

Active Wellbeing Leadership Network

Deeper Discussions – Meeting no.5

Martyn Allison Active Environment

1. We started with a round of sharing experiences and observations.

" We could define it better to expand understanding".

" We have a world designed by adults (mainly men) based on the car. We need to look through the lens of a child and hear more children's voices".

" Wales have gone much further on the rights of the child".

" Car owner pressure defends the status quo and slows change".

" What is place? Stoke has 5 towns, is each a different place".

" Council departments still tend to work in professional silos. Collaboration requires behaviour change".

" Post pandemic walking and cycling are declining but car usage is going back up".

" Kids can be active and also hate walking".

" Devolution, combined authorities, elected mayors may present a vehicle for greater cross organisation working".

" We have to rethink the concept of the leisure centre".

" Who do we need to influence to get change".

" In Scotland joining up policy has been hard and very often good ideas can have unintended consequences".

" Active environments are not always safe environments particularly for women. Increased cycling can increase accidents if infrastructure is not appropriate, poor street lighting can stimulate fear".

" Infrastructure can't always cope with the growth".

" How could we better incentivise change".

2. Our further discussions exposed some interesting dichotomies in the existing system.

Walking and cycling are more attractive to the already active middle class than to the inactive poor with disabling health conditions.

More cycling requires better infrastructure whereas poorer people just need access to a bike!

We need more and safer walking and cycling infrastructure but we have no resources to provide it so things could just get worse disincentivising more activity.

Children disparately need to be heard but it's adults that have the power to listen and respond.

Competition between professionals often for limited resources always seems to trump greater collaboration.

Housing growth may generate new resources and create better environments but could also have a detrimental environmental impact.

Behaviour change starts with better understanding and therefore better education. Children need to understand why being active matters.

Protecting sports pitches independent of creating more active spaces could be counterproductive.

3. We can try to resolve these dichotomies by influencing at three levels.

a) Influencing the reform of national policy, legislation, regulation and guidance being mindful of unintended consequences.

b) Influencing new devolved regional and sub-regional structures including elected mayors, combined authorities, unitary councils.

c) Influencing at a place/ neighbourhood level including councillors, professional officers, teachers etc.

At all three levels we need to be mindful of differentiating our audiences and not assuming one approach will suit everywhere.

Martyn Allison - 29th Jan 2025

