to stay on the main roads?

If there are public transport services...

- Are public transport services frequent and direct enough to provide a competitive alternative to car use?
- Is it easy for people to get to bus stops and change between different types of public transport?
- Is the street an attractive place to wait for the bus and access train stations?
- Are there measures to prioritise public transport over general traffic e.g. dedicated bus lanes?



Everyone feels welcome

Streets must be welcoming places for everyone to walk, cycle, spend time and engage with other people. This is necessary to keep us all healthy through physical activity and social interaction. It is also what makes places vibrant and keeps communities strong. The best test for whether we are getting our streets right is whether the whole community, particularly children, older people and disabled people are enjoying using this space.

PROMPT QUESTIONS

- Do the people you observe on the street reflect the diversity of the local community, even after dark?
- Do children walk and cycle without adult supervision and play on the street?
- Do women walk, cycle and spend time on the street on their own?
- Is the footpath mostly at least 2 metres wide and at least 1.5 metres wide at its narrowest point?
- Is the cycle path wide enough for adapted cycles e.g. trikes & cargo bikes to use?
- Is there step-free access from the cycle path to the cycle parking for people using their cycle as a mobility aid?
- Is the footpath wide enough to support a range of activities including scooting, skateboarding, mobility aids, playing, sitting and socialising?
- If the street has shops or amenities, do they serve the varied needs of the local community?
- During road works and construction activity is the space for walking and cycling maintained?
- Are there signs that the local community take ownership of the street e.g. community gardening?
- Are public toilets and drinking water fountains provided and in good condition?



Easy to cross

Streets need to be easy for everyone to cross. People prefer to be able to get where they want to go directly and quickly so if we make that difficult, they will get frustrated and give up. This is called 'severance' and it has real impacts on our health, on our communities and on businesses too. It is not just physical barriers and lack of safe crossing points that cause severance, it is fast moving traffic too.

PROMPT QUESTIONS

- Can people cross the street safely at the point they would find most direct and convenient?
- When people cross the street informally, do they walk slowly on a desire line or quickly on the shortest route?
- Does the amount and speed of traffic make it difficult for people to cross the street?
- Is it difficult to cross due to parked and/or loading vehicles blocking visibility and physical access to cross?
- Does the layout and architecture of the street make it easy for people crossing to see oncoming traffic and be seen by people driving?
- Do people need to walk to a junction to find a safe and accessible place to cross?
- At junctions can people walking and cycling cross safely, directly and comfortably at their own speed?
- Have the entrances to side streets been narrowed and raised to footway level to give clear priority to people walking?

If there are formal crossing points.....

- Are formal crossings accessible to everyone?
- Is the footpath wide enough at crossing points to comfortably accommodate the people who are waiting to cross as well as the people walking along the footpath?
- If there is an island or 'refuge' in the middle of the road is it big enough for a group of people travelling together?
- At signalised junctions are people waiting more than 30 seconds for a green man signal?
- At signalised junctions is there enough time for everyone to cross without feeling rushed?



People feel safe

Feeling safe is a basic requirement that can be hard to deliver. Motorised vehicles can make people feel unsafe on foot or cycle, especially if people are driving too fast or not giving them enough space, time or attention. Managing how people drive so that people can feel safe walking and cycling is vital.

People also need to feel safe from antisocial behaviour, unwanted attention, violence and intimidation. Street lighting and layout, 'eyes on the street' from overlooking buildings and other people using the street can all help to contribute to the sense of safety.

PROMPT QUESTIONS

- Will people walking or cycling on the street worry that they might be involved in a collision with a motor vehicle?
- Does the design of the street make it easy to drive above 20 mph/30 kph?
- If a person stepped into the carriageway would people driving or cycling be able to stop or manoeuvre safely to avoid a collision?
- Do people driving and cycling manoeuvre aggressively e.g. overtaking when there is some risk and little benefit in doing so?
- Is there ever visible police presence or enforcement against aggressive or antisocial driving?
- Are people cycling on the footpath?
- Will people using the street worry that they might be a victim of crime or feel threatened by antisocial behaviour?
- Will people feel safe at all times of the day and night?
- Does the street lighting illuminate the footpath, cycle path and cycle parking as well as the carriageway?
- Are side-streets, footpaths or alleyways leading from the street well lit?
- Are there places that feel neglected or run down, or where crime and antisocial behaviour might go unnoticed?
- Will people walking, cycling or waiting at bus stops feel isolated?
- Does the street have buildings with doors and windows that open onto and overlook the footpath?
- Are there people regularly going in and out of the buildings or passing by?



Things to see and do

Street environments need to be visually appealing to people walking and cycling, they need to provide reasons for people to use them –opportunities to interact with art, nature and other people, local shops and services.

PROMPT QUESTIONS

- Is there human activity on the street e.g. people socialising, waiting, playing, walking, cycling?
- Are there shops, services, schools and parks on the street or within a 5-10 minute walking distance?
- Does the street feel interesting and engaging to walk and spend time in?
- Does the street provide opportunities for children and adults to play and socialise informally?
- Do buildings create a varied frontage or do they present a long, blank, unbroken face to the street?
- Do the people who occupy the buildings on the street make them interesting and attractive e.g. art, front gardens, window boxes or window displays?
- Do different things happen on the street, such as parties, community activities, markets, street vendors, street artists?
- Does the design of street 'furniture' such as seating, signage, lighting help to make the street interesting and attractive?
- Are there a variety of well-maintained trees and plants all year round?

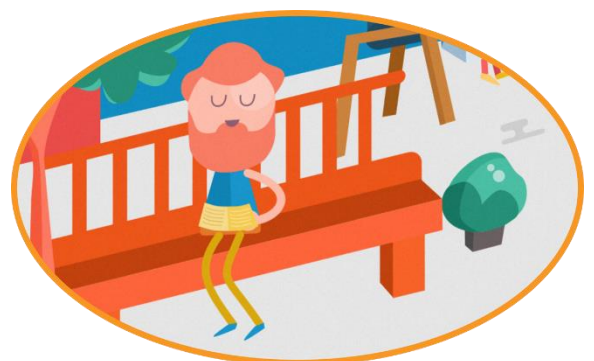


Places to stop and rest

Regular opportunities to stop and rest are essential for some people to be able to use streets on foot or cycle because they find travelling actively for longer distances a challenge. Seating is therefore essential for creating environments that are inclusive for everyone as well as being important for making streets welcoming places to dwell.

PROMPT QUESTIONS

- Is the footpath wide enough that people can easily find somewhere away from the flow of people walking to stop when they need to?
- Are there opportunities to sit down every five to ten minutes?
- Are seats designed around the needs of all people? Do some have back and arm rests?
- Does seating in places where people meet and socialise allow them to sit in groups?
- Will the seating be comfortable to use at all times of year, particularly when it is very cold or very sunny?
- Are seats in an attractive location and a comfortable distance from traffic?
- Are seats located in areas that are overlooked by nearby buildings to help reduce the potential for antisocial behaviour?
- Is seating located to avoid obstructing people walking, and has it been aligned with other street features, such as lamp-posts, bus stops and planting?
- Is the seating clean and well maintained?
- Are there informal opportunities for stopping and resting? Do walls, planters or steps provide places for people to rest if they need to?
- Do cafes and other businesses provide outdoor seating?
- Is the cycle path wide enough that people can easily move out of the flow of people cycling to stop when they need to?
- Is there sufficient secure cycle parking (that can be used for adapted cycles)? Is it located conveniently for accessing shops and local amenities?



People feel relaxed

The street environment can make us feel anxious – if it is dirty and noisy, if it feels unsafe, if we don't have enough space, if we are unsure where to go or we can't easily get to where we want to. All of these factors are important for making our streets welcoming and attractive to walk, cycle and spend time in.

PROMPT QUESTIONS

- Are the footpaths wide enough for people to comfortably walk side by side in conversation while still leaving space for others to pass them?
- Does the street feel clean and well maintained? Are litter bins provided and regularly emptied?
- Does the street feel appropriately peaceful or lively given the kind of street it is and the time of day?
- Are cycle paths wide enough for people to comfortably cycle side by side in conversation while still leaving space for others to pass them?
- Is there a smooth, level non-slip surface for people walking? Are there any defects in the footpath that could cause people to trip or fall e.g. broken paving? Are there leaves or fruit from street trees or litter on the footpath that could cause people to slip?
- Is there a smooth, level non-slip surface for people cycling? Are there any defects in the cycle path that could cause people to lose balance or fall e.g. drainage or utility covers? Are there leaves or fruit from street trees or litter on the cycle path that could cause people to slip?
- Does the street layout and signage make it easy to navigate on foot or by cycle?
- Is the space for walking clear of obstacles such as phone boxes, bins, signs or advertising boards?
- Are the building or maintenance works that create obstructions to people walking and cycling?
- Does rain water drain away without leaving puddles?
- Is there high quality, well maintained planting on the streets, for example trees, planters, or window boxes?
- Are there driveways or entrances to car parks that mean cars cross the footpath?
- Are side road entrances narrow and raised to the level of the footpath?
- Are public spaces used informally or illegally to park cars, vans and motorcycles?



Not too noisy

Noise from road traffic impacts on our health and wellbeing in many ways, it also makes streets stressful for people living and working on them as well as people walking and cycling on them. Reducing the noise from road traffic creates an environment in which people are willing to spend time and interact.

PROMPT QUESTIONS

- Do people have to raise their voices to hold a conversation?
- Do buildings lining the street keep their windows closed even on hot days?
- Do people avoid the street even though it is inconvenient to do so?
- Do vehicles sound horns or rev their engines?
- Are the materials used to surface the road smooth to help reduce noise from vehicles on the road?
- Are junctions narrow and raised to discourage aggressive driving?
- Is the carriageway narrow and winding to discourage aggressive driving?
- Is there noise and other disruption coming from deliveries and waste collection, and do these happen at particularly sensitive times?



Clean air

Air quality has an impact on the health of every person but it particularly impacts on some of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged people in the community – children and people who already have health problems. Reducing air pollution benefits us all and helps to reduce unfair health inequalities.

PROMPT QUESTIONS

- Do people drive for short trips which they could walk or cycle?
- Do people leave their engine running when their vehicle is stationary?
- When observing people driving, do they accelerate and brake aggressively?
- Are there restrictions in place for highly polluting vehicles e.g. charges?
- What is the mix of vehicles using the street? Is there a high proportion of large vehicles?



Shade and shelter

Shade and shelter can come in many forms – trees, awnings, colonnades – and they are needed to ensure that everyone can use the street whatever the weather. In sunny weather we all need protection from the sun, in hot weather certain groups of people struggle to maintain a healthy body temperature, in rain and high winds we all welcome somewhere to shelter. To ensure our streets are inclusive of everyone and welcoming to walk and cycle in no matter the weather we must pay close attention to shade and shelter.

PROMPT QUESTIONS

Shade

- Is it easy to find shade over the footpath at regular intervals along the street?
- Is shade provided over the footpath where people are likely to spend time e.g. where footpaths are wider, where there is seating, in front of shops and public buildings?
- Is shade provided over cycle paths at locations where people cycling are likely to be waiting for prolonged periods e.g. traffic signals?
- Is shade provided by the buildings lining the streets?
- Does the shade on the street enhance the visual appeal of the street?

Shelter

- Is it easy to find shelter on the street if it rains?
- Are there high winds or gusty winds as a result of the buildings lining the street?
- Is shelter provided by porches and colonnades on the buildings lining the street?
- Do the buildings along the street provide opportunities for the public to take shelter, such as canopies or awnings? Do bus stops have shelters?
- Does the shelter provided enhance the visual appeal of the street?





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