

# COUNTRY ANNEXES

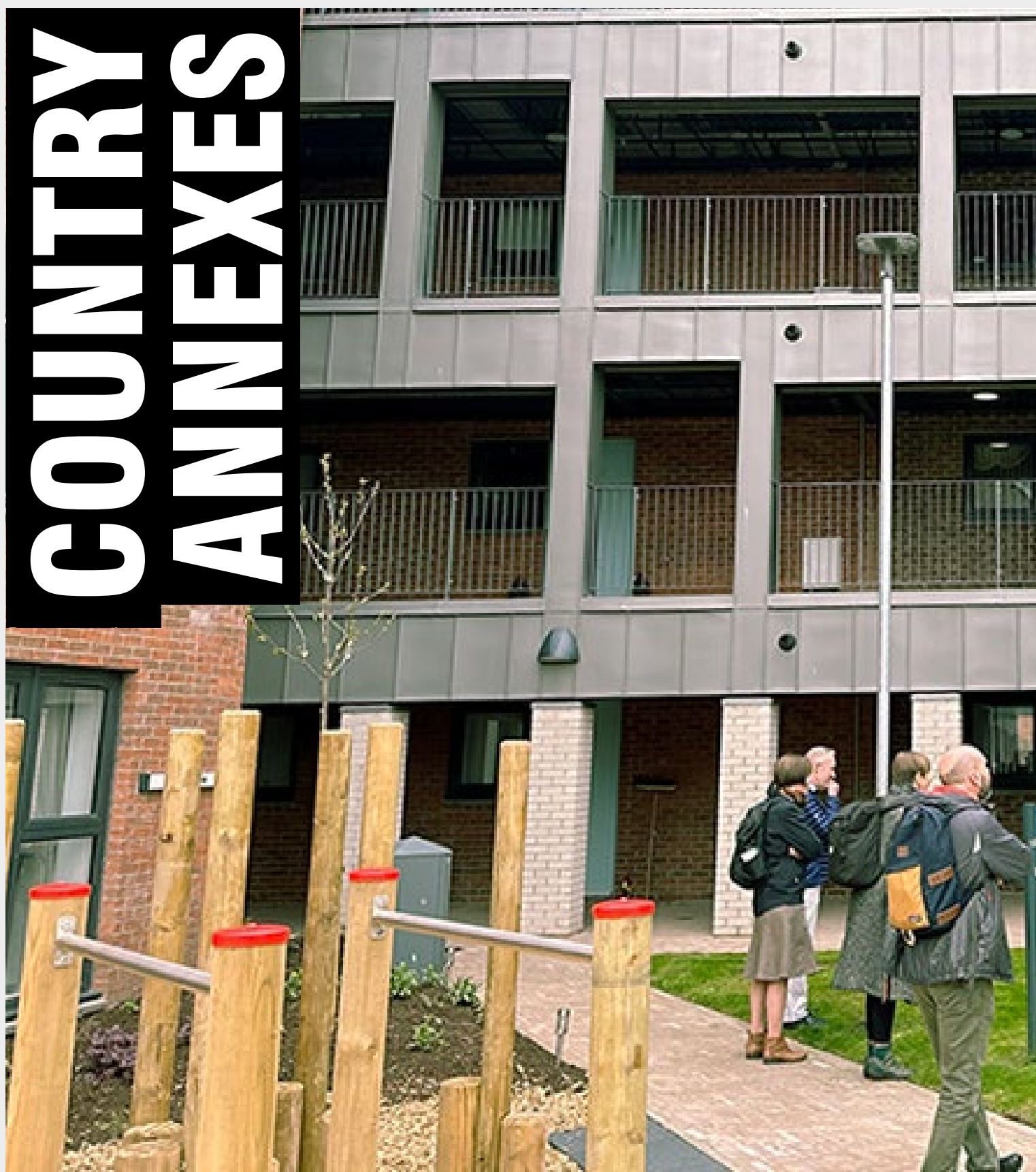




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# ENGLAND PEDESTRIAN POUND UPDATE

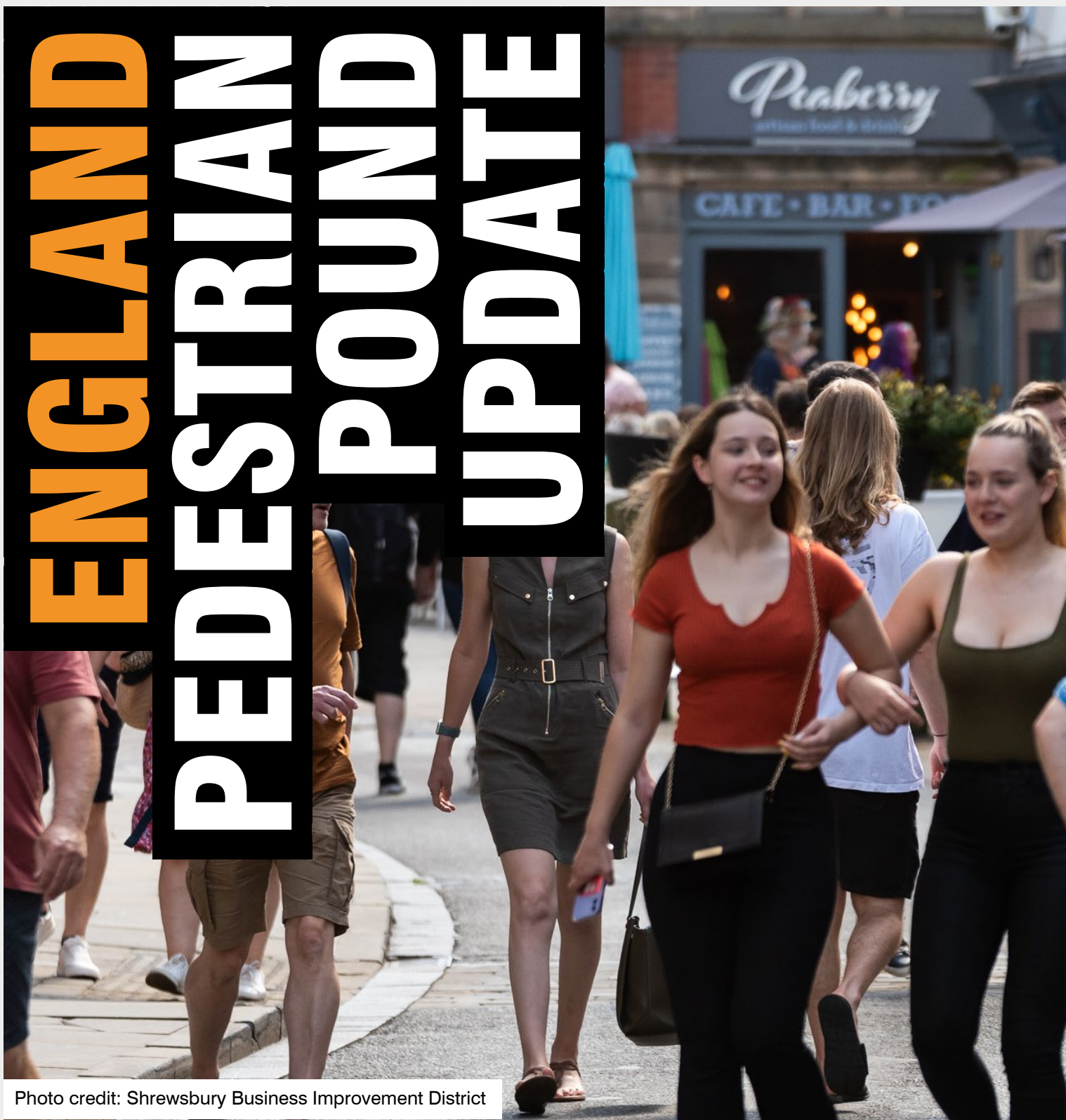


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**CONTENTS****INTRODUCTION 6****GEOGRAPHY AND SOCIAL CONTEXT 6****POLICY CONTEXT 7**

High streets and public realm 7

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Walking 8

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**WALKING LEVELS AND MODE SHARE 10****FUNDING CONTEXT 10****DELIVERY AND EVALUATION 12****WORKSHOP FINDINGS 12****RECOMMENDATIONS 14**

Policy 14

---

Funding 14

---

Delivery 14

---

Evaluation 14

---

**CASE STUDIES 14****REFERENCES 15**

## Introduction

This Annex sets out the context for public realm and walking improvements in high streets in England, including the geography and social context, as well as key targets, policies, funding and delivery mechanisms for such schemes. The evidence for greater investment in walkable high streets can be found in the main report which includes examples of case studies from England. The aim of this Annex is to help identify the specific context for England in which those decisions are made and the opportunities and barriers to that investment.

This Annex is for anyone who wants to understand the context and key policies and mechanisms for delivery of public realm and walking improvements in England. This includes people new to the sector and people from other sectors or other nations. There are also recommendations for policymakers in England.

This Annex is informed by the findings of a workshop held with stakeholders from the North East in April 2023, hosted by Transport North East and organised by Living Streets. to inform the research for this edition of The Pedestrian Pound. Delegates discussed the impact of walking and active travel measures (e.g., pedestrianisation) introduced since COVID-19 and how to better measure the value of walking. Their roles covered a wide range of expertise: public health, transport (including active travel and transport planning), climate change, economic growth, town centre management, planning, marketing, regeneration and retail consultancy.

## Geography and social context

England is the largest nation in the UK, with a population of 57.1 million in 2022 (Office for National Statistics, 2024). The majority (83%) of residents lived in urban areas (17% in rural areas) in 2020 (Defra and Government Statistical Service, 2024) which means there is plenty of opportunity to improve walking to local, town and city centres.

The UK has larger geographical differences than many other developed countries, with inequalities in productivity, pay, educational attainment and health, both within and between the four nations (Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, 2022). Although average income in England is generally higher than in the other three nations, there are considerable regional differences within England. For example, the North East and Yorkshire and Humber regions have the lowest earnings in the UK, while London and the South East have the highest (Francis-Devine, 2023).

Residents of England generally have poor health and low levels of activity, which, as outlined in the main report, could be helped by investment in public realm schemes that encourage more walking.

<sup>1</sup> Note the topics discussed in workshops in Scotland and Wales were different, and therefore the outputs from the workshops are not directly comparable.

<sup>2</sup> Where rural is defined as settlements of less than 10,000 people.



# ENGLAND

For example:

- Over a quarter (26%) of adults in England were living with obesity in 2021-22 (Bone, 2024);
- Over a fifth (21%) of men and a quarter (25%) of women in England were classed as inactive in 2019 (British Medical Association, 2019).

This is accompanied by large health inequalities, with people living in the most deprived areas of England found to be diagnosed with serious illness earlier and dying sooner than people in more affluent areas (The Health Foundation, 2022).

These regional and health disparities mean that there is a particular need for investment in public realm and walking schemes in the most deprived areas to help residents benefit from the positive impacts on health and wellbeing, economics and community as part of levelling up.

## Policy context

### High streets and public realm

Policy on public realm improvements in England straddle a number of Government departments but, in the main, comprise the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLHUC) and the Department for Transport (DfT).

The main policies, strategies and guidance relevant to public realm improvements include:

- **National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)**, which includes a commitment to 'town centres first' for retail planning, (see Section 8, DLHUC, 2021). There have been calls to revise the NPPF for better placemaking (see section on delivery below.).
- **The Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023**, which introduced changes to the planning system including a statutory requirement for local planning authorities to prepare design codes for new developments in their area (Rankl, 2024).
- **Build Back Better High Streets**, which sets out a strategy to regenerate high streets, including funding and tools to help high streets to adapt to the impacts of the pandemic (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, 2021). Improvements to the public realm are one of five areas for government action. This strategy established a new Levelling Up Fund and UK Community Renewal Fund, to fund green infrastructure and improvements to public space.

<sup>3</sup> A partnership between the local authority and local businesses, funded by a levy on business ratepayers in the BID area. The revenue from this is used to develop projects which will improve the local area, such as public realm improvements.

- **Levelling Up White Paper**, whose key objectives include boosting productivity, spreading opportunity and improving public services and restoring a sense of community and local pride across the UK (DLUHC, 2022). Two of its twelve missions to support those objectives are ‘improving wellbeing’ and ‘pride in place’ (i.e., building social capital). Investment in active travel is seen as central to levelling up.
- **Manual for Streets** (DfT, 2007) and **Manual for Streets 2** (CIHT, 2010) provide design advice to help plan, construct and improve streets.
- **Revitalising Town Centres Toolkit** is an online checklist to provide practical guidance and resources to assist councils in taking a strategic and evidence-based approach to revitalising town and city centres (Local Government Association, undated a).
- **The Flood and Water Management Act 2010 (Schedule 3)** (which came into effect in England in 2023) requires all new developments to include Sustainable Drainage Systems that comply with national standards.
- Unlike the other nations, planning laws have been relaxed in England to allow shops and offices to be converted into housing through ‘**permitted development rights**’, without the need for planning permission (Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government, 2020). See Section 7 of the main report for further discussion.

Many local authorities have public realm improvements as a key part of their regeneration programmes. A wide range of quasi-governmental, private and third sector organisations help to champion placemaking and public realm improvements in England. Key organisations include the High Streets Task Force, an alliance of placemaking experts set up by the UK Government in 2019 to help transform high streets, with a wide range of expertise, training, and data (High Streets Task Force, undated). The Task Force is run by the Institute of Place Management, the professional body for place management (Institute for Place Management, undated). Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) also play an important role in supporting placemaking and public realm improvements throughout England (British BIDs, 2018).

## Walking

Many public realm improvements involve active travel schemes. The DfT is the main government department responsible for walking policies, strategies and funding, while Active Travel England (ATE) is the executive agency responsible for making walking (and cycling) a preferred choice for travel (Active Travel England, undated).

Unlike the devolved nations, England does not have a central integrated transport strategy, to which all other policies are referenced. Instead, policy is often developed for different modes, sometimes with competing policy goals and trade-offs. For example, the road investment strategy is a five-year multi-billion-pound investment programme in new roads which is expected to increase traffic.



# ENGLAND

Conversely, a number of policies published in the last five years are focused on prioritising other modes, including walking, such as the Transport Decarbonisation Plan (DfT, 2021a), Gear Change (DfT, 2020), Bus Back Better (DfT, 2021b) and the Williams-Shapps Plan for Rail (DfT, 2021c).

Due to court challenges against its Net Zero Strategy, the UK Government published a new Carbon Budget Delivery Plan (CBDP) in 2023 which included a revised carbon reduction pathway for transport (DfT, 2023a). This, in turn, was the subject of three further legal challenges by climate groups, with the government now legally required to produce a better CBDP by May 2025 (Friends of the Earth, 2024).

Unlike Scotland and Wales, there is no explicit, high-level policy commitment across all government departments to the health and wellbeing of citizens in the UK or England, though the Levelling Up White Paper does include missions on improving health and wellbeing (DLUHC, 2022). Analysis by the British Medical Association in 2019 suggested that 'physical activity was not being prioritised in the UK' (British Medical Association, 2019). A long-awaited health disparities White Paper was shelved in 2023 (Nightingale and Merrifield, 2023).

The main policies, strategies and targets relevant to walking include:

- Gear Change – an ambitious strategy for active travel that reflects the important role of walking and cycling during the COVID-19 pandemic (DfT, 2020). It established a new inspectorate, Active Travel England, with the same aims. This was followed by a one-year review, summarising what had been achieved (DfT, 2021d).
- Cycling and Walking Investment Strategy (CWIS) (DfT, 2017a) and CWIS2 (DfT, 2018a), which set out the main objectives for walking and cycling and the financial resources available over a five-year period. As part of this, Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIPs) are developed by local authorities to identify walking (and cycling) improvements at local level. Although not mandatory, DfT has advised that councils who have plans will be well placed to make the case for future investment (DfT, 2017b).
- The targets for walking were revised upwards in CWIS2 to:
  - Increase walking to 365 stages per person per year in 2025.
  - Increase the percentage of short journeys in towns and cities that are walked or cycled from 41% in 2018 to 2019 to 46% in 2025.

## Walking levels and mode share

Walking is already important as a mode of travel and currently the only mode of transport in England where average trips per person are above 2018 levels. In 2022, the average person in England (DfT, 2023b):

- Made 267 walking trips (31% of all trips) and 318 walking stages.
- Walked 221 miles (4% of their total distance travelled).
- Spent about 90 minutes a week travelling by walking.
- Had an average walking trip length of 0.7 miles.

Walking mode share in England has increased from just over a quarter (27%) in 2018 to nearly a third (31%) of all trips in 2022, though this is partly due to the reduction in total trips (DfT, 2023c).

Academic research has shown that this important and growing role for walking as a mode of travel has multiple benefits for the economy, health and wellbeing, community and the environment (see the main report). Delegates to the workshop argued that this needs to be recognised and well provided for. This is especially the case for shorter trips in the vicinity of residential areas which link people to amenities, education, services and social activities.

## Funding context

The governance and funding context in England is very heterogeneous. For example, places such as Greater London with a unique governance structure and powers and Greater Manchester with devolved multi-year funding agreements (similar to the devolved nations), are in a very different situation to councils in smaller (e.g., two-tier) authorities required to competitively bid on a year-by-year basis for smaller pots of funding for public realm and walking improvements.

There are a number of UK Government funds that have recently been or can be used for high streets, public realm and walking improvements in England. These are shown in Table E1.

Through CWIS2, the UK Government has projected spending £3.56 billion on active travel between April 2021 and March 2025 (DfT, 2023d). However, only £1.1 billion of that is dedicated for active travel with the remainder made up of estimates spent on active travel as part of wider government programmes (e.g., Levelling Up) and highways maintenance. It is therefore very difficult to unpick exactly how much has been spent through the various funding programmes, some of which are not exclusively for active travel. Estimates suggest that, over the period 2021-25, the government has cut this dedicated funding by around £430 million (Transport Action Network, 2023).

**TABLE E1**

Recent and current funding streams for high streets, public realm and walking improvements in England

Name Of Fund	Funding (£)	Description	Nation	Reference
UK Levelling Up Fund (round 3 closed)	£4.8 billion	Fund for infrastructure including regenerating town centres and high streets, upgrading local transport, and investing in cultural and heritage assets	UK	DLUHC and Ministry of HCLG, 2021a
Shared Prosperity Fund (final allocation 2023/24)	£2.6 billion	Funding for improvements to town centres and high streets, including better accessibility for disabled people, including capital spend and running costs. All areas of the UK receive an allocation via a funding formula.	UK	As above
UK Community Ownership Fund (round 4 final round)	£150 million	Fund to support local facilities, community assets and amenities	UK	As above
Towns Fund (closed)	£3.6 billion	Fund to foster regeneration of towns as part of the Levelling Up plan	England	DLUHC and Ministry of HCLG, 2021b
Future High Streets Fund (closed)	1 billion	Fund to renew and reshape town centres and help them reopen and recover from the effects of the pandemic	England	DLUHC and Ministry of HCLG, 2021c
Brownfield Land Release Fund (closed)	£1.5 billion	Fund to transform derelict sites in towns and city centres	England	Local Government Association, undated b
Active Travel Fund	£634 million	Funding allocations in four tranches (2020-2024) for active travel schemes for local authorities in England	England	DfT, 2024a
Active Travel Capability Fund	£51.5 million	Revenue funding for local authorities outside London to develop active travel infrastructure plans and community engagement and training initiatives for the period 2023/24 and 2024/25	England	DfT, 2024b
Transforming Cities Fund (closed)	£2.45 billion	Capital fund to improve productivity by investing in public and sustainable transport infrastructure in English cities (2018-2024)	England	DfT, 2018b

## Delivery and evaluation

The funds listed above have enabled investment in a range of active travel schemes and ATE's Active Travel Capability Fund is designed to help local authorities outside London to build their capacity to deliver active travel schemes. As well as approving and inspecting schemes to enable active travel, ATE is set up to support local authorities, train staff and spread good practice in design, implementation and public engagement.

However, a report by the National Audit Office (NAO) found that the UK Government is not on track to meet its objectives to increase rates of active travel in England, despite increased ambition in recent years (NAO, 2023). More than half (56%) of local authorities in England were found to have low capability and ambition to deliver active travel projects, which has affected the quality of active travel interventions delivered with government funding to date (ibid.). The establishment of ATE is seen as helpful in tackling some long-standing issues, but the NAO identified a need for longer-term stable funding for active travel, and capacity building to help local authorities deliver schemes (ibid.).

The DfT has also been criticised by another cross-party group of MPs for not doing enough to understand the impact and benefits of active travel funding (House of Commons Public Accounts Committee, 2023). While DfT spent £2.3 billion on active travel schemes between 2016 and 2021, the vast majority of those schemes came under the threshold (of £2 million) where they are required to monitor or evaluate them. The Government agreed with many of the Committee's recommendations and is now developing a revised approach to evaluation of active travel schemes that have received grant funding, due to be completed in 2026/27 (DfT, 2024c). In the latest round of Active Travel Fund funding, DfT are encouraging schemes above £750,000 to submit a full economic appraisal (ibid.).

At the same time, some analysis has shown that an approach focused predominantly on transport assessments and traffic modelling can get in the way of good placemaking (Create Streets, 2022). There are calls for more vision-led planning and a move away from the 'predict and provide' techniques that favour maintenance of the status quo, often road-based solutions, towards an approach based on 'decide and provide' (Create Streets and Sustrans, 2024). Among other things, this will require updates to the NPPF to require a 'vision-led' approach (ibid.). An independent body advising DfT has also called for a more vision-led approach to planning and recommends reviewing the NPPF to ensure it delivers healthy, low-carbon development with "access to residents' needs within a short walk or cycle ride" (DfT Science Advisory Council, 2024).

The Government's levelling up programme has also suffered from delays, with only around a tenth of the funding to tackle regional inequalities spent as of September 2023. It also lacks a mechanism to measure the impacts of the programme (House of Commons Public Accounts Committee, 2024). Further research shows that local councils in England are struggling to invest in levelling up measures due to a lack of ongoing funding, staff and capacity (Taylor et al., 2024).

UK-wide guidance on evaluation for public realm schemes includes:

- UKSPF Evaluation strategy, published in March 2024 (around the same time as the Public Accounts Committee report) which sets out the methods and data sources that will be used to enable evaluation of the Shared Prosperity Fund at a programme, place and intervention

# ENGLAND

level (DLUHC, 2024). Evaluation is not compulsory for local authorities but those that opt in can access additional funding. Interventions are expected to be evaluated using randomised controlled trials and quasi-experimental approaches with treatment and control groups.

The most significant England-specific appraisal (and evaluation) tool used for public realm and active travel schemes is Transport Analysis Guidance (TAG).

- Transport Analysis Guidance (TAG) is the DfT's modelling and appraisal system for transport policy interventions or infrastructure decisions. It provides guidance to support the development of a business case for an intervention, in line with the Treasury's 'five case model' for decision making (DfT, 2024d).

More information on evaluation can be found in the Evaluation Briefing which accompanies this edition of The Pedestrian Pound.

## Workshop findings

Delivery of high street and active travel improvements since COVID-19 were discussed at a workshop in the North East in 2023. While the points raised in that discussion were specific to the North East, they can also be applied to England more generally. For example:

- Some of the COVID-19 social distancing schemes (wider pavements etc) were retained and some of the experimental schemes were effective, but the ones that were retained depended on political will and leadership rather than decisions being based on the effectiveness of each scheme.
- There is a polarisation in how local businesses understand parking and active travel in terms of their importance for trade.
- There is a difference in perceptions versus reality, with some traders not happy with some of the emergency active travel schemes despite the fact that their takings were higher than in usual trading conditions.
- The public response to new active travel schemes varied. This may have been a generational issue, but the emergence of conspiracy theories (as part of the backlash against Low Traffic Neighbourhoods) was also seen as playing a large part in the public response.

The workshop also discussed how to better measure (and evaluate) the value of walking (e.g., to public health and air quality). Points made by delegates included:

**Better data and information:** a need for more data about how people use public spaces; details on the origins and destinations of their journeys; how people would like to travel and what the barriers are. It was suggested that public health data and intelligence could be better used, as well as linking the value of walking to public health.

**Better evaluation:** the value of health indicators and statistics, as well as information about the impact on the NHS, to contribute to the economic case for walking. Delegates also highlighted the importance of quantifying carbon dioxide emissions and looking at the different costs and time of travelling by different modes. It was suggested that Living Streets community street audits of walking routes to check the quality/connectivity of routes should be fed into wayfinding schemes. There was also recognition of the importance of evaluation and a need to ensure there was sufficient funding for it. See the separate Evaluation Briefing for details of how to monitor public realm schemes.

## Recommendations

The following recommendations are drawn from both the Newcastle workshop and the reports discussed above:

### Policy

- Produce a single integrated transport strategy based on a transport hierarchy, with overarching objectives of health and wellbeing, carbon reduction, fairness and sustainable economic development.

### Funding

- Provide longer-term stable funding for active travel.

### Delivery

- Build capacity in local authorities to help them deliver schemes.
- Develop a clear and consistent approach for ensuring greater integration of active travel infrastructure with the public transport network.
- Revise the NPPF and planning policy to ensure there is a vision-led approach to planning for better placemaking.

### Evaluation

- Comprehensively identify and measure the benefits of active travel across all government policy areas, i.e., the wider benefits to health, climate targets etc.
- Better integrate the health costs and benefits of schemes into the economic case.
- Consider the costs and need for evaluation.

Some of the recommendations above, which are common to all three nations, have been included in the main report.

## Case studies

See the case studies which accompany this edition of The Pedestrian Pound for examples of public realm improvements in England – and across the UK – which have benefitted pedestrians.



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# SCOTLAND PEDESTRIAN POUND UPDATE



Photo credit: Ivon Bartholomew for Living Streets

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**CONTENTS****INTRODUCTION 4****GEOGRAPHY AND SOCIAL CONTEXT 4**

Workshop findings 5

---

**POLICY CONTEXT 6**

High streets and public realm 6

---

Walking 7

---

Workshop findings 9

---

**WALKING LEVELS AND MODE SHARE 9****FUNDING CONTEXT 10**

Workshop findings 10

---

**DELIVERY AND EVALUATION 11****RECOMMENDATIONS 13**

Policy 13

---

Funding 13

---

Delivery 14

---

Evaluation 14

---

**CASE STUDIES 14****REFERENCES 15**

## Introduction

This Annex sets out the context for public realm and walking improvements to high streets in Scotland, including the geographic and social context, as well as key targets, policies, funding and delivery mechanisms for such schemes. The evidence for greater investment in walkable high streets can be found in the main report which includes examples of case studies from Scotland. The aim of this Annex is to help identify the specific context for Scotland in which those decisions are made and the opportunities and barriers to that investment.

This Annex is for anyone who wants to understand the context and key policies and mechanisms for delivery of public realm and walking improvements in Scotland. This includes people new to the sector and people from other sectors or other nations. There are also recommendations for policymakers in Scotland.

This Annex is informed by the findings of a workshop held with Scottish stakeholders in April 2024, organised by Transport for Quality of Life for this edition of The Pedestrian Pound. Delegates were from the placemaking, transport, regeneration, planning, accessibility and public health sectors; and included policymakers, practitioners, professional bodies, charities and activists.

## Geography and social context

The social context review of Scotland identifies many challenges, but these also present an opportunity for interventions that promote and enable more walking to have a significant positive impact on health, transport poverty and access to opportunities.

Scotland is the second largest nation in the UK, with a population of 5.4 million in 2022 (Office for National Statistics, 2024a). The majority (71%) of residents were living in urban areas (with 29% in rural areas) in mid-2021<sup>1</sup> (National Records of Scotland, 2022a), which means there is plenty of opportunity to improve walking in local, town and city centres. Scotland also has many small settlements: in 2020, there were 514 settlements with a median population of 1,900 people per settlement (National Records of Scotland, 2022b). This means that facilitating walking journeys within compact towns and between settlements, and integrating walking with public transport, are key.

Scotland has generally poor health outcomes, which, as shown in the main report, could be helped by investment in public realm schemes that encourage more walking.

For example:

- Over a quarter (29%) of adults in Scotland were living with obesity in 2021-22 (Bone, 2024).
- Nearly a sixth (17%) of men and a quarter (23%) of women in Scotland were classed as inactive in 2019 (British Medical Association, 2019).
- Scotland has the lowest life expectancy at birth among the four UK nations (Office for National Statistics, 2024b).
- There are also high levels of income and health inequalities in Scotland:
- Inequality in household disposable income has generally been lower in Scotland than in the UK over the last 25 years. However, in 2019, Scotland had the same level of inequality as the UK with London excluded (Phillips et al., 2023).
- Men and women in the most affluent areas (e.g., Orkney Islands) live nearly 26 years longer in good health, compared to those living in deprived areas (e.g., North Lanarkshire) (Public Health Scotland, 2024).

These income and health inequalities mean that there is a particular need for investment in public realm and walking schemes in the most deprived areas of Scotland to help residents benefit from the positive impacts on health and wellbeing, economics and community, as part of levelling up.

## Workshop findings

At the workshop for Scottish stakeholders, it was generally agreed by delegates that Scotland has a strong local identity, communities with a can-do attitude, and an environment and landscape that is a real asset and attraction. However, it was also agreed that community engagement on public realm schemes needs to be improved, and that there are too many short-term projects with limited engagement. Perceptions that (public realm) solutions for cities don't apply in smaller settlements are also a barrier. Additionally, Scottish stakeholders considered that there is a persistent belief, particularly in the smaller towns, that cars are the answer to growth.

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<sup>1</sup> Where rural is defined as settlements of less than 3,000 people. The proportion of people living in rural areas in Scotland would be much higher if using the classification used in England and Wales (settlements less than 10,000 people).

## Policy context

### High streets and public realm

The Scottish Government has a strong policy commitment to placemaking, and for many years its goal for town centres has been much broader than simply supporting retail.

The main strategies, policies and guidance relevant to public realm improvements include:

- A **Town Centre First Principle**, agreed with COSLA (the voice of local government in Scotland) in 2014.
- The **'Place Principle'**, which promotes a shared understanding of place, and the need to take a more collaborative approach to a place's services and assets (Scottish Government, 2019a).
- A Revised Town Centre Action Plan, known formally as **The New Future for Scotland's Towns**. This was published in 2021 (Sparks, 2021). The **Scottish Government response** (Scottish Government, 2022) and supporting toolkit (Scotland's Towns Partnership, undated b) are discussed in the section on delivery and evaluation.
- **National Planning Framework 4**: Scotland's planning and spatial strategy (Scottish Government, 2023a). This includes a commitment to develop **'20-minute neighbourhoods'**, which means people being able to meet most of their essential needs – such as leisure activities, school and healthcare – all within a 20-minute walk. It is centred on supporting people to 'live well locally'.
- Planning guidance on **Local Living and 20-Minute Neighbourhoods** was published in April 2024 following a consultation in 2023 (Scottish Government, 2024).
- **Town Centre Living (TCL)**: a key policy aspiration for the Scottish Government (Scottish Futures Trust, 2023).
- An Accessible Travel Framework to ensure that transport in Scotland is accessible for all, including disabled people (Transport Scotland, 2017).
- A **pavement parking ban**. Scotland is the first of the four nations to make pavement parking illegal nationwide, which came into effect in November 2019 (Transport Scotland, 2023a) and is being implemented in Edinburgh (City of Edinburgh Council, undated) and in Stirling (Stirling Council, 2024). See Chapter 6 of the main report for further discussion.
- **Water Environment (Controlled Activities) (Scotland) Regulations 2011** requires all new developments to include Sustainable Drainage Systems (SEPA, undated).

Many local authorities have public realm improvements as a key part of their regeneration programmes. A wide range of quasi-governmental, private and third sector organisations help to champion placemaking and public realm improvements in Scotland. Some key organisations are as follows:

- **Architecture and Design Scotland** is an Executive Non-Departmental Public Body which provides leadership on the Place Principle (Architecture and Design Scotland, undated). They promote good design and collaboration, connect people and organisations, provide advice and skills, and share insights from work across Scotland and beyond.
- **Scotland's Towns Partnership (STP)** is a membership organisation, comprising local councils, businesses and NGOs, whose role is to represent and promote the diversity of Scotland's towns and places, and which is also responsible for Scotland's **Business Improvement Districts (BIDs)**<sup>2</sup> (Scotland's Towns Partnership, undated a). The STP acts as a hub for promoting towns, provides practical support and advice and shares good practice, knowledge and learning. The STP was also part of the review group for 'A New Future for Scotland's Town Centres' (see above). See Case Study 4 on Nairn for an example of a BID in the Highlands working to create a more vibrant town centre.
- **Scotland's Regeneration Forum (SURF)** is a membership organisation which acts as a channel for information, consultation and policy proposals to improve the lives of residents in Scotland's disadvantaged communities (Scotland's Regeneration Forum, undated). It runs an annual awards programme for best practice examples of community regeneration projects.
- **Improvement Service**, an organisation supporting local government in Scotland, which has developed its own placemaking tools – see section on delivery (Improvement Service, undated).

## Walking

Many public realm improvements involve active travel schemes. Transport Scotland is the agency of the Scottish Government responsible for walking (and cycling) for travel. It sits within the Economic Development Directorate. Walking (and cycling) for leisure is the responsibility of Active Scotland, a delivery unit tasked with encouraging more physical activity within the Health Directorate and chaired by the Minister for Public Health, Wellbeing and Sport. Support to local authorities has also been provided by active travel delivery partners (e.g., charities such as Paths for All and Sustrans).

As a devolved nation, the Scottish Government has powers over transport (as well as the economy, health, environment and planning), and its own funding streams for public realm improvements.

<sup>2</sup> A partnership between the local authority and local businesses, funded by a levy on business ratepayers in the BID area. The revenue from this is used to develop projects which will improve the local area, such as public realm improvements.

<sup>3</sup> The 11 outcomes include Children and Young People; Communities; Culture; Economy; Education; Environment; Fair Work and Business; Health; Human Rights; International; and Poverty (Scottish Government undated f).

The Scottish Government has a clear statement of its principles and intended outcomes in the Scottish National Performance Framework (Scottish Government, undated a) which sets out the Scottish Government's purpose and values. These include National Outcomes<sup>3</sup>, which link to the UN Sustainable Development goals, and provide a strong emphasis on fairness, equality and climate change. The health and well-being of citizens is an explicit high level policy outcome focus for the Scottish Government. The Scottish Ministerial Health Inequalities Task Force, set up to tackle inequalities in health, makes recommendations to the Scottish Government and monitors a range of health indicators over time (Scottish Government, undated b).

This overarching framework appears to provide better integration and consistency than in England, both within and between policies, on transport, climate, planning and the environment. For example, the National Transport Strategy sets out a vision for transport which is based on the National Outcomes. Key exceptions to this consistency are the six Scottish City Regional Deals, agreed by the Scottish and UK Governments to fund major projects, developed without reference to climate targets and with 70% of the £1.3 billion transport funding to be spent on transport projects which are likely to increase emissions (Transform Scotland, 2024).

The main strategies, policies and targets relevant to walking include:

- The **Second National Transport Strategy**, which has four interconnected priorities: Reduce Inequalities, Take Climate Action, Help Deliver Inclusive Economic Growth and Improve our Health and Wellbeing. The strategy embeds a sustainable travel hierarchy (Transport Scotland, 2020). There are a number of policies under each priority, as well as active travel indicators (Transport Scotland, 2022a).
- **Climate Change legislation**, which sets a target for Scotland to reach net zero by 2045 (Scottish Parliament, 2019). The ambitious 2030 target of a 75% reduction relative to 1990 was abandoned in April 2024 following a critical progress report by government climate advisors (Climate Change Committee, 2024).
- The original 2030 climate target had resulted in a target of a **20% reduction in total car mileage by 2030** relative to 2019 (Element Energy, 2021) which is an ongoing commitment in the Scottish Government's **Climate Change Plan update** (Scottish Government, 2020).
- The **National Walking Strategy**, which aims "to achieve levels of walking on a par with the best performing countries such as the Netherlands, Norway and Switzerland" (Scottish Government, 2014). This is due for a refresh in 2025.
- Scotland's **2030 Vision for active travel**, which is that "Scotland's communities are shaped around people, with walking or cycling the most popular choice for shorter everyday journeys" (Transport Scotland, 2014).
- Scotland's **Active Travel Framework**, which brings together the key policy approaches to improving the uptake of walking and cycling in Scotland for travel (Transport Scotland, 2019).
- **Free bus travel** for under 22s (and over 60s), which is also important for encouraging walking and reducing transport emissions (Scottish Government, 2021a).
- Scot Gov **Physical Activity For Health - Scotland's National Framework**



## Workshop findings

At the Scottish stakeholder workshop, delegates generally agreed that Scotland had good policies and targets and that the Scottish Government's Place Principle was a positive achievement. However, implementation of policies was generally agreed to be weak, short-term and very inconsistent, and it was proposed that there should be a mechanism to translate policies into local action and projects.

## Walking levels and mode share

Walking is an important means of travel in Scotland. A 2023 national survey of attitudes to walking and wheeling in Scotland commissioned by Paths for All (56 Degree Insight, 2023) found that:

- Over eight out of ten (85%) Scottish adults walk or wheel every day or several times a week, a slight increase on the levels recorded in 2019 (81%).
- The most common destinations for frequent walking are local shops that sell everyday necessities (44% adults walk to daily or several times a week); local parks and green spaces (35%); and public transport links such as bus stops (29%).
- Most walking takes place in urban places such as roadside pavements (61%) and parks (50%).
- Nearly seven out of ten (69%) Scots would like to be able to walk or wheel more often for leisure purposes and six out of ten (60%) would like to be able to walk or wheel more often for routine purposes.
- Factors that would encourage increased participation included feeling safer at night (34%), better quality pavements (32%) and someone to walk with (31%).

The Scottish Household Survey suggests that walking was the main mode of travel for 22.6% of journeys in 2022 (66% of trips under 1km), compared with 19.8% in 2018. However, trip rates per person may have declined slightly, from 0.37 to 0.34 journeys per adult per day (Transport Scotland, 2024).

A baseline report for the Scottish National Travel Survey 2 (Transport Scotland, 2022a) found that, in 2019, nearly seven out of ten (67%) people reported walking as a means of transport in the last seven days, while over six out of ten (62%) reported walking just for pleasure or to keep fit in the same period.

In 2022, around one in seven (14%) Scottish adults reported walking to get to work or further/higher education (Scottish Government, 2023b).

Academic research highlights the important role played by walking as a mode of travel, with multiple benefits for the economy, health and wellbeing, community and the environment (see the main report). However, workshop delegates highlighted that this needs to be properly recognised in decision-making and funding and more data collected for evaluation. This is especially the case for shorter trips in the vicinity of residential areas which link people to amenities, education, services and social activities. There is also a need to cater for the walking needs of people in rural areas and smaller communities.

## Funding context

There are a number of Scottish and UK Government funds that have recently been or can be used for high street, public realm and walking improvements in Scotland. These are shown in Table S1.

The Scottish Government had previously committed to investing at least £320 million or 10% of the transport budget for active travel by 2024/25 (Scottish Government, 2021b). This represents a spend of £58 per head of population a year, compared with approximately £10 per head in England, £23 in Wales and £30 in The Netherlands (*ibid.*). In Spring 2024, budget for active travel investment was increased, despite constrained public finances, though it was still £100 million short of the 10% commitment (Howden, 2024). As of June 2024, the future of this funding was unclear as a result of changes in political governance.

The model of funding for active travel is also changing. Previously, most funding came through active travel delivery partners (e.g., charities such as Paths for All or Sustrans) to local authorities and other organisations. The new approach is for funding to go via Regional Transport Partnerships or directly to local authorities. The process is still unfolding, with 2024 seen as a transition year, so it is still not clear where the funding – and how much of it – has been allocated (McCall, 2024).

### Workshop findings

At the Scottish stakeholder workshop, it was agreed that Scotland has some strong relationships between the public and private sector and that the BIDs (see earlier Policy Context section) could help to provide additional funding and support for public realm schemes. However, there was overwhelming agreement that short-term funding was an issue, and that multi-year funding (capital and revenue) was needed, both for schemes and for evaluation.

## Delivery and evaluation

A Town Centre Action Plan Review Group, which reported to the Scottish Government in 2021, reaffirmed the Town Centre First principle and Place Principle and noted that progress has been made at a policy and local level but that more could be done to enhance town centres and reduce inequalities (Sparks, 2021). The report made three recommendations, including highlighting the need to: strengthen the position of towns and centres in national planning; review tax and funding mechanisms to align with Scottish Government priorities (e.g., wellbeing); and funding for more demonstration projects around specific themes. The Scottish Government responded that they were implementing or exploring some of the recommendations, including a possible digital tax and more funding for demonstrator projects, though they stopped short of supporting a moratorium on out-of-town development or a levy on out-of-town parking (Scottish Government, 2022).

The Scottish Parliament's 2022 inquiry into town centres and retail made a number of observations and recommendations relevant to placemaking (Scottish Parliament, 2022). It welcomed the Scottish Government's renewed focus on town centres and retail but was concerned that the 'town centre first principle' was not statutory. The inquiry also recognised that the drive for regeneration should not just be focused on business and council revenue but take a wider and more inclusive approach to value, focused on wellbeing, quality of life and the environment. It also noted a gap in place-based support for towns and communities outside enterprise areas and recommended funding support for community-led groups to develop plans for town centres.

Scottish-specific appraisal and evaluation tools for public realm schemes, town centres and active travel include the following:

- **The Place Framework**, a consistent appraisal framework for all local capital investments to ensure that decision makers are provided with a good understanding of the place in which investment is being proposed (Place Standard Partners, 2024b).
- A Scottish **Place Standard Tool**, a simple framework with 14 themes to structure conversations about places (Place Standard Partners, 2023). This was designed as a discussion tool rather than an evaluation tool and is now widely used by local authorities across Scotland. This tool ensures that public health and placemaking are fully embedded in decision-making and empowers communities to shape local improvement plans (Howie, 2019). For example, see Case Study 10 on Alloa, where the tool was used to create a shared vision for town centre regeneration.
- **USP Your Town Audit**, a web-based tool to measure and monitor the performance of Scotland's towns using a series of economic and social Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) (Scotland's Town Partnership, 2015). Scotland's Town Partnership's website has a number of case studies of towns that have used the USP Your Town Audit tool.

**TABLE S1**

**Recent and current funding streams for high streets, public realm and walking improvements in Scotland**

Name Of Fund	Funding (£)	Description	Nation	Reference
Place Based Investment Programme (suspended)	£325 million capital 2023-2028	Fund to links and align all place-based funding initiatives, including the Regeneration Capital Grant Fund (RGCP) supporting place-based regeneration. Included delivery of 20-minute neighbourhoods.	Scotland	Place Standard Partners, 2024a
Vacant and Derelict Land Investment Programme (round 4 of 5-year programme, now suspended)	£50 million	Low carbon fund to complement the Place Based Investment Programme and support the reuse of persistent vacant and derelict land to deliver new green infrastructure.	Scotland	Scottish Government, 2023c
Scottish City Region Deals	£1.3 billion	Funding for councils to ‘support economic growth, create jobs or invest in local projects’. Only one city region, Stirling, has committed all its transport funding to low carbon transport.	Scotland	Transform Scotland, 2024
Town Centre Fund (closed)	£50 million (2019-20)	Fund to make town centres more vibrant, enterprising, and accessible, in partnership with COSLA.	Scotland	Scottish Government, 2019b
Investing in Communities Fund (round 2, 2023-2026, now closed)	£27 million (2023-26)	Fund that targeted disadvantaged communities to deliver projects, services and activities that address poverty and disadvantage, including developing place-based approaches	Scotland	Scottish government, undated d
Strategic Transport Projects Review 2	Unknown	An integrated fund to inform the Scottish Government’s transport investment programme (2022-2042) and help deliver the Second National Transport Strategy.	Scotland	Transport Scotland, undated a
Active Travel Transformation Fund (ATTF)	£190 million (2023-24)	Fund to help local authorities build up capacity on active travel. A number of the projects supported in 2023/24 include public realm improvements.	Scotland	Transport Scotland, 2023b
Cycling, Walking and Safer Routes (closed)	£35 million (2022/23)	Fund for active travel that went directly to local authorities.	Scotland	Transport Scotland, 2022b
Places for Everyone (closed)	Unknown	Fund for local authorities and other public bodies for active travel infrastructure to create safer, more attractive, healthier, and inclusive places, which has been administered by Sustrans.	Scotland	Sustrans, 2022
K Levelling Up Fund (round 3, closed)	£4.8 billion	Fund for infrastructure including regenerating town centres and high streets, upgrading local transport and investing in cultural and heritage assets.	UK	DLUHC et al., 2021b
Shared Prosperity Fund (final allocation 2023-24)	£2.6 billion	Funding for improvements to town centres and high streets, including better accessibility for disabled people, capital and revenue spend. All areas of the UK received an allocation via a funding formula.	UK	As above
UK Community Ownership Fund (round 4, final round)	£150 million	Fund to support local facilities, community assets and amenities.	UK	As above

- A **Place and Wellbeing Outcomes** tool developed by the Improvement Service (Improvement Service, undated). The tool has a set of 'place and wellbeing outcomes' and indicators, which can be monitored, and associated data sources.
- **Town Centre Health Checks** (Scottish Government, undated e) and a Town Centre Masterplanning Toolkit developed by the Scottish Government in 2015 to help implement its town centres action plan and described in *The Pedestrian Pound* (2018) (Living Streets, 2018). The Town Toolkit has since evolved in partnership with Scotland's Towns Partnership (Scotland's Towns Partnership, undated).
- **STAG (Scottish Transport Appraisal Guidance)**, Transport Scotland's framework to identify and appraise transport interventions, based on the UK TAG, with some differences (Transport Scotland, 2022c). It is used to develop transport related business cases. It aligns with The Place Framework.

More information on evaluation can be found in the Evaluation Briefing which accompanies this edition of *The Pedestrian Pound*.

## Recommendations

The key recommendations to improve the delivery of public realm schemes in Scotland, from delegates from the Scottish stakeholder workshop, included the following:

### Policy

- Scottish Government policies need to be better implemented, and certain policies (e.g., climate targets) should influence decisions.
- Design briefs for projects should be based on national policies and frameworks but retain some flexibility to respond to change and local need.
- Centres of all scales (district, town, city) should be redefined as more than just shopping streets.

### Funding

- Provide multi-year funding (capital and revenue) for walking (and transport generally) and public realm schemes.

## Delivery

- Ensure more joined-up decision-making and funding across policy departments, particularly between transport, planning, housing and health, and across projects.
- Undertake quality-led procurement based on long-term place outcomes (rather than prioritising least cost generic design and build).
- Provide better training for local councillors in factors underpinning regeneration, including the benefits of traffic reduction and walkable places.

## Evaluation

- Ringfence a proportion of funding for a scheme for evaluation.
- Develop better academic research links to help with evaluation.
- Collect and disseminate good practice from abroad and in Scotland.

Delegates also noted the potential conflict between funding streams from their own government and the UK government, which often have different priorities.

Some of the recommendations above, which are common to all three nations, have been included in the main report.

## Case studies

See the case studies which accompany this edition of The Pedestrian Pound for examples of public realm improvements in Scotland – and across the UK – which have benefitted pedestrians.



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# WALES PEDESTRIAN POUND UPDATE





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# CONTENTS

## **INTRODUCTION 4**

## **GEOGRAPHY AND SOCIAL CONTEXT 4**

Workshop findings 5

---

## **POLICY CONTEXT 6**

High streets and public realm 6

---

Walking 7

---

Workshop findings 8

---

## **WALKING LEVELS AND MODE SHARE 9**

## **FUNDING CONTEXT 11**

Workshop findings 11

---

## **DELIVERY AND EVALUATION 11**

Workshop findings 12

---

## **RECOMMENDATIONS 13**

Policy 13

---

Funding 13

---

Delivery 13

---

Evaluation 13

---

## **CASE STUDIES 14**

## **REFERENCES 15**

## Introduction

This Annex sets out the context for public realm and walking improvements to high streets in Wales, including the geography and social context, as well as key targets, policies, funding and delivery mechanisms for such schemes. The evidence for greater investment in walkable high streets can be found in the main report which includes examples of case studies from Wales. The aim of this Annex is to help identify the specific context for Wales in which those decisions are made and the opportunities and barriers to that investment.

This Annex is for anyone who wants to understand the context and key policies and mechanisms for delivery of public realm and walking improvements in Wales. This includes people new to the sector and people from other sectors or other nations. There are also recommendations for policymakers in Wales.

This Annex is informed by the findings of a workshop for Welsh stakeholders held in April 2024, organised by Transport for Quality of Life, to inform the research for this edition of The Pedestrian Pound. Delegates included policymakers, practitioners, professional bodies, academics, charities and activists from across Wales.

## Geography and social context

The social context review of Wales identifies many challenges, but these also present an opportunity for interventions that promote and enable more walking to have a significant positive impact on health, transport poverty and access to opportunities.

Wales is a relatively rural nation within the UK, with a population of 3.1 million in 2022 (Office of National Statistics, 2024). The majority (65%) of residents live in urban areas (and 35% in rural areas) (Woods, 2021). It is described as 'a country of small interdependent towns, villages and communities' with the majority (86%) living within five miles of a town centre (Audit Wales, 2021). This means that facilitating walking journeys within compact towns and between settlements, and integrating walking with public transport, are key. Public realm improvements that improve the walkability of local centres will benefit residents of settlements of all sizes.

The population in Wales is generally poorer and has higher levels of obesity and inactivity than the rest of the UK, which, as shown in the main report, could be helped by investment in public realm schemes that encourage more walking. For example:

- The average weekly earnings in Wales in 2023 were the lowest of any of the UK nations (Francis-Devine, 2024).
- Nearly a third (32%) of adults in Wales were living with obesity in 2021-22, the highest levels of any of the four UK nations (Bone, 2024).
- Nearly a third (32%) of men and over a third (36%) of women in Wales were classed as inactive in 2019 (British Medical Association, 2019).

# WALES

While there are more health inequalities compared with England and Scotland, men and women in the most affluent areas of Wales have been found to live around seven and six years longer respectively, compared to those living in deprived areas (People's Health Trust, 2022).

A study has found that many people across all parts of Wales suffer from the effects of transport poverty. In most areas of Wales, it is estimated that 40-50% of households need to spend more than 10% of their income on the costs of running a car (Sustrans Cymru, 2022).

These transport and health inequalities mean that there is particular need for investment in public realm and walking improvements in the most deprived areas to help residents benefit from the positive impacts on health and wellbeing, economics and community, as part of levelling up.

## Workshop findings

At the Welsh stakeholder workshop, it was generally agreed by delegates that people in Wales take pride in being Welsh and have a strong sense of place ('cynefin' and 'milltir sgwâr' which roughly translate as 'habitat' and 'square mile') and connection to home ('hiraeth' which roughly translates as 'longing'). It was also agreed that there is a strong sense of community and a tradition of people taking responsibility for their towns and villages.

The rurality of Wales was felt to be both a positive and negative factor. Delegates recognise the value of the unique landscapes of Wales but consider that the steep topography across parts of Wales can also be a challenge, by increasing the time and costs of projects, and limiting design options. For example, this is the case in the South Wales valleys where space is limited, and towns and villages are essentially ribbon developments on busy through roads. There are also many examples of roads and railways cutting off communities. Many people don't live within walking distance of town centres but, on the other hand, many people do drive when walking is possible. It was suggested by delegates that Wales also has low car ownership but high car dependency due to car-dominated planning and land use, which leaves the 20% or so of the population without car access at risk of social isolation.

## Policy context

### High streets and public realm

There are many Welsh policies which are specific to planning and placemaking. Town centre regeneration is a longstanding Welsh Government objective, reconfirmed in the 2021-26 Programme for Government.

- The main strategies, policies and guidance relevant to public realm improvements in Wales include:
- Future Wales - The National Plan 2040. This is the national Welsh development framework and has a strong Town Centre First policy approach (see Policy 6) (Welsh Government, 2021a).
- Planning Policy Wales – Edition 12 provides the policy framework for the effective preparation of local planning authorities' development plans as well as development management. It includes the Welsh Government's vision for town centres and placemaking (Welsh Government, 2024a).
- Planning (Wales) Act 2015 introduced the use of 'Place Plans' led by local communities and Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) (Welsh Government, 2024b). A Town Centre Position Statement supports the Town Centre First policy and sets out a series of actions aimed at addressing key challenges facing town centres (Welsh Government, 2023a).
- The Flood and Water Management Act 2010 (Schedule 3) (which came into effect in Wales in January 2019) requires all new developments to include Sustainable Drainage Systems that comply with national standards.
- Placemaking Wales Charter and Guide 2020 identifies six placemaking principles including 'public realm' and provides guidance on placemaking in Wales (Placemaking Wales Partnership & Design Commission for Wales, 2020).
- Building Better Places sets out the Welsh Government's planning policy priorities to assist in taking action after the COVID-19 pandemic crisis (Welsh Government, 2020a).
- Place Plans. These set out local infrastructure needs and are developed by local people. Planning Aid Wales has a toolkit for communities and planners on the process and details of producing plans (Planning Aid Wales, undated).
- Placemaking Toolkit for Wales. This is a forthcoming tool from a multidisciplinary team of academics and practitioners, four Welsh local authorities, the Design Commission for Wales (DCFW), the Urban Design Group and Living Streets (Cardiff University, undated).

Many local authorities have public realm improvements as a key part of their regeneration programmes. A wide range of quasi-governmental, private and third sector organisations help to champion placemaking and public realm improvements in Wales. These include the Design Commission for Wales, a Welsh Government funded organisation, which promotes good design in the built environment to the public and private sectors in Wales (Design Commission for Wales, undated) and the Placemaking Wales Partnership, a multi-disciplinary group of professions and organisations working on the built and natural environment who co-produced the Placemaking Wales Charter (RTPI, undated). Business Improvement Districts (BIDs)<sup>2</sup> also play an important role in high street regeneration (Audit Wales, 2021) as do Town and Community Councils, who are often the convenors of BIDs.

## Walking

Many public realm improvements involve active travel schemes. The Welsh Government is responsible for walking policies, strategies and funding while Transport for Wales, a wholly-owned, not-for-profit company, provides support and expertise to the Welsh Government's transport projects.

Whilst the UK government has responsibility for some aspects of transport (such as rail infrastructure and franchising), as a devolved nation, the Welsh Government has powers over others including active travel (as well as health, environment and planning).

The Welsh Government's general policy approach has a strong emphasis on community, equality and social justice, and eliminating inequality (Welsh Government, 2017a). For example, The Equality Act 2010 goes further than the English equivalent and contains express provisions about engagement and equality impact assessments which are not present in the English Act (Welsh Government, 2020b). Wales has a Disability Rights Taskforce set up in 2023, with travel being one of their priority areas (Welsh Government, 2023b).

The unique Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 aims to improve the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales through seven well-being goals (Future Generations Commissioner for Wales, undated). It also sets out 'five ways of working' that guide how public sector organisations should work towards these objectives, which require collaboration and long-term thinking. The health and wellbeing of citizens is therefore a legal requirement for the Welsh Government and a range of public bodies, and is embedded in policies across government, including in the new Welsh curriculum.

This groundbreaking Act has helped shape other policies and strategies. For example, Llwybr Newydd, the Wales Transport Strategy is driven by the need to deliver social equity and meet climate targets and includes an explicit recognition of the need for fewer cars on the roads and more public transport, walking and cycling. The Act has also had a strong influence on some pioneering policy decisions on transport, such as the Welsh Roads Review (Welsh Government, 2023c).

<sup>2</sup> partnership between the local authority and local businesses, funded by a levy on business ratepayers in the BID area. The revenue from this is used to develop projects which will improve the local area, such as public realm improvements.

The main strategies, policies, guidance and targets relevant to walking include:

- **Llwybr Newydd:** The Wales Transport Strategy 2021 puts sustainability at the heart of transport planning in Wales (Welsh Government, 2021b). It sets a new target for 45% of journeys to be made by sustainable means across Wales by 2045, up from 32% in 2019, to help reduce carbon dioxide emissions. The strategy also embeds the ‘Sustainable Transport Hierarchy’, which is used to prioritise new transport infrastructure and places walking and cycling at the top of the hierarchy. This has been followed by a new Transport Delivery Plan, as discussed in the section below on delivery.
- **The Active Travel (Wales) Act 2013** requires all local authorities in Wales to map, plan and promote active travel journeys, with particular emphasis on encouraging modal shift from cars to cycling and walking for everyday short journeys. All local authorities are required to make year-on-year improvements to their active travel routes and facilities. The Act is accompanied by two statutory guidance documents on delivery and design (Welsh Government, 2021c). The Act was reviewed by the Senedd in 2022 and made 51 recommendations including the need for a new delivery plan and better monitoring (Welsh Parliament, 2023). Many of those recommendations have been agreed by the Welsh Government.
- **The Environment (Air Quality and Soundscapes) (Wales) Act 2024** has introduced new duties for Welsh Ministers and local authorities to promote active travel as a way of reducing or limiting air pollution (Browne Jacobson, 2024).
- **The Restricted Roads (20 mph Speed Limit) (Wales) Order 2022** makes Wales the first nation in the UK to introduce legislation to have a default 20mph speed limit (Welsh Government, 2024c).

Wales has an Active Travel Board to coordinate activity to support the effective implementation of the Active Travel (Wales) Act 2013. The Board has an independent Chair and members include the Welsh Government as well as external stakeholders and independent members (Welsh Government, undated a).

## Workshop findings

At the Welsh stakeholder workshop, delegates expressed strong support for the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, which, it was agreed, provides a long-term vision, a framework for decision-making and encourages joined-up thinking. Other key policies supported by delegates include the Town Centre First policy, the Active Travel (Wales) Act 2013 which provides context for decision making, together with Llwybr Newydd (the transport strategy) and Planning Policy Wales, which both emphasise the hierarchy of transport users and the integration between transport, health and communities. The political leadership of some Welsh politicians on transport issues was also recognised and appreciated, but delegates criticised leaders for a lack of consistency, and rolling back decisions (e.g., the 20mph limit) to win political support.



## Walking levels and mode share

According to the Welsh Government (Welsh Government, 2023d), in 2022/23:

- Over half (51%) of people aged 16+ in Wales walked at least once a week for active travel purposes.<sup>3</sup>
- Over six in ten (62%) of those who lived in urban areas walked for more than 10 minutes as a means of transport at least once a month, compared with around half (52%) of those who lived in rural areas.

In the absence of official data on mode share for all journeys in Wales, walking mode share was estimated at 25% of all trips in Wales in 2019 (Sloman and Taylor, 2021).

These statistics point to the potential for increased walking, which has multiple benefits for the economy, health and wellbeing, community and the environment (see the main report). Delegates highlighted that the important role for walking needs to be recognised and well provided for, especially for shorter trips in the vicinity of residential areas which link people to amenities, education, services and social activities, and that there is also a need to cater for the walking needs of people in rural areas and smaller communities. There is also a need for more funding for wider and better maintained pavements throughout Wales.

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<sup>3</sup> Although this appears to be a fall from 60% in 2019/20, there have been changes in the survey data collection which make direct comparison difficult.

**TABLE W1**

**Recent and current funding streams for high streets, public realm and walking improvements in Wales**

Name Of Fund	Funding (£)	Description	Nation	Reference
Transforming Towns Wales	£100 million (2022-25)	A single fund created in 2020 to redevelop and improve town centres or their nearby areas which includes loan funding (a).	Wales	Welsh Government, undated b.
Active Travel Fund	£72 million (2023-24)	Fund to support the delivery of active travel schemes across Wales by local authorities. Includes a combination of core funding and a competitive bidding process.	Wales	Welsh Government, 2021c. Howorth, 2023.
Safe Routes in Communities (closed)	£5 million (2024-25)	Capital funding for walking, wheeling and cycling routes to school and School Streets projects.	Wales	Welsh Government, 2023e.
UK Levelling Up Fund (round 3 closed)	£4.8 billion	Fund for infrastructure including regenerating town centres and high streets, upgrading local transport, and investing in cultural and heritage assets.	UK	Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, 2021.
Shared Prosperity Fund (final allocation 2023/24)	£2.6 billion	Funding for improvements to town centres and high streets, including better accessibility for disabled people, including capital spend and running costs. All areas of the UK receive an allocation via a funding formula.	UK	As above
UK Community Ownership Fund (round 4, final round)	£150 million	Fund to support local facilities, community assets and amenities.	UK	As above

(a) A 2021 Wales Audit report showed that, since 2014, the Welsh Government had invested nearly £900 million in regeneration via a number of schemes including Viable and Vibrant Places (2014-17); Town Centre Loans (2014-2020 and 2020-2022); Building for the Future (2017-2023); Targeted Regeneration Investment (2018-2021); Valleys Taskforce Towns Funding (2020-2021); Coastal Town Fund (2017-2023); and a Green Infrastructure and Biodiversity Fund (2018-2021) (Audit Wales, 2021).

## Funding context

There are a number of Welsh and UK Government funds that have recently been or can be used for high street, public realm and walking improvements in Wales. These are shown in Table W1. Between 2014 and 2021, the Welsh Government directly invested or levered in around £900 million of funding to regenerate town centres (Audit Wales, 2021).

The Senedd has recommended that Welsh Government funding for active travel should be set at £17-£20 per head per annum (Howorth, 2023). Active travel funding allocations to local authorities for 2023/24 were just over £20 per head (Climate Change, Environment and Infrastructure Committee, 2023).

### Workshop findings

At the Welsh stakeholder workshop, there was strong support for the core allocation from the Active Travel Fund to local authorities, as well as the wellbeing and ‘foundational economy’<sup>4</sup> focus of the Welsh Government. Lack of maintenance funding was considered a big issue, with cuts to budgets, as this influences the design of public realm schemes, with elements that may be seen as a maintenance burden reduced or left out of schemes. The damage done to streetscapes by utility companies was also identified as an issue. There was wide agreement on the need for more revenue funding (together with capital funding) to enable better management of schemes and to provide training and engagement. The loss of European funding and the lack of long-term funding security (with the end of the UK Government’s Shared Prosperity Fund) were both considered disadvantageous to Wales. Lastly, delegates agreed that poor design can cost as much in the long term as good design (for example, due to the need for earlier replacement), and therefore more time and resources in good design upfront could save money in the long term.

## Delivery and evaluation

A 2021 report by Audit Wales found that, despite significant Welsh Government funding for town centre regeneration, many towns were continuing to struggle, largely due to a lack of capacity and skills within local authorities (Audit Wales, 2021). The powers to help stimulate regeneration were also not being used effectively or consistently. Audit Wales also noted that the Town Centre First policy was not fully embedded, and there was a need to better value and use information to understand the problems and identify what works. The Welsh Government responded to this with the development and publishing of a Town Centres Position Statement (see Policy Context section earlier).

<sup>4</sup> Defined by some as “that part of the economy that creates and distributes goods and services consumed by all (regardless of income and status) because they support everyday life” (IWA, 2019).

Research for the Welsh Parliament (Senedd Cymru) showed that funding for active travel exceeded the Senedd's recommendation of £17-20 per head in 2023/24 (Howorth, 2023). But while funding has increased in recent years, this has not translated into increases in active travel, which has not increased significantly since 2013 (ibid.). A cross-party Senedd expert review panel noted that the Active Travel Act had not realised its full potential, particularly on delivery, but did pay tribute to the significant progress, level of political will and greater political focus on active travel (ibid.). The Welsh Government published a new national Transport Delivery Plan in 2022, with a range of integrated measures on active travel (Welsh Government, 2022a).

It is not clear how the political leadership changes in 2024 might impact delivery, funding and political will on public realm and active travel.

The main Welsh-specific appraisal and evaluation tool for active travel is Welsh transport appraisal guidance (WeITAG).

WeITAG is the Welsh Government's framework to assess the strategic case for proposed changes to the transport system (Welsh Government, 2017b). It contains best practice for the development, appraisal and evaluation of proposed transport interventions in Wales. Updated guidance was put out for consultation in 2022 to align it with the new Wales Transport Strategy: Llwybr Newydd (Welsh Government, 2024d). The updated version of the guidance places less emphasis on the use of cost-benefit ratios, and more emphasis on wellbeing and wider social, economic, environmental and cultural factors.

More information on evaluation can be found in the Evaluation Briefing which accompanies this edition of The Pedestrian Pound.

## Workshop findings

At the Welsh stakeholder workshop, it was generally agreed that there is a consensus across council departments on broad objectives for scheme delivery, suggesting a more joined up approach to policy than in other nations. There was also support for the strong emphasis on the Sustainable Transport Hierarchy in Wales and the fact that walking is prioritised in Llwybr Newydd and the Active Travel Act and associated 2022 guidance. Delegates also noted that there are generally good levels of community engagement in the design of schemes in Wales, possibly as a result of the emphasis on a placemaking approach and the ways of working set out in the Well-being of Future Generations Act.

On the negative side, delegates felt that local authority capacity is generally low and political commitment variable, with too much siloed working. It was agreed that there is a lack of coordination between departments on placemaking and a lack of training and vision within local authorities. There is also a large focus on short-term measures and funding, and a lack of longer-term delivery programmes. Participants recommended better monitoring of the impacts of public realm schemes, with a need for robust evidence, longitudinal data and standardised metrics.

## Recommendations

The key recommendations from delegates from the Welsh stakeholder workshop included the following:

### Policy

- Need for political leadership and consistency on transport policies (at Welsh Government and local authority level).
- More evidence-driven policies.
- Policies that empower communities to take better care of their place.

### Funding

- More revenue funding (together with capital funding) to better manage schemes and for training and engagement.
- Ringfenced maintenance funding from capital funds for five-year maintenance periods.
- Long term funding security from the UK Government.
- More resources to ensure good design.
- Quicker decision-making on the Shared Prosperity Fund.
- Reallocation of investment to sustainable transport modes.

### Delivery

- More local facilities in small towns.
- Less car dominated planning and land-use, and more measures to ensure that people without cars are served.

### Evaluation

- Dedicated funding allocated to evaluation as part of all initiatives.
- Funding for pre and post monitoring and evaluation to be costed into schemes.

Delegates noted the potential conflict between funding streams from their own governments compared with those from the UK government that can have different priorities.

Some of the recommendations above, which are common to all three nations, have been included in the main report.

## Case studies

See the case studies which accompany this edition of The Pedestrian Pound for examples of public realm improvements in Wales – and across the UK – which have benefitted pedestrians.



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