

## Community Active Travel project

### Walkability assessment findings – Ballybeen

#### Introduction

The Community Active Travel initiative is a three-year project aimed at encouraging communities to travel more actively, both for transport and leisure purposes. The project is funded by the Public Health Agency and led by Sustrans. Belfast Healthy Cities has contributed to the project through walkability assessments designed to provide a baseline insight into the community's perceptions regarding walking and walkability in the local neighbourhood. The aim of the assessments is to provide evidence on priorities for action that can be addressed with stakeholders throughout the life of the project. The approach is also intended to give local residents an opportunity to share their views and ideas on their neighbourhood environment.

#### The walkability assessment approach

The assessment tool used within the project has been developed by Belfast Healthy Cities through adaptation of existing walkability assessment tools.<sup>1</sup> The tool was originally developed as part of the Age Friendly Belfast action plan and reflects the key criteria for outdoor space outlined in the World Health Organization (WHO) Age Friendly Cities framework.<sup>2</sup> It has been piloted with over 200 older people, including people in supported housing with early stage dementia, community based walking groups and seniors fora.<sup>3</sup>

The assessment tool is designed to particularly highlight issues in the built environment, but also encourages and allows for feedback on other issues important to participants in relation to walking in the local neighbourhood. The questionnaire is completed following a walk in the neighbourhood, along a route identified by participants as important to them and the community. Typical walks last for 10-20 minutes, to enable people of all abilities to participate.

#### Ballybeen walkability assessment

The walkability assessment in Ballybeen was undertaken in collaboration with Ballybeen Women's Centre in July 2017. In total 12 people participated in the walk as part of early efforts to establish a walking group in the area. One of the participants was a wheelchair user.

The route of the walk is shown in Figure 1 below. Figure 2 in Appendix 2 shows the route in relation to the wider Ballybeen area.

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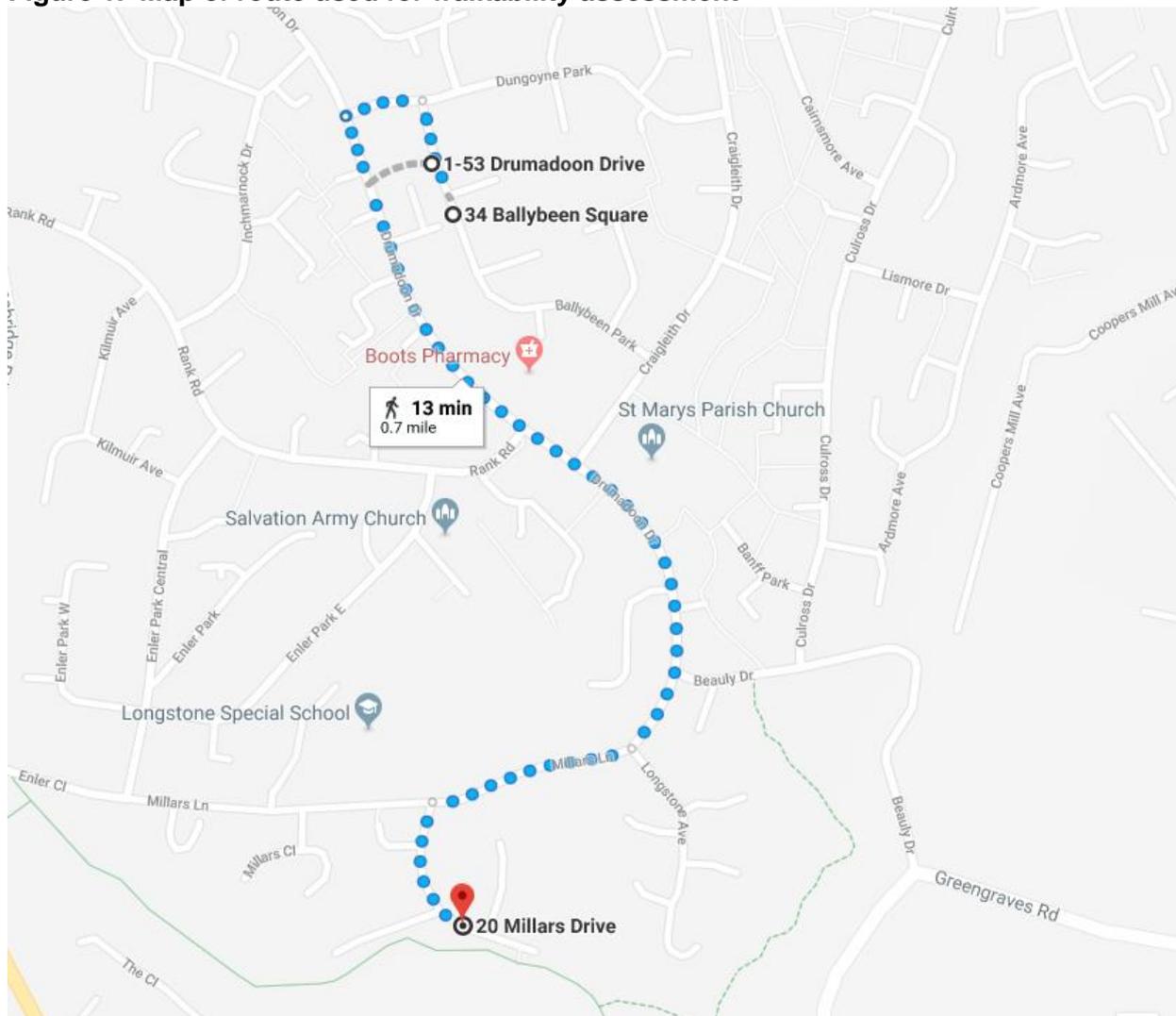
<sup>1</sup> Belfast Healthy Cities (2014) *Walkability Assessment for Healthy Ageing: A report.*  
[www.belfasthealthycities.com/publications](http://www.belfasthealthycities.com/publications)

<sup>2</sup> WHO (2007) *Global Age Friendly Cities: A Guide.*

[http://www.who.int/ageing/age\\_friendly\\_cities\\_guide/en/http://www.who.int/ageing/age\\_friendly\\_cities\\_guide/en/](http://www.who.int/ageing/age_friendly_cities_guide/en/http://www.who.int/ageing/age_friendly_cities_guide/en/)

<sup>3</sup> Belfast Healthy Cities (2016) *Walking Belfast: Older People's Views.*  
[www.belfasthealthycities.com/publications](http://www.belfasthealthycities.com/publications)

**Figure 1. Map of route used for walkability assessment**

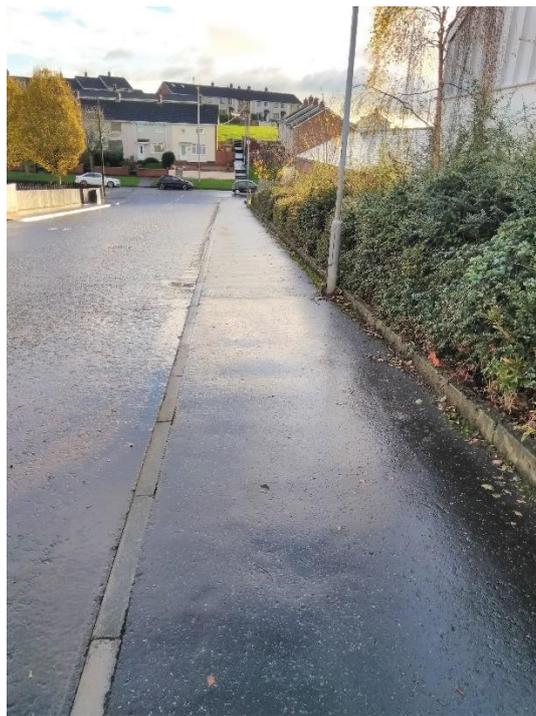


## Findings

The key issue highlighted during the assessment was the condition and maintenance of the street environment, which participants felt discouraged walking and contributed to a sense of low priority given to the area. The images below illustrate the specific issues raised, which included above all cracked pavements, weeds in the street in the summer and poor accessibility with limited access to dropped kerbs and ramps, in a hilly area with housing located on split levels. A specific issue noted was that there is no dropped kerb or ramp to enable wheelchair users and prams to access Comber Greenway from Millar's Drive. Lack of seating and poor lighting throughout Ballybeen was also highlighted. The full findings of the assessment are reported in Appendix 1.

Key suggestions for improvement included introducing more seating and lighting to create a more pleasant and safer walking environment. It was also suggested that the relevant authorities should introduce street cleaning and maintenance on a more frequent basis, particularly in the summer around the local bonfire site. Managing weeds was a key priority for this group, who felt that weeds and high grass contributed to a perception of neglect.

## Pavement



### Key issues:

- Pavement cracked in places with raised
- Pavement patchy with reinstatement following repairs completed to differing standards
- Range of pavement materials varies
- Especially on slopes, pavement is uneven

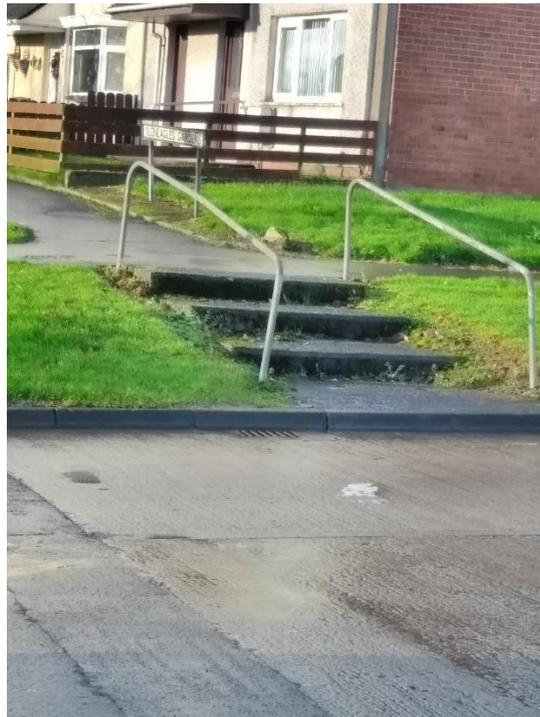
## Street environment

- Maintenance of grass and green areas is limited
- Especially in summer weeds grow along pavements
- In places there are high and dense shrubbery reducing visibility and light



## Accessibility

- Throughout Ballybeen, steps but no ramps connect footpaths to crossing points. This reduces accessibility particularly for wheelchair users and prams
- Provision of dropped kerbs is inconsistent
- There is no dropped kerb at the access point to Comber Greenway in Millar's Drive
- Speed bumps at some junctions have improved accessibility by raising the road level to footpath level



## **Recommendations**

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The walkability assessment provides an initial starting point for exploring relevant solutions with local residents and stakeholders. The key recommendations arising from this assessment are:

- Regular maintenance and grass cutting can significantly improve the potential for walking in the area by creating a more pleasant and safer environment encouraging walking. This is particularly important in the summer and at the time of bonfire construction, which involves significant amounts of construction material gathering in the area.
- Provision of dropped kerbs at key locations, above all the access point to Comber Greenway at Millar's Drive, would significantly improve accessibility and enable more people and groups to use the greenway for leisure as well as transport
- The quality of reinstatement following utility works and other street repairs should be monitored closely. Pavement quality varies across Ballybeen and walkability would be improved if this is improved, potentially as part of a rolling programme
- Engagement with local residents is essential to maximise use of local knowledge and ensure residents can have appropriate ownership of any developments

## Appendix 1: Walkability assessment questionnaire responses

**Date:** 28 July 2017

**Participants:** Walk undertaken in collaboration with Ballybeen Women's Centre with a group of 12 participants

**Route:** Starting at the Women's Centre at 34 Ballybeen Square, along Drumadoon Drive and Millar's Drive to Comber Greenway and back

<b>General impression of the area:</b>	<b>Excellent</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>Average</b>	<b>Poor</b>	<b>Very Poor</b>
Cleanliness		II	II	I	
Overall appeal		I	III		
<b>Pavements:</b>	<b>Excellent</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>Average</b>	<b>Poor</b>	<b>Very Poor</b>
Well maintained with few cracks				III	II
Free of obstruction – cars, bins etc		I	II	II	
Non-slip surface	I - dry		I		I
Wide enough for wheelchairs or for safely passing other pedestrians	I	I	I	I	
Dropped curbs at crossings		III		I	
<b>Outdoor safety:</b>	<b>Excellent</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>Average</b>	<b>Poor</b>	<b>Very Poor</b>
Drivers give way at crossings		III	I		
Separate cycle paths				I	II
Good street lighting		I		III	
Good visibility with no high hedges, dark corners etc.			I	I	II
Street is used by others, feels busy			IIII		
<b>Pedestrian crossings:</b>	<b>Excellent</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>Average</b>	<b>Poor</b>	<b>Very Poor</b>
Available at busy locations and at local shops and services			III	I	
Safe for people with different levels of ability		I	II	I	
Appropriate tactile surfacing at crossings		II		I	
Traffic lights are clearly visible	I	II	I		
Sound signal clear	I	II	I		
Adequate crossing time			IIII		

<b>Seating:</b>	<b>Excellent</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>Average</b>	<b>Poor</b>	<b>Very Poor</b>
Available at suitable intervals			I	I	II
Well maintained			I		II
Comfortable			I	I	II
<b>Walking environment &amp; shops:</b>	<b>Excellent</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>Average</b>	<b>Poor</b>	<b>Very Poor</b>
Streets are situated together and are accessible	I	II	I		
Streets link me to places I want to go		III	I		

### Additional comments:

<b>Positive elements</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good for health.</li> </ul>

<b>Challenges</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cyclist lane or everyone's safety;</li> <li>• Very poor pavements, some stones move in places. Weeds growing in between cracks and haven't had weed killer put on them. Dog mess on the pavement. Cars parked on the pavements so mums with prams and wheelchairs can't pass;</li> <li>• Uneven cracked pavements, overgrown weeds, poor services, shops and facilities etc.;</li> <li>• No ramp to Comber Greenway and no seating on greenway;</li> <li>• More seating, hedge cut back on both sides, more bins;</li> <li>• Buses going too fast over ramps;</li> <li>• Barking dog from morning to night;</li> <li>• Poor street lighting – often broken;</li> <li>• Young people gathering – intimidating especially for older people;</li> <li>• Millmount Road – traffic lights not working sometimes.</li> </ul>

<b>Changes suggested</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If there are a crowd of boys and girls together I feel intimidated but how that can change I don't know. Move them on and they'll congregate somewhere else;</li> <li>• More lighting;</li> <li>• Council needs to check areas for cleanliness and shrubs.</li> </ul>

## Appendix 2

### Map of route used for walkability assessment in relation to the wider neighbourhood

