Eddleston & Peebles Link Paths project – Sustrans project PCT-PFE-3150

Community Engagement Report to accompany Stage 1

This report relates to the Links Path Project within the communities of Peebles and Eddleston engaging with residents and visitors to contribute meaningfully as users of the towns, it's roads and network of pathways to inform infrastructure improvements. The Links Path Project was funded under the "Places for Everyone" programme which aims to create **safe**, **attractive**, **healthier** places by increasing the **number of trips** made by **walking**, **cycling** and **wheeling** for **everyday journeys**. The scheme is funded by the Scottish Government through Transport Scotland and is administered by Sustrans.

1. Background

The Link Paths Project originally intended to create links between the Eddleston Water Path (currently under construction) and the communities of Peebles and Eddleston. More specifically, the Tweed Valley Railway Path which ends at the back of the Hydro Hotel in Peebles and how the new path would integrate with the village of Eddleston. It soon became evident, through initial community engagement, that a more holistic and strategic approach to the improvement of the path network in Peebles and Eddleston was required to capture the needs of those living in and visiting the area to access services through walking and wheeling.

At the same time there was a combination of changes in UK and Scottish government sustainable communities walking and cycling policies and changing priorities emerging during and as a result of the Covid-19 emergency which caused a review of the focus of the Link Paths Project. This led to a re-casting of the project as a whole town pedestrian, walkers and cycling study, rather than simply pathfinding a route through the towns to link to the Eddleston Water Path at the north and south end.

Fig 1 – Forum November 2021 at Burgh Hall

Peebles Community Trust (PCT) supported the development of the Links Path Project under its umbrella providing the connection to all working partners and the community of Peebles via its communication and administration channels.

Eddleston Community Council offered the point of contact for the community of Eddleston via the project coordinator Jeremy Cunningham. The community of Eddleston wanted a hands-on approach to their link study and Jeremy will write a separate report for the Eddleston community.

Mott Macdonald Ltd. were the tendered engineers and Sterry Walters the landscape architects on the project and completed the initial options appraisal feasibility report in March 2020 which led to the wider more holistic approach. These ideas were used to feedback potential options to the community.

Sustrans, our working partners, use a number of design principles to influence safer, more attractive, healthier places to support an increase in the number of journeys made by walking, wheeling and cycling. These were used as the basis for approaching engagement in this community.

2. Scottish Government / Sustrans "Places for Everyone" programme

2.1 Design principles of Places for Everyone

- Develop ideas collaboratively and in partnership with communities
- Facilitate independent walking, cycling, and wheeling for everyone, including an unaccompanied 12-year old or a less-experienced cyclist.
- Design places that provide enjoyment, comfort and protection.
- Ensure access for all and equality of opportunity in public space.
- benefit people of all ages and abilities
- Ensure all proposals are developed in a way that is context-specific and evidence-led.
- Reallocate road space, and restrict motor traffic permeability to prioritise people walking, cycling and wheeling over private motor vehicles.

2.2 Aims and Objectives

Places for Everyone design principles guided the aims and objectives of the project;

- To provide accessible infrastructure to make it easier (and preferable) for people to walk, cycle, and wheel for everyday journeys in Peebles and Eddleston. Peebles is growing and the levels of vehicular traffic through the High Street are already unsustainable.
- To prepare the town and village for a low carbon future and to take account of the opportunities and limitations imposed by the geography and history of the town and village.
- To seek interventions which reduce private vehicular traffic in support of safe school journeys for pupils and their parents in Peebles and Eddleston.

- Considerations of flood mitigating and resilient designs will factor into designs, now a core part of the project following the flooding of Peebles in October 2021.
- A holistic approach would canvass this community, research and recommend routes that link multi-use paths across the communities of Peebles and Eddleston whilst also recommending associated infrastructure improvements that will make these routes safe and attractive and so increase the number of trips made by walking, cycling and wheeling for everyday journeys

It is worth noting that a baseline was not required for this element of delivery but the data collected could be reviewed at a future time to inform any change in behaviour.

3. Community Engagement Approach & Methodology

3.1 Community Engagement Plan

This required a holistic approach so collaboration with journey users was essential to capture the experiences of journeys made on a regular basis such as school, work journeys and shopping, social habits Initial data was then fed back to project stakeholders for interpretation. The following approach was used to engage with our community.

- Identified stakeholders to ensure the view of residents / members of the community were taken into account.
- Developed tools for both online and face to face consultation that met the needs of all age groups and abilities.
- Created as much of an authoritative and exhaustive body of data as possible to support the changes the community seeks.
- Built on the research of the engineers and landscape architects and communicated these innovative ideas back to the community.
- Explored tools for mapping and engagement
- Consolidated a set of ideas that the community support to include in further development.

3.2 Stakeholders

As journey users were targeted by journey specific routes audiences were automatically created for the project to approach and engage with. Data collection was based around the regular habits of journey users to seek their patterns of behaviour and to engage how and why they made their journeys and record responses to possible options for change. This allowed inclusivity from a wide range of different groups as they used the services in the town. Data was collated for comparison and to feed this into ideas for change.

The towns were divided into zones for domestic journeys and then also school users, primary and secondary, work journeys, including to/ from the industrial estate at Cavalry Park, and finally the

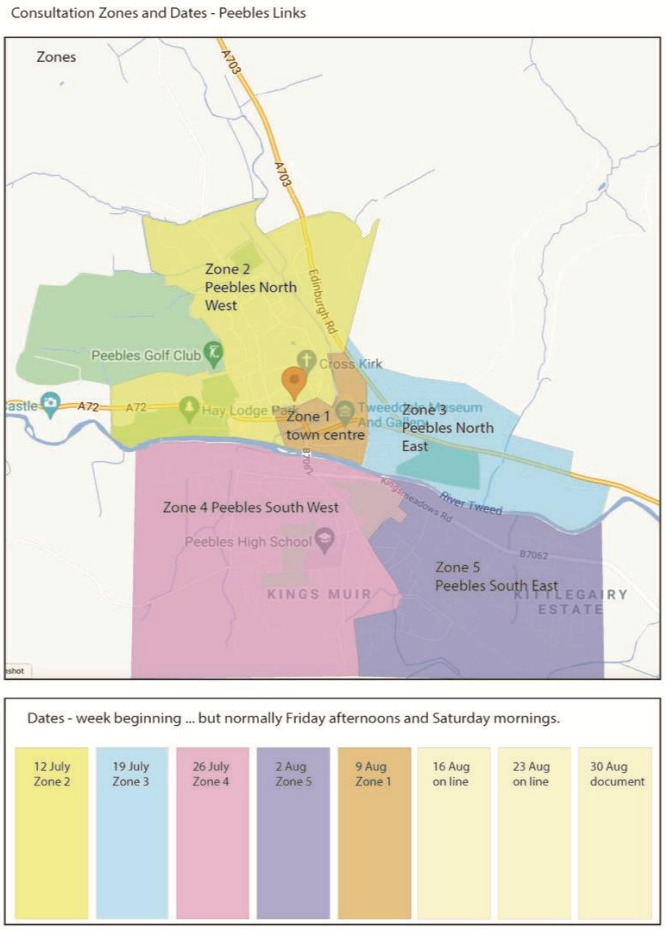
High St. Covid restrictions hampered our ability to access some groups as it was not seen as a priority.

Stakeholders by journey user-type canvassed were;

- Peebles Residential areas – the town was divided into 4 zones (**Fig 1**.)
- Cavalry Park Business Park
- Visitors to the town
- Peebles High St
- Peebles High School
- Kingsland Primary School
- Halyrude Primary School
- Priorsford Primary School

Unfortunately, the timing to approach and engage the High St businesses was hampered by a pressure to return to normal business after the lockdown and after the fallout of bad publicity towards the 20 MPH initiative installed by SBC during the lockdown. Peebles Community Council requested a delay to engaging around the high street to avoid potential confusion between SBC and community delivered projects.

Fig 2 – Map of residential zones in



3.3 Tools used for connecting with the community

Open consultations were used to attract the different audiences of route users using tried and tested communication methods. This relied on participation of those prepared or available to respond to the consultation but good responses were received.

1. SurveyMonkey (online) surveys to target specific route user groups; 3 surveys were shared to PHS, the whole community and at the Forums in November 21 and Feb 22.

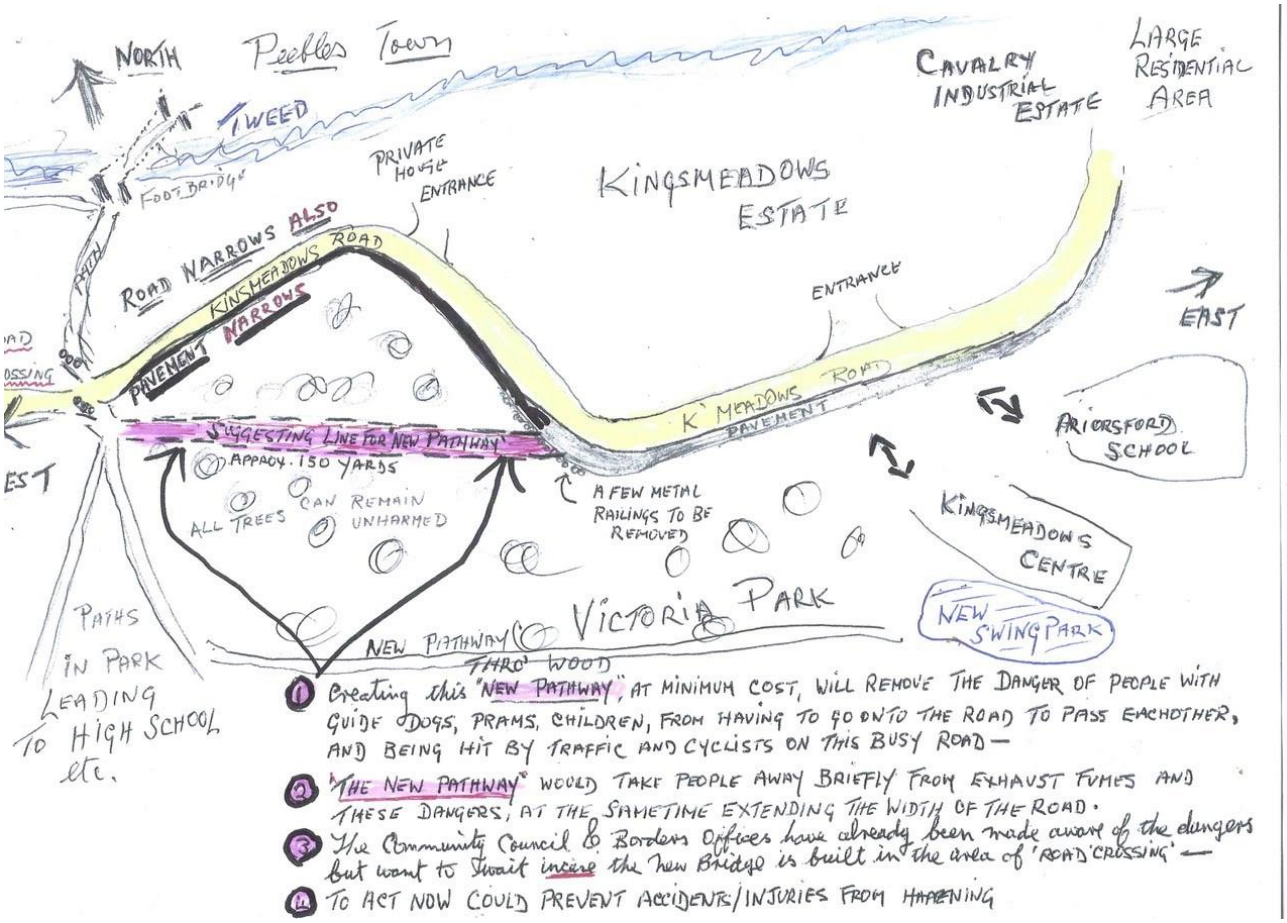
2. An article in Peeblesshire news advertised a request for contributions from community members followed by three face-to-face events at School Brae Hub and the Peebles Saturday Market.

3. An open exhibition of the maps was based at School Brae Hub, a community space and home of PCT office, for a month to allow inspection at any time.
4. Face to face consultations using paper surveys at points around each residential zone, at Kingsland Primary School, at supermarkets and Peebles Saturday market on 3 occasions, at the School Brae Hub, at 2 Community Forums.
5. Advertising boards on lampposts advertising times to engage at 3 points around each zone on a weekly basis and QR codes for those unable or unwilling to attend face to face. These boards were left in place for a week.
6. Social media was used to complete the reach in this community providing updates via PCT Facebook page but also using the Peebles W4 Facebook page. QR codes of surveys were included on these posts.

Fig 3 – Street-side interviews

7. Peebles Life – delivered monthly to every resident in the town included updates on Sustrans paths projects.
8. PCT email list of 1000 of its members received regular newsletter updates.
9. Forums at the Burgh Hall in Nov 2021 and Feb 2022 coordinated with delivery of Placemaking and updating of the Peebles Town Action Plan.
10. Consultation fatigue was a consideration, particularly for the Eddleston community, as they had been involved in the Eddleston Water Path project consultations for many years without seeing any results. Jeremy Cunningham focussed on the community engagement for Eddleston.

Fig 4 – Example of input from town resident – hand drawn map of suggested Kingsmeadow's alteration



The illustration shown in **Fig 4** was presented to PCT by a concerned resident of Peebles as a recommendation for change with the following suggestions. It captures all the design principles of Places for Everyone.

- Creating a through wood pathway at minimum cost will remove the danger for people with guide dogs, prams, children and dogs who currently have to stand in the road to pass each other on the narrow pavement.
- A new pathway would take people away from exhaust fumes.
- It could allow more width on the road for other road users, cyclists.
- Peebles Community Council and SBC have been made aware of the dangers but wish to wait in case a new bridge is built.
- Acting now could prevent accidents.

3.4 Consultation to date

- Peebles High School survey to all pupils in June and September 2021 – total responses 253 (**survey responses from Peebles High School.xlsx**)
- Primary schools Hands up surveys 326 responses (**EWP HandsUp Survey Results.xlsx**)

- Whole town community engagement – how you make your journeys (**Links Path Community Engagement 2021.xlsx**) 76 responses
- Kingsland Primary School community engagement paper copies x 21 (**Parents Links Path Community Engagement 2021.xlsx**)
- Whole town community engagement from zones 2, 3, 4, 5 to discuss with residents their individual journeys and to ask for feedback face to face, via surveys and online questionnaires – summer 2021.

  Included 81 responses via QR code online. (**Links Path Community Engagement 2021.xlsx**)
- Cavalry Park business district face-to-face questionnaires (**Community Engagement - Business PELP. xlsx**).
- Open Forum shared engagement event and exhibitions (**sorted comments from Nov 21 Open Forum.xlsx**).

4. Consultation outputs and interpretation

4.1 Peebles High School

As Peebles High School (PHS) approaches a large-scale new build project it is a good opportunity to look at changes in infrastructure that could positively impact the outcomes for pupils and those who live around the school for the long term.

Surveying school pupils was only possible online due to covid restrictions. PHS agreed to make the survey available to all pupils through their I-pads. This survey was designed to establish how pupils travel to school and if alternative travel options would be considered to deliver healthier, safer journeys. 253 responses were received from the survey to pupils from an audience of 1200 (**survey responses from Peebles High School. xlsx**).

4.1.1 Data

It's clear that the majority of pupils rely on the school buses to make their journeys daily. Of the total surveyed 66 % travel by bus versus 32 % who walk. Some pupils mention the rural journeys they make before reaching a bus stop to meet the school bus and how dangerous these roads are to walk on without pavements, paths or lighting in the winter months.

Bus journeys whilst for some offer a social or leisure environment or a place to relax and listen to music are a friction point for many users as they run late, are overcrowded and noisy. The buses follow a disparate timetable where some arrive at school 25 minutes early to allow space and time for all buses to arrive and leave again and some are late on a regular basis which creates conflict with pupils and teachers. Some pupils identified the difficulty of the bottleneck at the junction at Springhill Road and Springwood Road, that there is too much going on with access to the school and the paths are not wide enough.

The 32% who walk seem very happy with this method as it's flexible, they get fresh air and the freedom to choose who they walk with. They also can access the shops on the way to school. The number who journey by car is minimal at 2 % approximately but this is on top of a system under pressure. No bike travel was recorded which assumes no bike riders completed the survey or possibly the lack of safe bike parking at the high school and recent thefts in the area putting people off. There was a request for improving the infrastructure for bike use.

90 % of pupils felt safe on their journey to school.

When asked if they could change their journey method to school, 58 % said they could not but 42 % were able to, meaning there is a possible scope for change in behaviour. Those who could not make a change was usually down to the distance of travel to school and reliance on the bus as parents are at work and unavailable to support them.

In order to test a different approach to buses stopping further from the school, to take the pressure away from the junction and bus D, we asked if pupils travelling by bus would consider a walk for the last part of their journey similar to those living in Peebles. However, this question was confusing for some as the question was ambiguous. Looking at the response comments indicated that those who used the school bus mostly didn't want to see any change citing that buses were already late and this would make it worse. And a lot of these pupils have a walk at the home side of their journey and are not supportive of increasing walking.

4.1.2 Key findings

Most school journeys are made by school transport. The current bus service sees most pupils delivered over a 45-minute period to the Bus drop off, known as the Bus-D. There is a lot of contention around arriving too early or late and waiting for ages before departure at the end of the school day. It is clear the school journey allows for social interaction which if by bus can mean both positive and negative interactions and there is no scope for change if these are negative. Bus users identified that infrastructure was lacking for their walking journey after being dropped off by the bus at their home destination, sometimes walking on country roads without pavements and lighting. Some of these journeys are long walks and these students were not interested in more walking.

Some pupils indicate that the bus is the only option for them due to the dynamics of parents working and the rural setting they live in does not allow access to public transport. This limits their ability to attend after school activities further impacting their social interaction. In fact public transport services have not returned to normal since the pandemic restrictions.

On the other hand pupils who walk to school have a more positive experience with flexibility on arrival and departure time and the social aspect that is in their control. They also report enjoying the environment, fresh air and exercise. Walking pupils were very aware of the congestion at points around the school in particular at the junction of Springhill and Springwood Road which is really the main access for buses and pedestrians with only narrow pavements, no crossings and a bit of a free for all.

4.1.3 Recommendations

would be to revert to drop off points away from the school as were implemented after the school fire in December 2019. Pupils had at that time been restricted to school access and so school buses dropped pupils at the Kingsmeadows car park for some months which meant a short walk for the last part of the journey. This would be no more than the walk made by pupils who live in Peebles.

Since our engagement with pupils in 2021 bus travel has been made available at no cost to all under 23-year-olds and a suggestion would be that some older students, S4 – 6, could access public transport options to make their journey to and from school and reduce the numbers of school buses that need to approach the school.

Many of the pupils identified the dangerous pinch point at Springhill Road and the junction with Springwood Road. Once construction of the new High School begins there will be even more competition for these spaces. This could be seen as an opportunity to make permanent changes to school travel by eliminating buses at these junctions and focus infrastructure changes to prioritise walking and wheeling.

None of the pupils reported cycling to school. There is no perceived secure parking at the High School for bikes and thefts are often reported as Peebles is targeted for high value bicycle thefts. As the Tweed Valley Railway Path and the soon to open Eddleston Water Path supports cycling journeys for many of the school community it would make sense to include facilities for storage at the school. It would also give pupils an option to make positive choices for health and climate action.

4.2 Primary School Hands Up surveys

All Primary schools were invited to engage with a hands-up survey although face-to-face access was only possible at Kingsland (KPS) and Eddleston Primary School (EPS). Halyrude (HPS) teachers supported the hands up survey in class and the answers. Priorsford Primary School did not respond to our requests to engage the school pupils, no reason was given. A total 326 responses were recorded, **EWP HandsUp Survey Results.xlsx**. Eddleston Primary School has since become threatened with closure and the Eddleston pupils have been absorbed into other local schools that require a car journey.

4.2.1 Key findings

Our findings relate to HPS and KPS as they can be compared more closely. This process was useful to ascertain the scope of bike travel in our school journeys compared to car use and walking and how this relates to possible change of behaviour with infrastructure implementation. An assumption was made that the variety of answers between schools may be dependent on the location and demographic of the school community. Some of these answers may be inaccurate due to the perception of our young people in a school environment. Parents at KPS told us of the walking bus that was being trialled but for most this meant a journey away from school and earlier so hadn't

appealed to many. Some parents drove a certain distance by car and walked/ cycled the rest of the way.

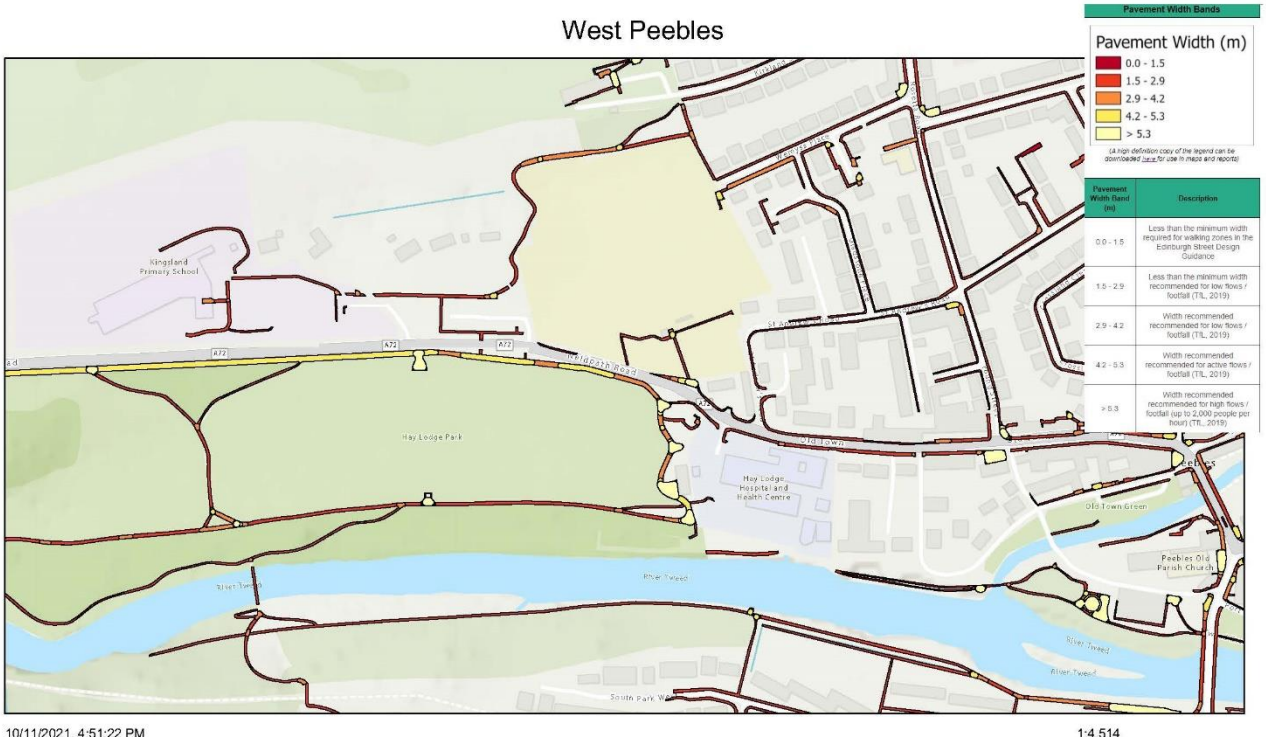
	Halyrude	Kingsland
Do you own a bike?	60 %	90%
Do you use your bike		
Daily ?	1%	10%
Weekly ?	23%	42%
Do you walk to school ?	inconclusive	30%
Do family members cycle?	74%	83%
Would you like to increase bike use?	64%	74%
Would you like to decrease car use?	24%	48%
Do you follow safer routes to school ?	20%	40%

4.2.3 Recommendations

Based on responses supporting increased use of bike journeys and a high number willing to use cars less

- recommendations are made for upgrades to routes to school to support these journeys safely.
- Storage of bikes at school would also need to be addressed to support each child that wants to cycle.
- Wider paths are necessary to increase walking safety and even the perception of it.
- Maps of the paths around Peebles (**Fig 5**) show pavements are less than the minimum width required for walking zones.

Fig 5 – Map showing narrow pavements in West Peebles



We returned to KPS in June 2021 and spoke to parents about their school journeys and generated 21 paper survey responses, **Parents Links Path Community Engagement 2021.xlsx**.

- Data collected around school journeys and how these would be improved derived themes around car speed and increased support for walking and cycling pathways. These have been amalgamated into Hands Up word art, **Fig 6**.
- There is a real call for separation of road users even asking for barriers.
- Requests to reduce car speeds, support road crossings on zebra crossings and even a lollipop lady.
- As the infrastructure of Peebles is not suitable to pavement widening then other routes need to be found in consultation with parents and the routes they use.
- One wider pavement may be better than two ineffective ones.

Fig 6 – Word art responses from parents of Kingsland Primary School

4.3 Whole Town engagement of residential areas.

To capture the experienced journey of residents we divided Peebles into residential zones and attended each one 3 times at different traffic intersections. These events were heavily advertised on billboards, in Peebles Life and on social media. We were able to listen to individual stories and experiences of travel around everyday journeys. We received over 80 responses to paper surveys, **Links Path Community Engagement 2021.xlsx.**

Improvements for walking and cycling drew out similar themes of route maintenance, traffic management and infrastructure change. These themes were reflected in the comments received at the Forums.

Route Maintenance

- Mend potholes/ increase surface quality
- Cut back greenery
- Ensure homeowners cut back verges
- Clear road markings

Traffic Management

- Keep cyclists off pavements
- Prosecute illegal parking
- Enforce speed limit

Infrastructure change

- Second pedestrian bridge from Cavalry Park to east side of Peebles
- More dropped kerbs
- Better cycle lanes / less cars
- Wider paths / safer crossings
- Create a network of paths – joined together
- Keep cyclists and walkers separate
- Separate cars from cyclists
- Educate users
- Secure cycle parking

4.3.1 Key Findings

In order to support a commitment to walking and cycling change the following changes were suggested by the community.

- **Paths** need to be dedicated to cyclists or walkers, of good standard and well signposted.
- **Traffic** needs to be enforced particularly parking on the High St and on pavements. Numbers of vehicles need to be reduced particularly large vehicles and HGVs which travel through the main arteries of the town. Parking could be removed on the high street and given over to disabled parking and loading for business only.

Cars could be cleared from Northgate.

- **Infrastructure** needs to be maintained to an adequate standard. Rat runs should be discouraged. Public transport needs to be improved. We need a footbridge from the south side, which has a seen greatest development in recent years, to north side

4.3.2 Recommendations

- Several recommendations came out of the community engagement with residential areas.
- Currently the parking on the High St is dysfunctional which pushes potential users away from the High Street and to the larger stores that supply parking.
- Sustrans data has shown that businesses report an increase of 16% when pedestrian numbers increase.
- There is limited scope for increased parking so moving people from car use to walking and wheeling would begin to alleviate this problem.
- Reliable cycle parks are requested to increase confidence of users, in well-lit and busy areas.
- A footbridge from Kingsmeadow's Road to Kerfield Park would encourage walking and wheeling and support businesses in the town as more people can access their services.
- A well-used footbridge would also reduce traffic journeys on Kingsmeadow's Road which could encourage more use for walking/ wheeling from residents in this zone.
- Where possible footpaths should be widened to support active travel for all including wheelchairs and pushchairs.
- Current path networks are well used but are not joined together and signage has been suggested to support visitors to the town as well as residents.
- Public transport does not provide an adequate cover of service for many to commit to.
- And there was a request to have more places to tie dogs up and more doggie doo bins.
- Many of these recommendations were repeated when we engaged at Cavalry Park as this group are challenged by the same infrastructure issues being based furthest away from the High St.

4.4 Cavalry Park

The business questionnaire was developed to identify where the difficulties are for users to move away from their car use and what would be required to effect change in behaviour. We wanted to understand how services were accessed to support the business community. We leafletted all businesses asking them to complete our questionnaire and spoke at length with some of the employees/ service users – 39 surveys completed.

From these the following themes were commonly referred to as barriers to behaviour change.

- Infrastructure is not adequate to leave the car behind
- Traffic enforcement is an issue.
- Time demands and weather support car use.
- Distance to travel/ public transport links inadequate

	Drive	**Walk**	**Cycle**	**Difficulties to change**
How do you travel to work?	82% Journey longer than 2 miles. Car is used for journeys up to 1 mile	10%	5%	I need to carry equipment I need to pick up kids on way I need to stop on way to work to run an errand I drive to get my lunch in Peebles
Barriers to change are?	Feels safer to drive, time and weather restrictions.	Paths are not wide enough	**Don't feel safe** to cycle. Roads are **not maintained , have pot holes,**	Don't feel safe
Would you like to change away from car use?	16 out of total 39 surveys would like to change away from car use		14 of these 16 would be able to cycle	-
Do you leave Cavalry park at lunchtime?	62 % do not leave work at lunchtime 38 % do leave and most use a car			Asked if this journey would be possible in 20 minutes half said no. some reasons were mobility issues.

Do you have a bike to work scheme?			18 % have a scheme 82 % do not	
Do you have access to safe bike storage at work?			62 % do 28 % do not.	

The following suggestions were made by those taking surveys about the infrastructure changes that would encourage them to use walking and wheeling;

- A second bridge from Cavalry Park area to the East side of Peebles- for pedestrian use.
- Dedicated cycle routes.
- Riverside path through Kingsmeadows to Priorsford Bridge.
- Improved road maintenance.
- E bike lending
- Secure bike facilities.

4.5 Accessible Paths Group (APG)

As with other settlements along the River Tweed (such as Hawick and Galashiels), Peebles and its greenspaces, which are key active travel links, are at major risk of flooding. Peebles has been highlighted as the next town to receive flood prevention works and as Destination Tweed is working on project delivery for the same pathways, whilst PCT has been consulting through Mott Macdonald and Sterry Walters on the Links Path Project the overlap was likely to lead to duplication.

The formation of a multi organisational steering group was set up in 2022 to avoid duplication over various infrastructure projects. This is led by Robin Tatler and includes PCT, Scottish borders Council flood prevention team, Destination Tweed Project, the Callants, NHS, community groups and local landowners affected by changes to infrastructure.

APG meets as required in response to developments from any of the parties involved. The main scope is to look at some quick wins, identified through the Links Path Project, for two routes behind Hydro Gardens and at the mound at Hay Lodge Park. It can support change from all contributors when the flooding programme begins.

5. Summary

The Links Path Project was delivered during the uncertainty of the lockdown and just as we were coming out of restrictions. It was always going to be challenging to deliver in these unprecedented times but being recognised as the anchor organisation in this community enabled quick routes to the community using trusted tools for engagement. Surveys online in particular are always challenging and we made mistakes in some approaches. However, the community response has revealed similar themes offering solutions to create **safe**, **attractive**, **healthier** places by increasing the **number of trips** made by **walking**, **cycling** and **wheeling** for **everyday journeys.**