



Safe Routes Healthy Places Belfast



Co-creating
HEALTHY
neighbourhoods



Safe Routes, Healthy Places, Belfast

enabling the children's perspective

Safe Routes, Healthy Places, Belfast

enabling the children's perspective

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1 Introduction

1 Introduction

The ‘Safe Routes, Healthy Places, Belfast’ is a toolkit to reimagine urban spaces, particularly streets, as places that prioritise children’s safety, health and well-being, through their perspectives. ‘Safe Routes, Healthy Places, Belfast’ approach builds on the Urban Childhoods Study¹ and Resilience Strategy² and recognises children as equal citizens, encouraging their participation in shaping our communities. ‘Safe Routes, Healthy Places, Belfast’ provides activities and tools to meaningfully engage primary school children with their neighbourhood, by enabling safe routes to schools and creating an opportunity for children to observe and reflect on the design of their neighbourhood streets. By involving children in urban design, we can improve streets that are safe, enjoyable, and accessible for everyone.

Why Child-Friendly Streets and Cities matter?

Children see and experience the world differently from adults. Including their perspectives in urban planning helps to create streets that are safer, more playful, and easier to explore. However, children’s voices are often missing from design decisions, despite their rights being recognised by the United Nations. ‘Safe Routes, Healthy Places, Belfast’ aims to help bridge that gap, providing tools and activities for including children’s voices in the co-design process. By actively engaging children in the design and planning process, we can create public spaces that accommodate their unique spatial and developmental needs, while ensuring an inclusive city for all the ages and needs.

“ If you design a street that works for kids, you design a street that works for everyone. If you can change the street, you can change the world. ”

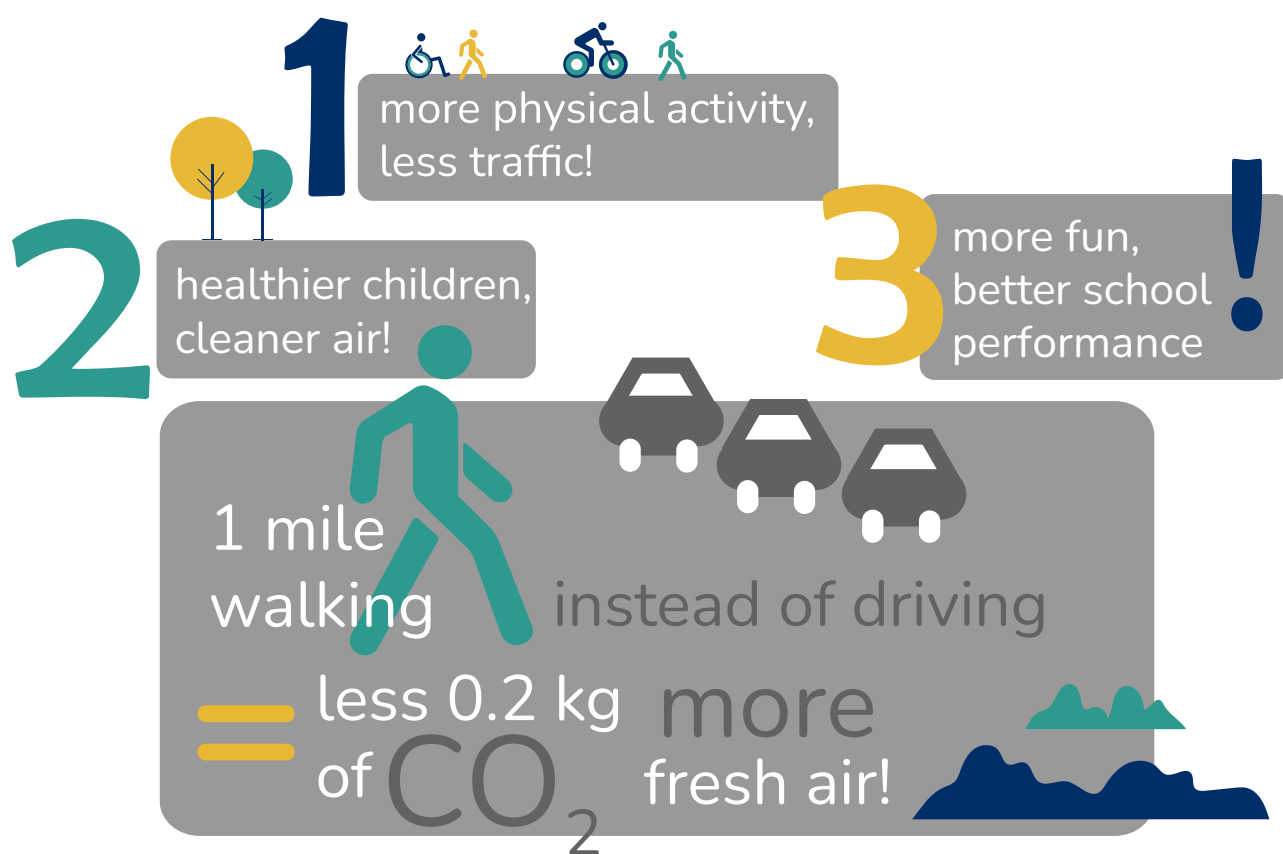
Janette Sadik-Khan

1 A framework and design strategy to create a more healthy, inclusive and child-friendly city centre in Belfast was developed by Arup. Learn more [here](#).

2 The strategy’s overall mission is to transition Belfast to an inclusive, low-carbon, climate-resilient economy. Learn more [here](#).

Why Safe Routes, Healthy Places ?

Walking or wheeling³ to school brings a range of benefits to children, including improved physical health, mental well-being, and cognitive performance. Active school travel benefits the wider community, boosts the local economy, strengthens social cohesion by reducing traffic, improving air quality and fostering stronger connections between neighbours. Safe routes are essential to encourage more children to walk or wheel, while healthy places make it easier to be physically active, and provide attractive environments that can connect children with local biodiversity. The 'Safe Routes, Healthy Places Belfast' toolkit provides tools to identify and improve these routes, creating healthier, happier communities.



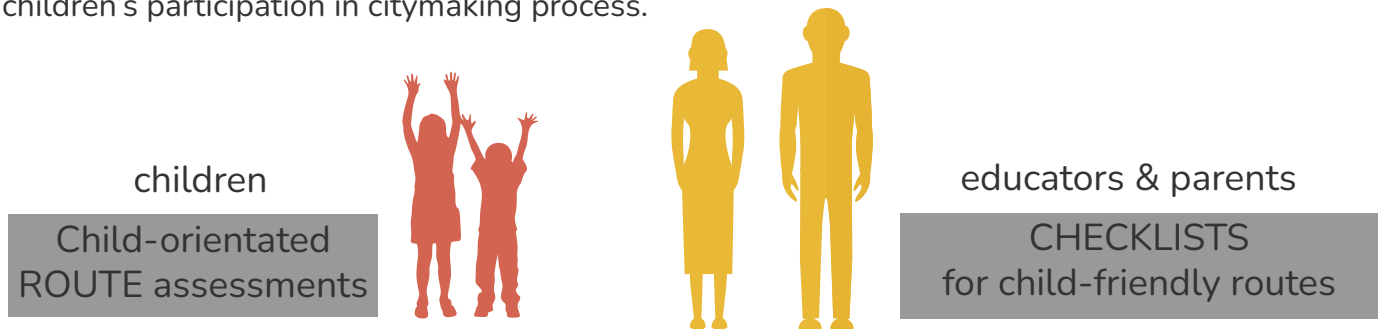
³ "Wheeling" refers to the act of traveling using wheels other than bicycles, including prams, pushchairs, wheelchairs, or other mobility aids.

How this toolkit links to Net Zero Neighbourhood for Belfast

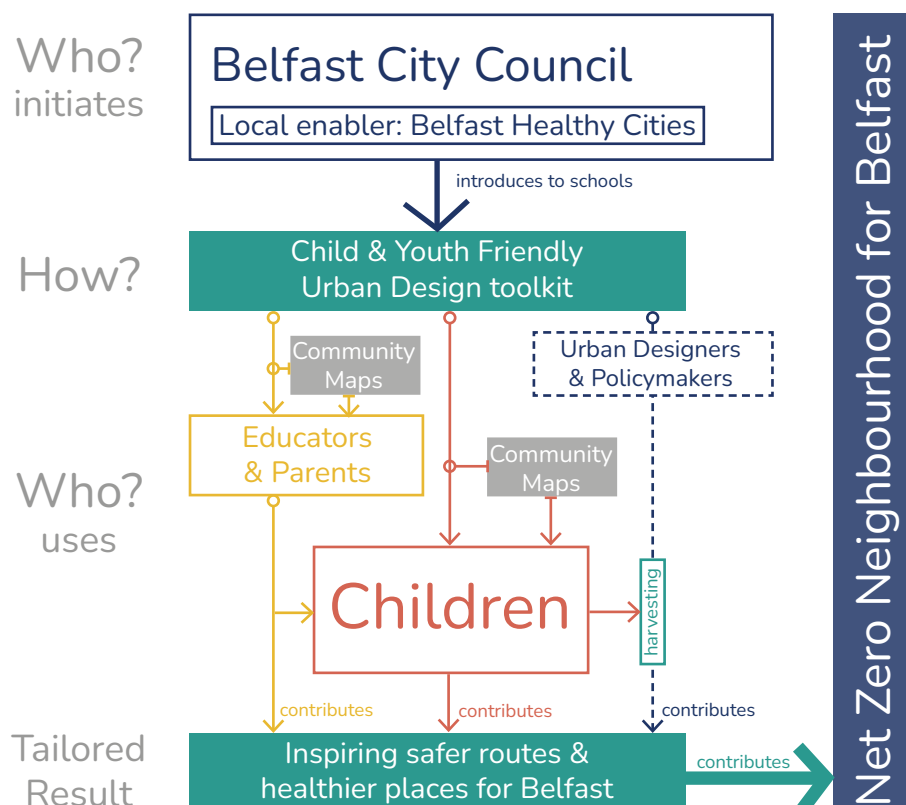


Belfast City Council declared a Climate Emergency in 2019, and has been working to make climate resilience a priority for the city. The UP2030 project involves Belfast City Council working with other cities to create a Net Zero Neighbourhood framework. The 'Safe Routes, Healthy Places, Belfast' toolkit supports this vision for children to walk or wheel to school. These routes reduce car use, improve air quality, and make neighbourhoods healthier for everyone.

'Safe Routes, Healthy Places, Belfast' is based on Child & Youth Friendly Urban Design toolkit, developed by Design Clips, urban design specialists in child-friendly cities and children's participation in citymaking process.



For the case of 'Safe Routes, Healthy Places, Belfast' the toolkit is focusing on street level, including tools and activities tailored to age, needs and characteristics of primary school children. The activities and tools are designed to successfully guide educators and parents in selecting safe routes for children as well as to meaningfully engage children in route and street assessment. Finally, the activities aim to inspire urban designers and policymakers for future urban regeneration projects towards safer routes and healthier places for Belfast. As part of the toolkit a Digital Community Maps tool by Mapping for Change is included to enrich the participatory process with a digital option that enables the creation of a safe route map archive.

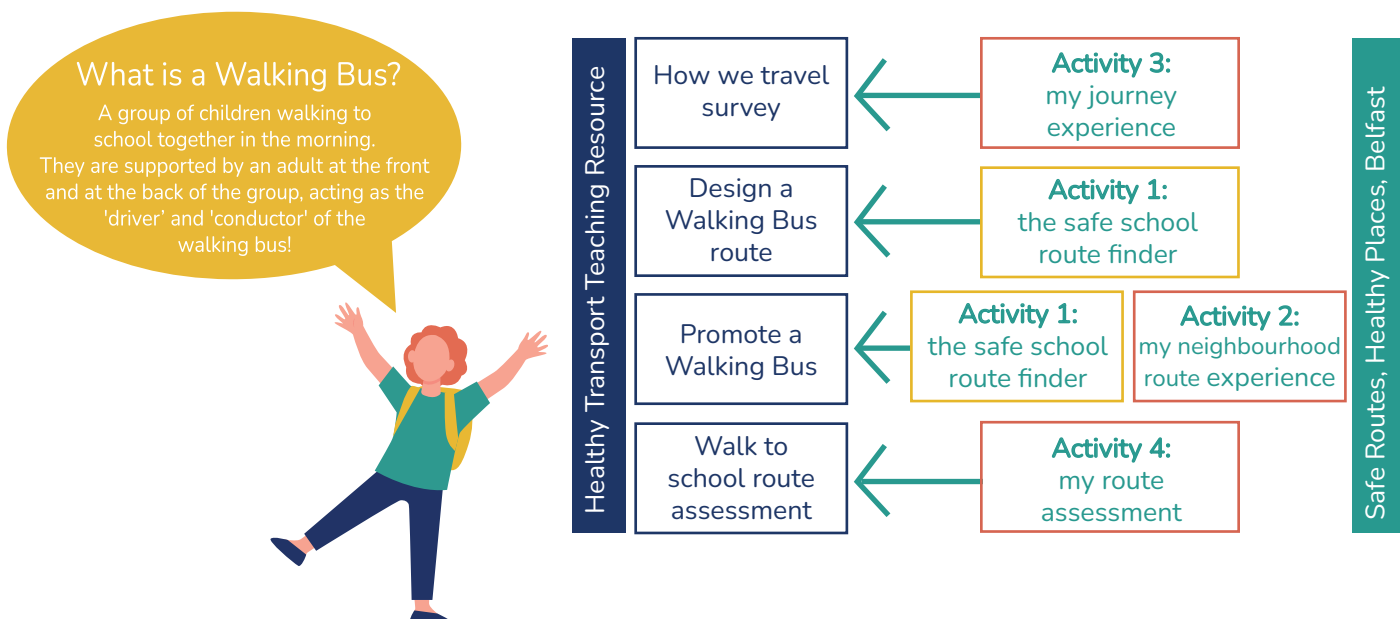


Levels of Action !

‘Safe Routes, Healthy Places, Belfast’ lays the foundation for action and could inspire future initiatives in Belfast that promote sustainable mobility and urban greening. This toolkit is part of a wider effort to create safer routes and healthier places for Belfast that may include both short-term (e.g. awareness lessons, etc.) and long-term activities (e.g. improvement of street design, etc.). Short-term actions can serve as quick wins to engage more children in walking and wheeling to school, while long-term efforts will create a safer environment that enables a sustainable and lasting change for the future. Together these actions aim to encourage more children to walk and wheel to school, reducing air pollution and creating vibrant, attractive neighbourhoods where everyone can live and thrive.



In the case of the Healthy Transport Teaching Resource by Belfast Healthy Cities, the 'Safe Routes, Healthy Places, Belfast' toolkit provides specific tools and activities to incorporate child-friendly urban design elements into route selection and to enable children to share their perspectives on urban design. These activities are supplementary, aiming to enrich the teaching resources and support the walking bus initiative, as illustrated in the following diagram:



The following matrix illustrates who may initiate each of the different activities, as well as the level of effort and resources each may require. It is intended to support local enablers and facilitators in selecting the activities that best fit their specific context:

Activity	Who initiates/ facilitates the activity				Aspects to consider					
	Educator	Parent Association	Local organization / NGO	Designer	Location		Time*	Level of Effort	Level of impact	Level of children's participation
					indoor / in classroom	outdoor / on site				
Safe school route finder	●	●	●			●	●○○	●○○	●●●	○○○
My journey experience	●		●	●	●		●○○	●○○	●○○	●●●
My neighbourhood route	●		●	●		●	●●○	●●○	●●○	●●●
My route assessment	●		●	●		●	●●●	●●●	●●●	●●●

**Time: refers to the activity duration - actual time of participants' engagement*

LOW
HIGH
EFFORT / RESOURCES

The next section presents the campaign materials created to support the Walking Bus initiative.

Did you know

that walking & wheeling to school has multiple benefits for children, their families & the neighbourhood

Safe Routes Healthy Places Belfast

Belfast City Council and Belfast Healthy Cities are exploring how to make our neighbourhoods cleaner, greener and healthier places. We are piloting a Walking Bus to get more children walking and wheeling to school.

1

more physical activity,
less traffic!

2

healthier children,
cleaner air!

3

more fun,
better school
performance

Make it EASY
for ALL children



Awareness activities

Transforming morning run
to school into a FUN activity
with family & friends

Active travel initiatives



Street audits

Co-creating
HEALTHY
neighbourhoods



Safe streets



Safe Routes Healthy Places Belfast

Belfast City Council and Belfast Healthy Cities are exploring how to make our neighbourhoods cleaner, greener and healthier places. We are piloting a Walking Bus to get more children walking and wheeling to school.

Are you interested?

Get your school involved to help more primary school children walk & wheel to school, creating safer streets, cleaner air, and a healthier community for everyone!

- ☒ Get involved! Let us know your school wants to participate by contacting _____
- ☒ Receive the Healthy Transport teaching resources, the Walking Bus toolkit & the Safe Routes, Healthy Places Belfast toolkit
- ☒ Explore the resources and get started on your walking bus.
- ☒ Teach children awareness of their neighbourhood and how to make streets child-friendly

What is a walking bus?

A group of children walking to school together in the morning. They are supported by an adult at the front and at the back of the group, acting as the 'driver' and 'conductor' of the walking bus!

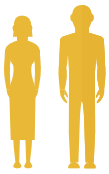


2

Participatory
Activites

2 Participatory Activities

The activities are designed to accommodate your school's needs and adapt to your resources. Using the 'Safe Routes, Healthy Places, Belfast' toolkit, you can conduct some or all of the activities to support your students in walking and wheeling to school, while meaningfully engaging them in sharing their travel experiences and perspectives on the street design of their neighbourhood.



Activity 1: the safe school route finder



Activity 2: my neighbourhood route



Activity 3: my journey experience



Activity 4: my route assessment

Tip:

To ensure that all activities respect participating children and their legal guardians, we recommend that facilitators collaborate closely with the school to align the proposed activities with EU and national legal and ethical requirements. Please also ensure full compliance with the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and relevant national data protection laws. When taking photos or recording videos during workshops or activities, be especially cautious to avoid capturing or sharing identifiable images of children, including their faces.

Activity 1: the safe school route finder

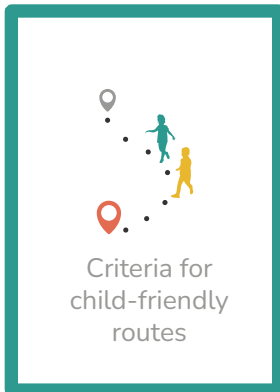
Who uses the tools?

Educators/ Parents

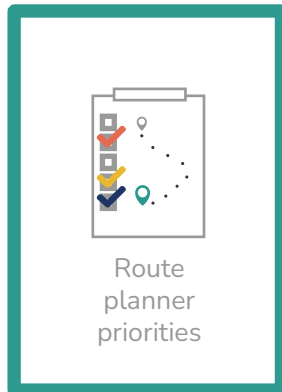
Scope:

The 'Safe school route finder' activity can help parents or educators design a child's school route or a Walking Bus route, by guiding them and ensuring that urban street features along the selected route provide an accessible, safe, and pleasant route. This will lead to successful and positive walking experiences. Alternatively, this activity can be used by adults to find the most accessible and safe route for any other initiative involving children.

Tools:



Please see p. 14



Please see p. 16

Extra materials:

You will need to be either on site to assess the route or use a street view on a digital map, such as Google maps.

Preparatory steps:

Consider few alternative routes before the activity.

Activity steps:

1. Select a possible route based on the 'Criteria for Child-Friendly Routes' tool, then use the 'Route Planner Priorities' tool to ensure the route meets the criteria.
2. If the first option does not meet the Essential and Desirable criteria, select another route and repeat step 1.
3. If there are multiple routes that meet the Essential and Desirable criteria, choose the one with the most Nice-to-Have criteria.

Output: An accessible, safe and pleasant route for everyday walking to school, a safe route option for a Walking Bus or a similar initiative.

Next steps: You can use [Safe Routes, Healthy Places, Belfast](#), a digital Community Mapping tool by Mapping for Change, to map your route and the character of the places along the route. By documenting safe routes on the digital map the aim is to create a safe route options archive to inspire and enable more children to walk and wheel.



Activity 2: my neighbourhood route

Who uses the tools?

Facilitator: Educator/ Urban Designer

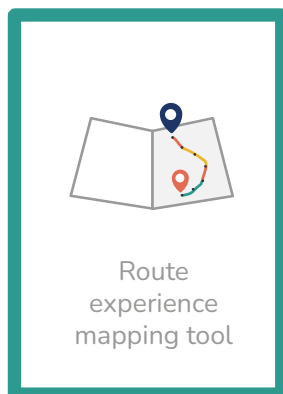
Participants: Children (9-11 years old)

Time: 15-45 minutes (on site)

Scope:

'My school route' activity uses the 'Route experience mapping tool' which provides children with a key for mapping their actual route and share their travel experience along their everyday route to school.

Tools:



Please see p. 25



Please see p. 18

Extra materials:

If you prepare a hard copy option, you will need a base map and coloured pens/ pencils, based on the 'Route Experience mapping tool' key. Alternatively, you can use the digital Community Maps tool [Safe Routes, Healthy Places, Belfast](#) on tablets.

Preparatory steps:

Print out the 'Route experience mapping tool' and a base map or find a tablet for each participant.

Activity steps:

1. Get out on site and follow the actual route to school.
2. Follow the Route experience mapping tool key and map the route accordingly.

Output: Children's actual route, their experience, and the number of crossing points

Next steps: The outputs of this activity can be used by parents and educators to support the [Safe Routes, Healthy Places Belfast](#) archive that could be used by the school other parents for future route selections, according to Activity 1. Additionally, the data that will be collected during Activity 2 can be used by urban designers to help them understand the existing conditions of the built environment, providing valuable insights for future regeneration projects.

Activity 3: my journey experience

Who uses the tools?

Facilitator: Educator/ Urban Designer

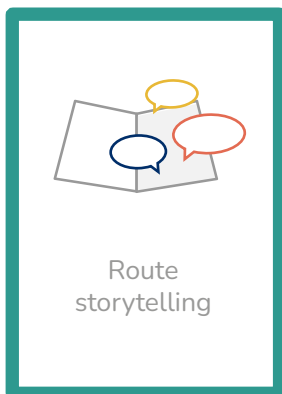
Participants: Children (8-10 years old)

Time: 20-45 minutes (in the classroom)

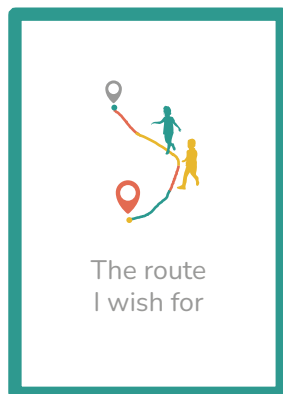
Scope:

'My journey experience' activity helps children reflect on their daily journeys and reimagine their neighbourhood streets.

Tools:



Please see p. 20



Please see p. 23

Extra materials:

You only need pens and pencils.

Preparatory steps:

Print out the 'Route storytelling' and 'The street I wish for' tools.

Activity steps:

1. Begin with the 'Route storytelling' tool, giving students 20 minutes to reflect on their journey to school and write what they like and dislike along the way. Encourage them to recall their morning (or most recent) journey to help visualise their experiences.
2. Next, use 'The route I wish for' tool to help students reimagine and draw their ideal journey experience. Ensure step 1 is completed first as a warm-up activity before asking them to draw a dream route.

Output: Children's route experiences and their expectations for a dream route.

Next steps: The data collected during Activity 3 can be used by urban designers to help them understand a. the existing conditions of the built environment as well as b. children's preferences and expectations; and inspire future regeneration projects.

Activity 4: my route assessment

Who uses the tool?

Facilitator: Educator/ Urban Designer

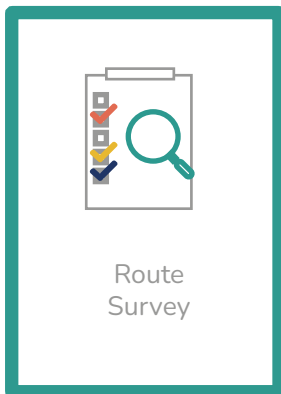
Participants: Children (10-11 years old)

Time: 30-60 minutes (on site)

Scope:

'My route assessment' activity aims to provide children with tools to observe and assess their neighbourhood streets.

Tools:



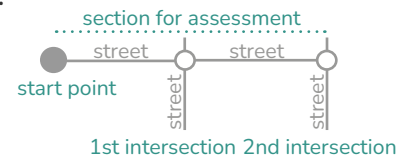
Please see p. 28

Extra materials:

You will need a pen/ pencil.

Preparatory steps:

Divide the route into sections. Each section should be defined between 2 intersections.



Decide how many sections to assess, depending on the route's length and availability of time. Print multiple worksheets if you are assessing more than one section.

Activity step:

1. Get out on site and use the 'Route Survey' tool to assess the route/ parts of the route.

Output: Children's assessment of their route and needs for street improvements.

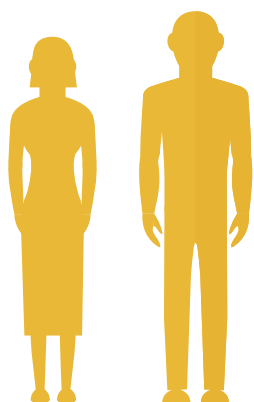
Next steps: The data collected during Activity 4 can be used by urban designers to help them understand the existing conditions of the built environment through children's experiences and perspectives. Their input may highlight priorities that need attention in their neighbourhood streets and inspire future regeneration projects.

3 Participatory Tools

3 Participatory Tools

The following tools are designed to support adults—including parents, educators, urban designers, and policy makers—in encouraging more children to walk and wheel to school through active travel and greening initiatives. They also enable children to share their travel experiences and perspectives on their neighbourhood streets.

If you are an adult:



Criteria for
child-friendly
routes



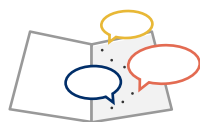
Route
planner
priorities



Digital
Community
Maps tool

by Mapping for Change

If you are a child:



Route
storytelling



The Route
I Wish For



Route
experience
mapping tool



Route
Survey



Criteria for child-friendly routes



Criteria for child-friendly routes

A child-friendly route should be safe, pleasant, and easy to travel.

Use the checklist below to describe the route:

Active travel & safety features

- ☐ wide footpath
- ☐ greenway
- ☐ well-maintained pavement
- ☐ ramps
- ☐ footpath lights (or street lights illuminating the footpath)
- ☐ zebra/ pelican crossing
- ☐ traffic lights
- ☐ low-traffic street (ideally a narrow or one-way street)
- ☐ cycling path
- ☐ bus stop(s)
- ☐ low levels of urban noise (such as roadworks, railways, etc)
- ☐ absence of litter, broken glasses, dog waste

Natural features

- ☐ trees, plants, gardens
- ☐ river, seafront or a pond
- ☐ birds, butterflies or other wildlife

Places to be and meet others

- ☐ green space
- ☐ park, field or a playground
- ☐ parklet/ benches/ bins
- ☐ local shop(s)
- ☐ community/ leisure centre



Route planner priorities



Route planner priorities

Please keep in mind that you will have to tick all the boxes in the Essential category, at least one box in each column of the Desirable category, and optionally as many boxes as possible in the Nice-to-Have category to ensure a safe and pleasant route.

Essential

- ☐ wide footpath along the whole route
- ☐ well-maintained pavement along the whole route
- ☐ ramps along the whole route
- ☐ (if travelling in dark) footpath lights (or street lights illuminating the footpath)

Desirable

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> zebra/ pelican crossing | <input type="checkbox"/> trees, plants or gardens |
| <input type="checkbox"/> traffic-lights | <input type="checkbox"/> a river, seafront or a pond |
| <input type="checkbox"/> low-traffic road | <input type="checkbox"/> birds, butterflies or other wildlife |

Nice-to-have

- ☐ low levels of noise (such as roadworks, railways etc)
- ☐ a greenway or a green space
- ☐ a park, field, or a playground
- ☐ cycle parking/ benches/ bins
- ☐ a local shop (avoid if along busy/ polluted street)
- ☐ community/ leisure centre (avoid if along busy/ polluted street)
- ☐ cycling path
- ☐ bus stop (s)



mapping for change

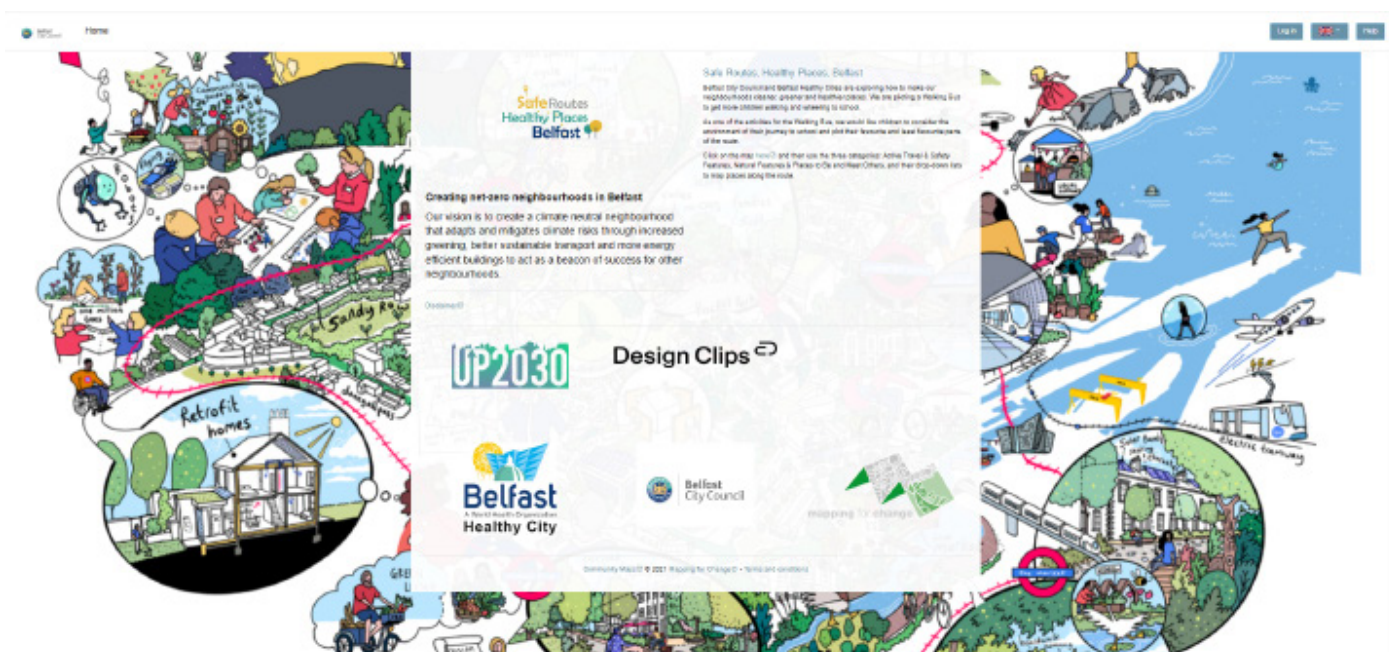
Digital Community Maps tool

by Mapping for Change

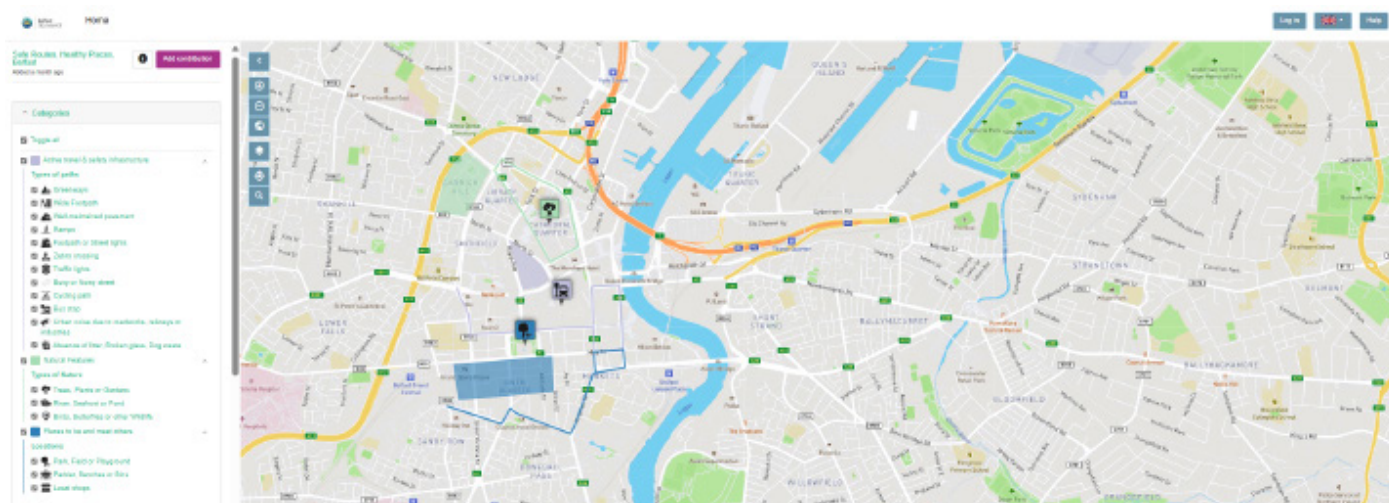


Digital Community Maps tool

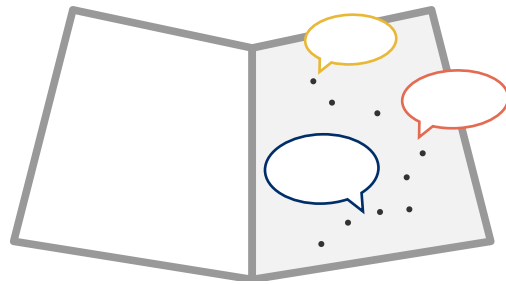
You can access the digital Community Maps at <https://up2030belfast.communitymaps.org.uk/welcome>



Click on the map and then use the three categories:
Active Travel & Safety Features, Natural Features & Places to Be and Meet Others,
and their drop-down lists to map a route and places along the route.



Additionally, you can use images, videos or audio stories to capture your experience.
Additional instructions are available [here](#) or you can watch a tutorial video [here](#).



Route storytelling

my name:



This morning on my way to school...

! Your positive experiences can
● inspire designers to make routes even safer!
By sharing what you enjoy about walking or wheeling, you can help more children walk & keep our air cleaner

I liked to hear

.....
.....

I liked to see

.....
.....

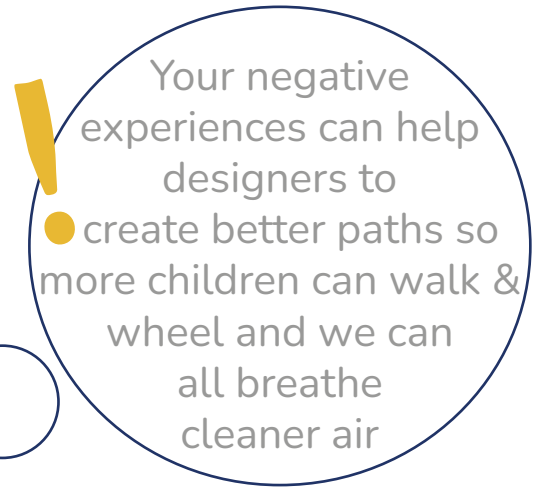
I really enjoyed seeing

.....

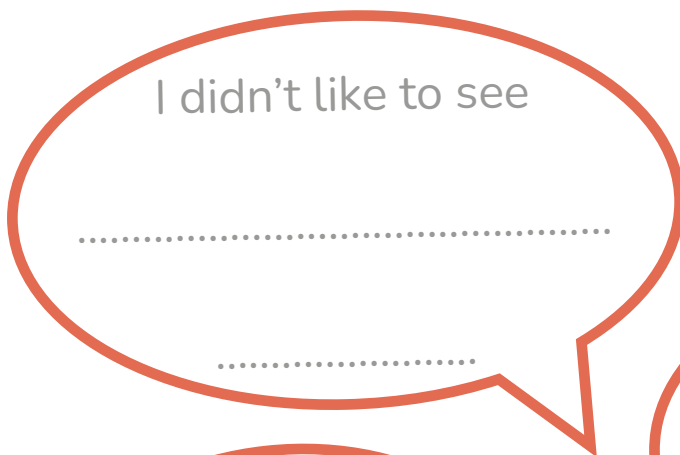




This morning
on my way to school...



Your negative experiences can help designers to
● create better paths so more children can walk & wheel and we can all breathe cleaner air



I didn't like to see

.....

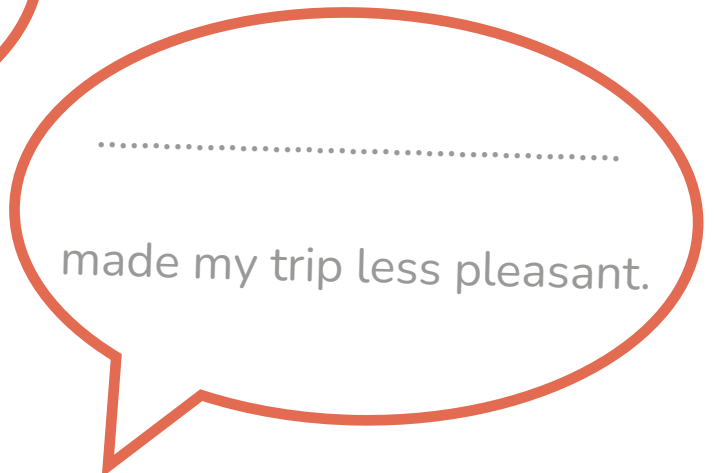
.....



I didn't like to hear

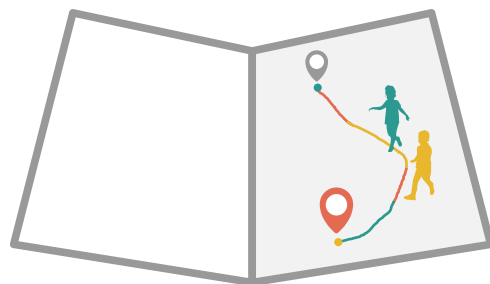
.....

.....



.....
made my trip less pleasant.

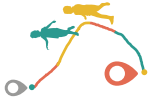




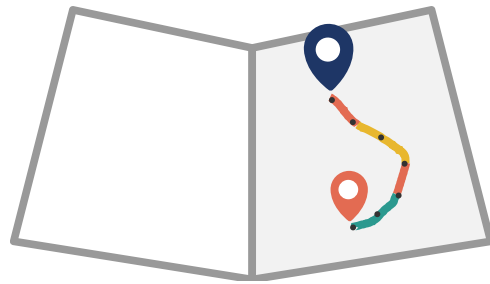
The route
I wish for



Imagine your perfect street, one you'd love to walk or wheel along every day on your way to school. Draw your dream street here and inspire designers to create spaces that help more children travel safely while keeping our air cleaner.



The route I wish for



Route experience mapping tool



Route experience mapping tool

The Key



start point

end point

direction change



route



safe route



green route



safe crossing

1 zebra/ pelican crossing

2 traffic lights

3 lollipop person



green space



blue spaces



social places

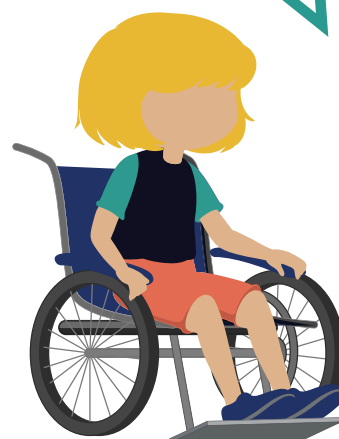
1 local shop(s)

2 community centre

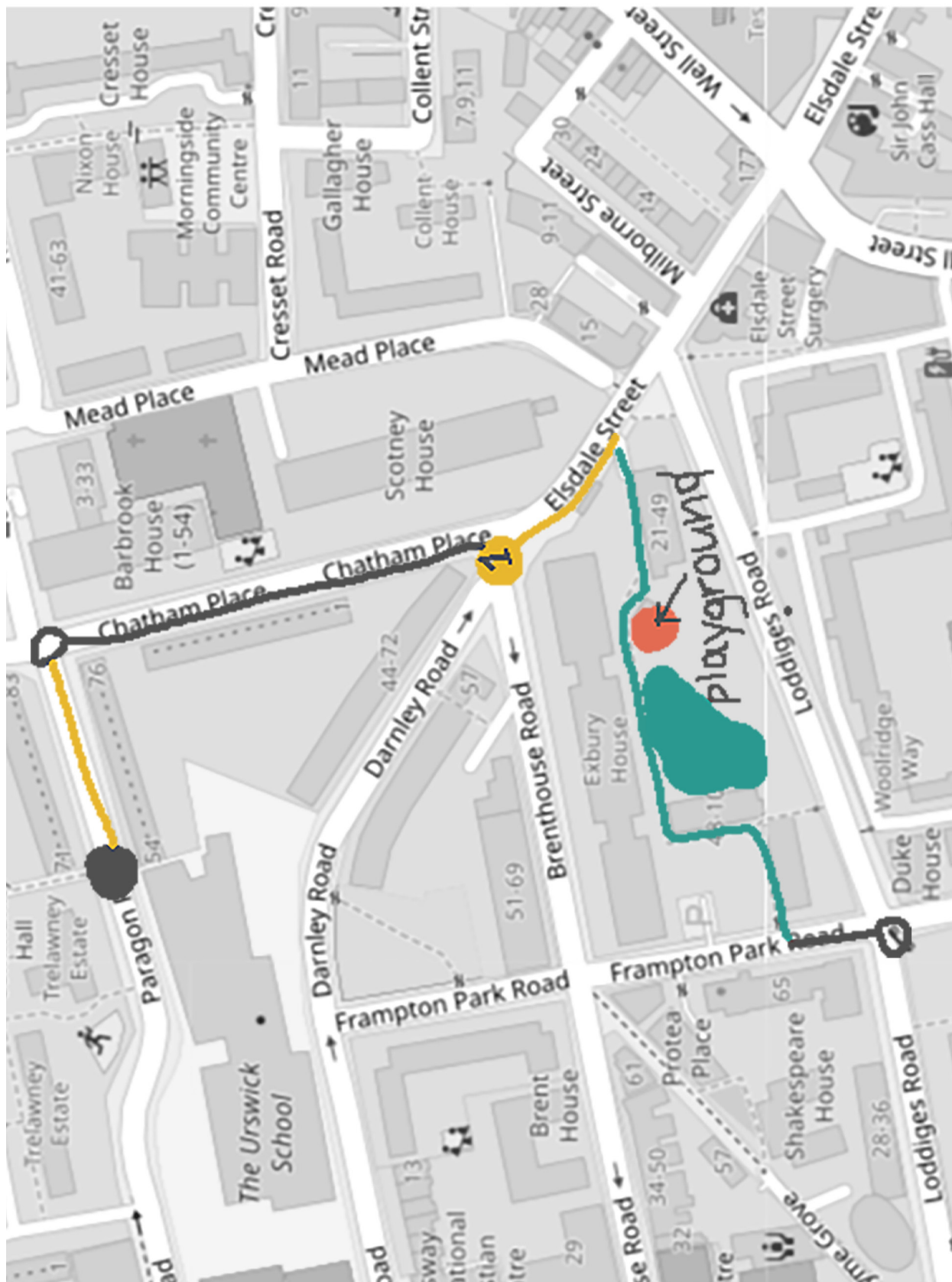
3 leisure centre

Use the symbols, colours, and numbers below to map your route and help designers to understand what you need and how you see things when walking or wheeling to school, to design safer streets and healthier places

Do you have any extra comments?
Please keep notes here:



An example map:



The Key

- start point
- end point
- direction char
- route
- safe route
- green route
- safe crossing
- 1 zebra crossing
- 2 traffic lights
- 3 lollipop person
- green space
- blue spaces
- social places
- 1 local shop(s)
- 2 community centre
- 3 leisure centre



Route survey



Route survey

Use each worksheet to assess the three categories:

Travel Path

Nature

Places

from your unique perspective !



Travel



Nature



Places



Usability




Steps

- > First check the box if you can see any of the features in the list ☒
- > Then score each question
3, if you agree 😊
1, if you are so-so 😐
0, if you disagree ☹️
- > At the end, add up all your scores to get the total for each category.

16	24
----	----

Travel Path


 Can you see any (please tick) :

☐ Footpath

 Is it wide enough?

 Is the pattern of the pavement fun?


☐ Cycling lane

 Do you think it will be easy to cycle here?

☐ Street lights

 Do they shed light on the path?

☐ Zebra/ pelican crossing

 Do they have ramps?

 Is it short enough to cross safely?

☐ Traffic lights or lollipop person

 Do they provide enough time to cross safely?

☐ Cars or street works

 Is it a quiet street?

yes

so-so

no



3

1

0

3

1

0

3

1

0

3

1

0

3

1

0

3

1

0

3

1

0

3

1

0

keep some notes here:

Total score for Travel Path



How could your journey
to school be safer?



Nature

Can you see any (please tick):

☐ Trees

Do they make you feel nice?

☐ Plants or flowers

Do you think they are well-maintained?

☐ Water feature

Do you like it?

☐ Wildlife

Does it make you happy?

☐ Downhills/ Uphills

Do you think they are fun?

yes



so-so



no



3

1

0

3

1

0

3

1

0

3

1

0

3

1

0

Can you smell the fresh air

3

1

0

Can you hear any (please tick) :

☐ Any birds

Do you enjoy this?

☐ The leaves of the trees

Do you think this improves your trip experience

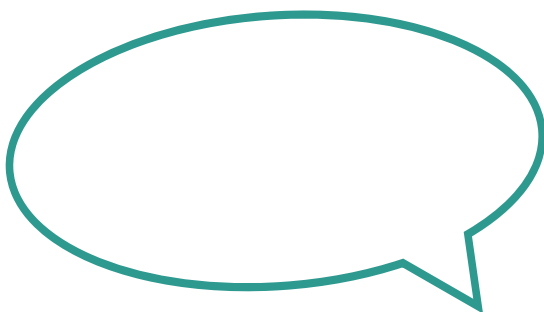
3

1

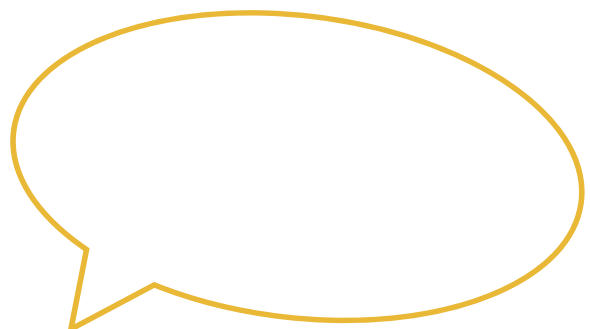
0

keep some notes here:

Total score for Nature




How can we have more nature here?



Places

Can you see any (please tick) :

☐ Park, field or playground

 Are you happy with its size?

 Do you think it's well-maintained?

☐ Pedestrianised street

 Does it feel like a safe place?

☐ Benches

 Is the material comfortable to sit on?

 Do you like its colour and design?

☐ Bins

 Are they well-maintained?

☐ Shop

 Is it a good size?

☐ Community centre

 Do they have activities for children?

yes



so-so



no



3

1

0

3

1

0

3

1

0

3

1

0

3

1

0

3

1

0

3

1

0

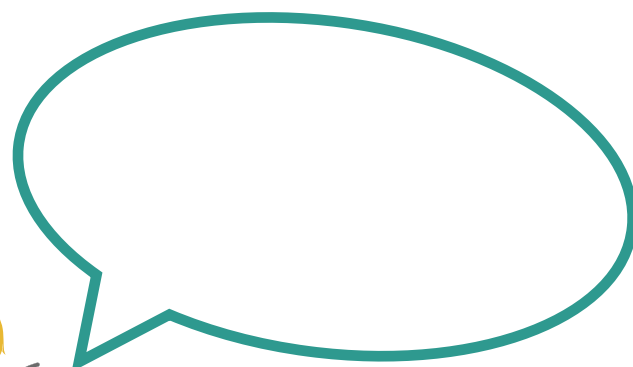
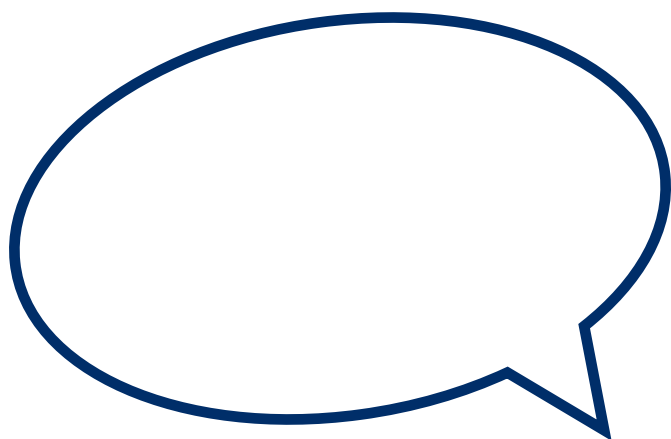
3

1

0

keep some notes here:

Total score for Places



How could your
journey to school be more fun?

! Now let's think
● about which part of
your route needs the most
improvement. What changes
would make more children
walk to school & keep our
air cleaner

?

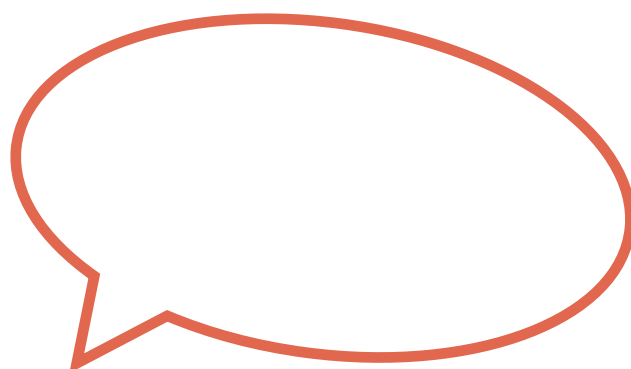
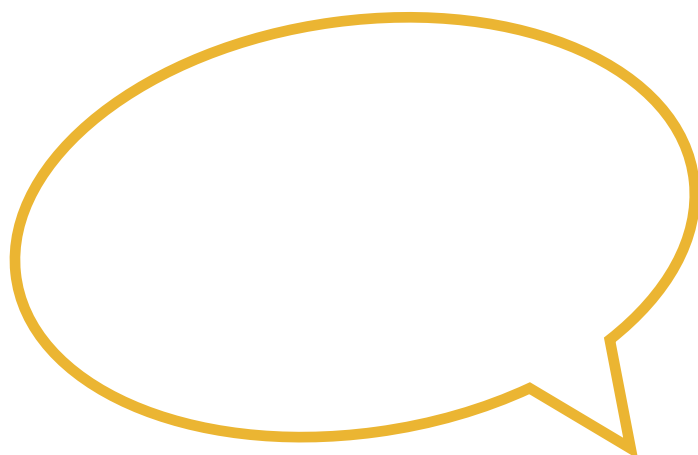
Total score for **Travel Path**  24

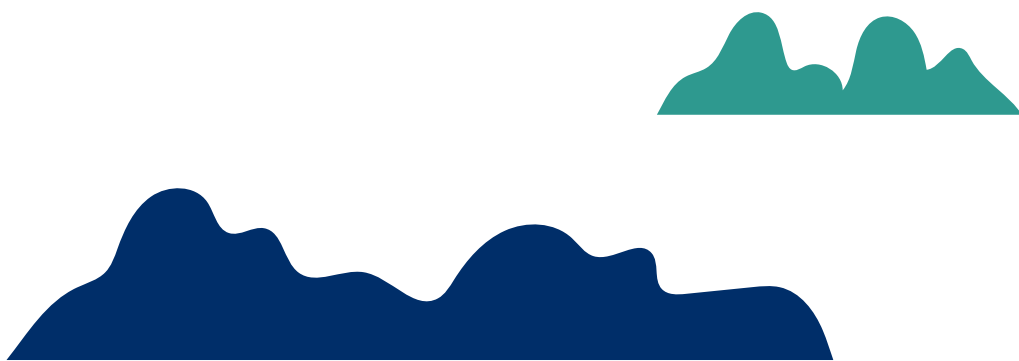
Total score for **Nature**  24

Total score for **Places**  24



keep some notes here:





Together,
we can all help make our
neighbourhoods safer, healthier
& free from pollution,
with cleaner air!

