



## Walk Derbyshire Evaluation

Walk Derbyshire is a long-term vision, working towards a future where all parts of the public sector such as transport, health, housing, planning, and education work together with the voluntary sector and the community to help make every day walking as accessible as possible for everyone.



**LEEDS  
BECKETT  
UNIVERSITY**

Between March 2023 and March 2025 we funded system wide Pilots across our 8 districts and boroughs with an aim to increase levels of walking through engaging communities in learning about what would support people to walk more on an every day basis. More information on our 8 pilots can be found here: [Walk Derbyshire Pilots -](#)

We are working with Leeds Beckett University to understand the complex system change involved in promoting every day walking across the county. This includes examining the initial processes of developing diverse consortia and the broader Walk Derbyshire initiative itself. Through an embedded research approach, this will contribute to both academic research and practical learning in the field of physical activity interventions and systems working, ultimately striving to influence policy shifts and foster real change by collaborating closely with the consortia and communities.



## Evaluation

Study 1 of the evaluation: Exploring the strategic and operational understanding of Walk Derbyshire and the development of the Active Neighbourhood and Community Engagement Pilots.



LEEDS  
BECKETT  
UNIVERSITY

Rebecca Sutton, our embedded PhD student conducted semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders, strategic leads, consortia lead members (*previous, present and those who expressed interest to lead*) and commissioners to develop a holistic overview of the initial pilot consortia formation and development of the **Walk Derbyshire** programme.

27 interviews were conducted, averaging an hour in duration between November 2023 and January 2024. These interviews reflect consortium formation and stakeholder and strategic perceptions.

Follow up interviews with Pilot leads will follow at the start of 2025, along with focus groups with residents.

## Eight main themes were identified through inductive thematic analysis:



### Background and vision of Walk Derbyshire

This theme had consistent responses with all interviewees understanding the background and purpose of Walk Derbyshire.

Responses included understanding around test and learn, system working (although the vocabulary used to describe this differed), promoting everyday walking, with physical activity as a broader goal considered and as a wider aim.

*"Great potential for influence... Walk Derbyshire, that it lands and resonates with more wider system partners than physical activity and or sport or even move more."*

#### What this tells us:

- There is recognition that every day walking can be used to influence many agendas and that is already being seen through this work.
- Having a shared understanding of the vision has been helpful given that the Pilot process was relatively non-prescriptive to allow consortiums to follow where the community engagement themes took them.



### Strategic Direction and Partnerships

This theme explored shared themes across partners / role and purpose for organisation / change or growth in consortia / existing and new collaborations / lead partner role etc.

- The main theme that came out consistently was around challenging traditional approaches – most people were keen to do this but there was some tension where individuals were keen to explore new ways of working yet came from an organisation that worked traditionally.

*"Some of the areas are being led... by Voluntary Sector organisations, well that's fantastic yeah that's a complete shift in how to work."*

*"I think the other thing is the partner working. It's been a real opportunity for us to link with different people in the area. And I feel that there's lots of learning and lots of sharing that we can do"*



## Eight main themes were identified through inductive thematic analysis:



### Funding and Implementation Challenges (Impact and Effectiveness)

This theme includes adapting to changing circumstances / moving from solution focus to community led activity / impact of funding and external funding pressures

*"I think there's some as good work going on within the areas with 20 000 and it shows that it's not necessarily all about the money."*

*"I feel like it's been an enjoyable process and as I said before the flexibility with the funding and that allowing us to shape what that looks like for our district you... haven't felt pressured or that we've had to say something because we know it ticks a box for them. I think the programme allows that flexibility with it that we can still do that"*

#### What this tells us:

- A shared perspective is that the success of the program is not solely dependent on large funding amounts.
- Several participants point out that valuable work is happening even with relatively modest funding levels, which demonstrates that impactful outcomes are achievable without massive financial investments.
- Money, while important, is not the only factor driving success but that shared vision and developing relationships with new partners has also been extremely valuable.



### Challenges and Drawbacks

This theme focussed on initial misunderstandings around the role of pilot lead, pre-existing tensions and constraints on capacity and resource.

*"There was a bit of a misunderstanding about the lead applicant role. At first, it felt like I was expected to do everything, but that wasn't really the case. It's been about trying to balance that and make sure that responsibilities are shared."*

*"there were a few tensions with some of the partners involved and from the discussions there wasn't a clear lead", "as to the Council, at the time we didn't really want to force ourselves upon being the lead because it didn't have to be, it was meant to be collaborative..."*

#### What this tells us

- The challenges mentioned here around the lead role were reflections from Phase One and had been dealt with and roles understood by the time of the interviews.
- Partnership working is hard and it takes time to build trust between partners.
- Many of the challenges have been addressed as they have arisen and realised as learning throughout the process, which is testament to the openness and honesty of participants. This has led to better collaborative working.



## Eight main themes were identified through inductive thematic analysis:



### Consortium Development and Community Engagement

This theme had discussions around the approach to community engagement and how consortiums developed and worked together including what the working approach and trust looked and felt like.

*"More time was needed at initial formation of consortiums to build relationships."*

*"I think the good thing about a consortium is that it does pull all those ideas together. And it causes people to work together rather than pulling in opposite directions. So that's got to be a benefit."*

#### What this tells us

- Forming new working relationships does take time and effort and then building trust into this takes longer and is a constant process, especially where dynamics change and new ideas or people are brought in.
- There was recognition for the need to bring in community and resident voice and that this was something that needed to be built upon that hadn't always been seen in previous working.



### Achievements and Learning

This theme looked at learning and adaptation, network support, need for training and trust building.

*"It's making sure that we're not duplicating efforts, and that we're working smarter, not harder. By having that consortium group, we've been able to share what we're doing and make sure that we're all working towards the same goal."*

*"I think there's a lot more flexibility and a lot more awareness of trying to do something bottom up instead of top down."*

*"it feels like the trust has built because we were happy to have some of those difficult conversations"*

#### What this tells us

Trust and developing trust is a major theme throughout the Pilot work – those places where there is trust, appear to thrive and can communicate openly and honestly with a better sense of collaboration.

- Trust isn't a given and does need to be worked on.
- Levels of trust can depend on differing personalities, ways of working and previous experiences.



## Eight main themes were identified through inductive thematic analysis:



### Impact and future direction

This theme explored sustainability of the Pilot work, feelings of uncertainty (now overcome to an extent), future opportunities and growth.

*"I feel quite optimistic that, again, some of those right foundations are being put in place... for that future impact and work to come to some fruition."*

*"this is about walking initially, but actually this consortium could be used moving forward... we're looking at this as a five, 10, 15 year programme about getting people active... And if we can... get momentum, to get more funding... [it] could be really key in driving that forward."*

#### What this tells us

From an early stage, people were already recognising the potential for further collaborative working and impact post Pilot.

- These interviews were completed by January 2024 and the work that followed has created the foundations for sustainability for these collaborations moving forward.



### Working approaches

This theme looked at a shift in focus towards learning, from solution focussed to community led approach / collaboration and 'new way of working' / 'integration of feedback loops' – how they reacted to learning and how comm feeds back into system and reacting and responding.

*I think there's definitely things we've taken from the last six months, particularly that we wouldn't do again. But there's some things that we would definitely do more of, when we think about engagement specifically. But I think that's all part of learning."*

*"There was a real vision and a real move from just working in isolation for districts"*

#### What this tells us

The learning aspect to this work seems to have been appreciated across the County.

- Recognition that 'learning' is also about development and is a positive action in itself.



## Flexibility in funding



One of the significant strengths and key learnings of the Walk Derbyshire initiative has undoubtedly been the enhanced flexibility demonstrated by Public Health in its administrative processes and levels of engagement.

This consciously more relaxed and community-led approach from the outset, while initially encountering some friction around the requirements of the early application stages, ultimately proved beneficial.

Public Health's willingness to adapt, offering extended deadlines, additional support, and a broader understanding of funding intentions when challenges arose, fostered a more collaborative environment.



As highlighted by a leader within a 3rd sector and CIC organisation and community consortium.

*"The informal and relaxed approach .... is a huge help for us as grassroots... you're always willing to see it from a different point of view and give me and colleagues some valuable input,"*

underscoring the positive impact of this flexible and understanding stance in empowering community-driven initiatives.







## Next Steps

- Community and resident engagement research phase
- Presenting learning at Conference / workshop
- Understanding impact on health inequalities and physical inactivity

The next 12 months will see the design, delivery and completion of study two, thesis write-up and a conference presentation.

The next research phase involves following the pathway of emergent findings in an adaptive evaluation approach.

Qualitative data sources will be used to measure changes, enablers, and barriers in engagement with community voice.