

Community Active Travel project

Walkability assessment findings – Woodvale

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.¹ 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.² 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.³

Methodology

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 walks follow a route that is identified by participants as important to them and the community and are preceded by a short briefing session on the purpose of the walk, the questionnaire topics and logistical information about duration of the walk and point of assembly etc. Walks typically last for 10-20 minutes, to enable people of all abilities to participate. A questionnaire is completed following the walk in the neighbourhood, and a further discussion of the results is facilitated in order to extract a more in-depth understanding of the issues raised and to allow additional information not covered by the questionnaire to be shared and recorded.

The questionnaire included a list of 25 topics that are grouped under different themes including 'general impression of the area'; 'pavements'; 'outdoor safety'; 'pedestrian crossings'; 'safety'; and 'connectivity'. These topics are rated by participants from 'excellent' to 'very poor'. An additional section at the end of the questionnaire allows participants to register more detailed comments about the positive aspects and challenges of the area and suggestions to make the area safer.

¹ Belfast Healthy Cities (2014) *Walkability Assessment for Healthy Ageing: A report.*
www.belfasthealthycities.com/publications

² 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/

³ Belfast Healthy Cities (2016) *Walking Belfast: Older People's Views.*
www.belfasthealthycities.com/publications

Feedback from participants

The key challenges of the area that were highlighted during the assessment are:

- The Woodvale Road / Ballygomartin Road junction is quite **busy with traffic** and disorientating due to the fact that five roads come together. This means that many roads need to be crossed in order to reach Woodvale park from the Disraeli Street area. Pedestrian crossings are available on the Woodvale Road and Ballygomartin Road crossings and are equipped with pedestrian lights and dropped kerbs as well as tactile pavements for the visually impaired, however, sound signals are lacking. There are no pedestrian crossings on Enfield Street and Bray Street. In combination with the disorientating layout of the junction, this can mean that pedestrians can have a difficult time judging when it's safe to cross. This is a particular issue for children, who might not be able to judge correctly where traffic is coming from at any point in time.
- Pavements generally have dropped kerbs at pedestrian crossing points, however, the absence of dropped kerbs at the entrances to back alleys and around the cluster of shops on Disraeli Street. This means that wheelchair users and people with buggies might experience difficulties when moving around in the area.
- The pavements generally appeared to be smooth and quite clean, apart from the occasional dog fouling, and free of obstruction, apart from the occasional electricity unit. There is generally sufficient space for people to pass each other on the pavement. However a **lack of bins means** in the streets means that litter is more likely to be thrown on the street. There is a general **lack of places to sit** in the area, which means that walking in the area can be more challenging for those with mobility issues, particularly elderly people.

The full results of the questionnaires can be found in Appendix 1. The images below illustrate some of the issues raised that relate to the various questionnaire topics.

Pavement

- Quality of pavements is generally good and appropriate widths have been assigned.
- Dropped kerbs and tactile pavements occur at most road crossings. However, near the cluster of shops on Disraeli Street and near the entrances to back alleys dropped kerbs and tactile pavement are missing. This may present challenges for the visually impaired and wheelchair users / people with buggies.



Disraeli Street (location 2)



Disraeli Street (location 1)



Disraeli Street (location 3)



Disraeli Street (location 1)

Street environment

- Streets are generally clean and well-maintained, however, some occasional dog fouling appears;
- There is a general lack of bins in the area;
- There is a general lack of places to sit in the area;
- The Woodvale and Ballygomartin Roads are very busy with car traffic. The Junction where Woodvale Rd / Ballygomartin Rd and Enfield St / Bray St come together is dominated by car traffic;
- There are no trees or small green spaces in the area except for Woodvale park, which can be difficult to reach due to the traffic volume on the Woodvale Road. There is a small play park for children opposite the Disraeli Community Centre, however, this play area consists of hard surfacing only.



Disraeli Street (location 3)



Woodvale Road / Enfield Street (location 4)



Disraeli Street (location 3)

Accessibility

- The large numbers of busy roads converging in the area means that several pedestrian crossings need to be used when reaching Woodvale Park. The volume of traffic on these roads makes it very dangerous for children to cross without supervision;
- Pedestrian crossings are missing on the Enfield Street and Bray Street, which can make it dangerous to cross these roads, particularly since the road layout is disorienting and car traffic flows are difficult to anticipate;
- Pedestrian crossings on Woodvale Road and Ballygomartin Road are fitted with pedestrian lights, however, pedestrian crossings lack sound signals, which makes it difficult for visibly impaired people to determine when to cross;
- Along Disraeli Street there are occasional items obstructing part of the pavement such as electricity boxes, cars and domestic bins.



Woodvale Road / Ballygomartin Road (location 6)



Woodvale Road / Ballygomartin Road (location 6)



Woodvale Road / Bray Street (location 5)

Recommendations

The walkability assessment provides a preliminary foundation to devise solutions with local residents and stakeholders. The key recommendations arising from this assessment are:

- The instalment of **pedestrian crossings** on Enfield Street and Bray Street would add to a sense of safety when having to cross the junction, particularly for children and people with mobility issues such as elderly people. The instalment of audio signals at pedestrian crossings will make crossings more user-friendly for visually impaired people. An additional pedestrian crossing on Woodvale Road near the Eastern entrance to the park would add to the accessibility of the park;
- The instalment of **dropped kerbs** and **tactile paving** on pavements adjacent to back alley entrances and around the cluster of shops on Disraeli Street will enhance the environment for the visually impaired, wheelchair users and people with buggies;
- The inclusion of **more bins** and addressing the issue of **dog fouling** along the main routes will contribute to cleaner streets;
- The inclusion of more **places to sit** and the **planting of trees** along the main routes will contribute to more pedestrian friendly environment.

Appendix 1: Walkability assessment questionnaire responses

Date: 19 July 2018

Route: Woodvale Community Centre to Woodvale Park via Disreali Street and Enfield Street.

Number of completed questionnaires: 9

General impression of the area:	Excellent	Good	Average	Poor	Very Poor
Cleanliness					
Overall appeal					
Pavements:	Excellent	Good	Average	Poor	Very Poor
Well maintained with few cracks					
Free of obstruction –cars, bins etc					
Non-slip					
Wide enough for wheelchairs or for safely passing other pedestrians					
Dropped kerbs to road level at crossings					
Outdoor safety:	Excellent	Good	Average	Poor	Very Poor
Drivers give way at crossings					
Separate cycle paths					
Good street lighting					
Good visibility with no high hedges, dark corners					
Street is used by others, feels busy					
Pedestrian crossings:	Excellent	Good	Average	Poor	Very Poor
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:	Excellent	Good	Average	Poor	Very Poor
Available at suitable intervals					
Well maintained					
Comfortable					
Walking environment & shops:	Excellent	Good	Average	Poor	Very Poor
Streets are situated together and are accessible					
Streets link me to places I want to go					
Shops are within walking distance					

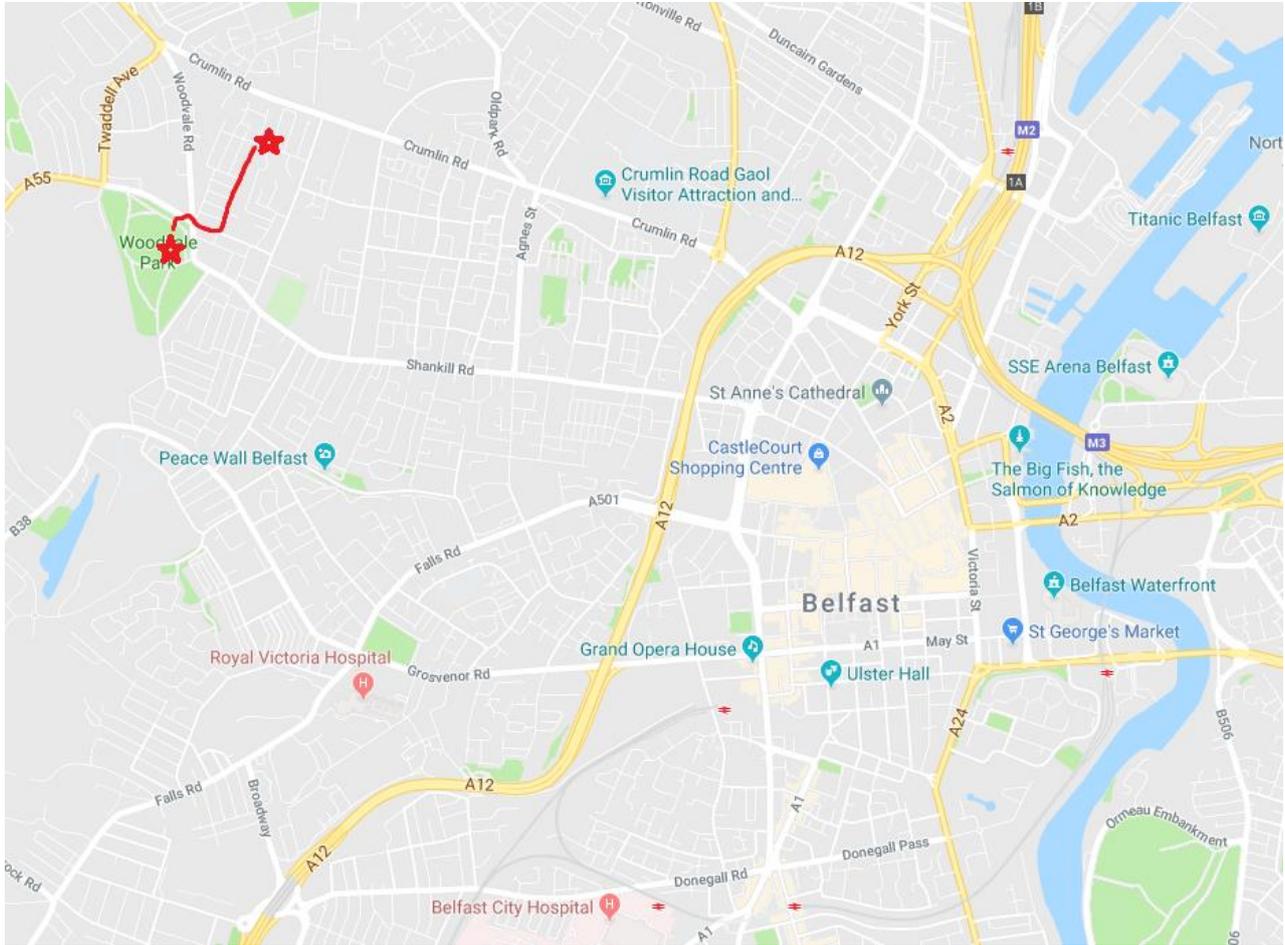
Additional comments raised during the discussion:

Positive elements
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Footpaths are kept clear; • Facilities are within walking distance; • I feel safe within my community; • Streets are well maintained and clean.

Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Absence of pedestrian lights at some roads at Woodvale park junction.

Changes suggested
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dog fouling needs to be addressed; • More pedestrian lights at Woodvale road crossing.

Appendix 2



Map of route used for walkability assessment in relation to the wider neighbourhood. Source: Google Maps