Case study

Climate Action Leeds

Alwoodley Walk to School Week 2024

LIVING STREETS LET'S WALK TO SCHOOL COMMUNITY FUND LEEDS CYCLING CAMPAIGN Climate Action Leeds Leeds Community Foundation

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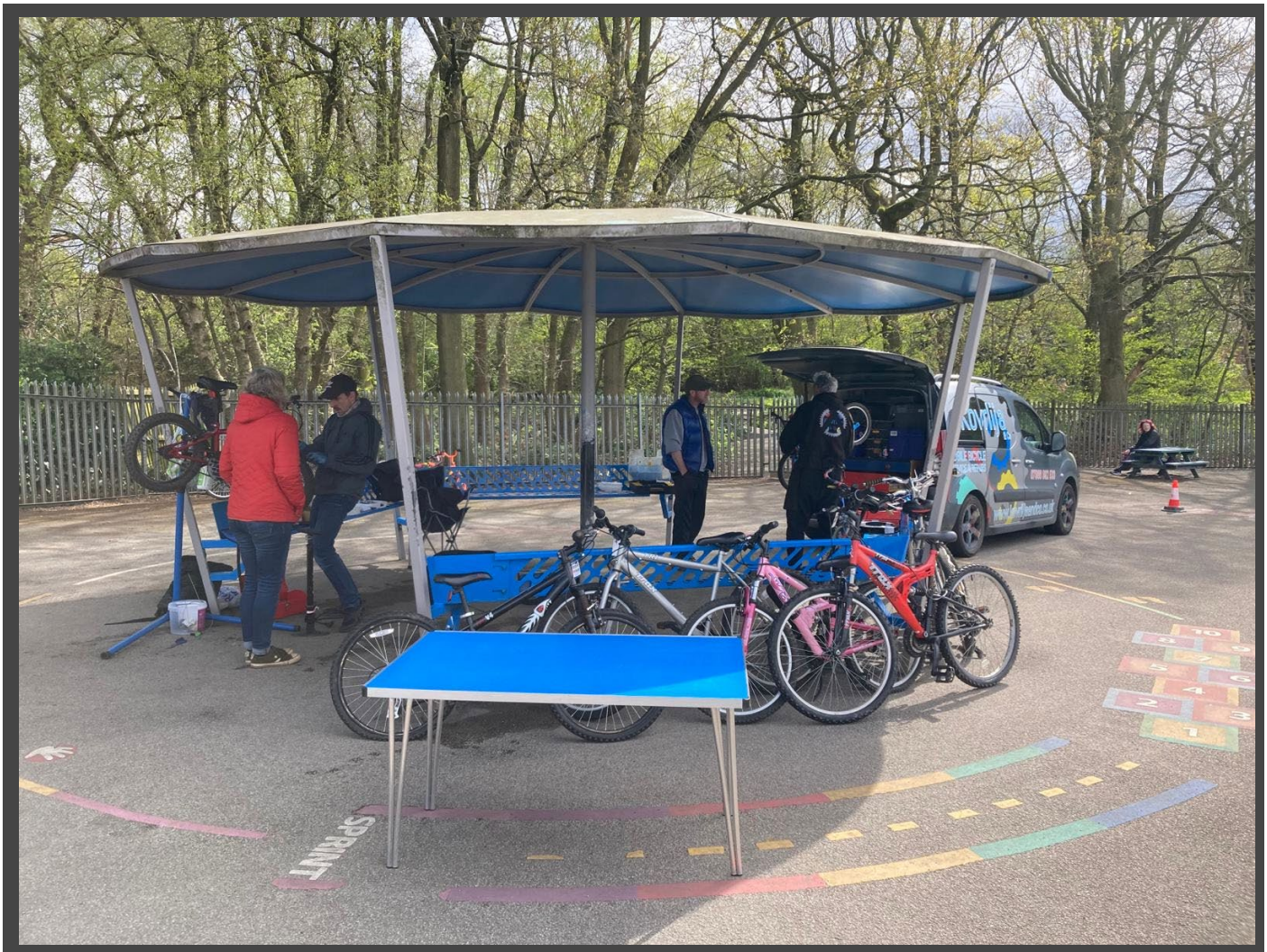


Bike MOT day at Wigton primary school, ahead of Walk to School week

Summary

Alwoodley 2030 Climate Hub supported a successful 'Walk to School' week from 7-10th May at all seven primary schools in Alwoodley ward: Allerton Church of England, Alwoodley, Brodetsky, Highfield, Primley Wood, St Paul's and Wigton Primary Schools. The initiative was supported by Climate Action Leeds (via the Alwoodley 2030 Climate Hub and the Transport Transition Partner), by staff and parents at the seven primary schools, by the Leeds Cycling Campaign, the Leeds Community Foundation and by Living Streets. Alwoodley 2030 Climate Hub and Living Streets led an intensive campaign to inspire children and families to 'take a pledge' to use more active travel during the Walk to School week. This included:

- Schools being encouraged to sign up for the Walk to School week, including participation in monitoring activities (which included a WOW ('Walk Once a Week') Travel Tracker account with 'Living Streets', a charity which promotes everyday walking)

Climate Action Leeds case study (summary version): Alwoodley Walk to School Week 2024

- Publicity campaigns run by each school, including posters designed by kids, school gate banners, notices in newsletters, encouragement from staff, social media posts to parents and other school-led activities.
- Assemblies being run by Living Streets staff in the run up to the Walk to School week, including use of a life-size foot character called 'Strider'. Active encouragement for parents and kids during Walk to School week, including visits by 'Strider' to celebration assemblies and school gate/playground visits. A couple of schools also took up the offer of a Hedgehog mascot from Leeds City Council's Influencing Travel Behaviour Team.
- Living Streets' 'WOW' Travel Tracker platform being used to track travel patterns within each school, from February/March onwards - this involved kids logging their travel to school each day using WOW buttons.
- Parents being encouraged to complete an initial survey and to make a pledge about how they would use more active travel during Walk to School week (e.g. more cycling, walking or scooting; and more use of 'Park and Stride', involving at least 10 minutes walk by their kids).
- 'WOW' badges being given to kids who logged their travel regularly and 'Pledge' badges being given to kids whose parents made pledges for Walk to School week, with schools being encouraged to monitor WOW and pledge rates by class.
- More families being encouraged to cycle, with free Bike MOTs being undertaken for around 450 bikes during April, provided free by a local bike shop. Leeds Cycling Campaign also ran 'easy ride' for families in the area, just before the Walk to School week. Cycle mentoring, offered by Cycle North, was welcomed by the schools but not taken up in practice.
- Parents who had made pledges being asked to complete a follow-up survey in the following week, sharing their experience of the week, with further feedback being collected via social media.

How is this helping to deliver the CAL aims of a zero carbon, nature friendly, socially just Leeds by the 2030s?

This initiative encouraged kids and families to experiment with using more active travel modes (e.g. walking, cycling, scooting or 'Park and Stride') during Walk to School week. The longer term aim of Walk to School week was to encourage families to switch to using more active travel modes on a more lasting basis, having tried them out during the week itself. Switching to more active travel to primary school helps to save carbon and improve local air quality. More active travel can also reduce congestion around school gates and thereby improve road safety. And, finally, active travel brings social benefits by being cheaper than driving, by reducing traffic and congestion for residents living in streets around the school and by contributing to kids' health and wellbeing.

What has been the impact of the project/activity?

The impact of the Walk to School week has been monitored in two ways: via the interim and final parent survey and via Living Street's WOW Travel Tracker. The parent surveys provided good quality data, particularly for the initial survey which attracted 762 responses across all the schools. But, at the time of this case study, there were only 74 responses to the final survey: this limited sample may be biased towards people who found their pledges easy to meet. The WOW Travel Tracker played a really important role in motivating kids. However, it collects travel mode data from

kids on a self-reported basis and may be subject to peer pressure bias. Based on these evidence sources, key findings about impact were as follows.

Initial survey data, combined with school roll data, showed that around **29% of pupils in the seven schools** (representing an estimated 40% of families) signed up to pledges. Common factors that encouraged respondents to make the pledge to actively travel during Walk to School week included: environmental benefits, fitness, the fact they already used active travel, and that their child or children were keen to take part.

Pledge data from the initial survey showed that around **45% of families making pledges already used active travel** (e.g. walking, cycling, scooting) with 30% normally driving and the remainder using a mix of driving, walking, cycling, scooting and 'Park and Stride' (i.e. driving combined with a walk of at least 10 minutes). The baseline figure for 'active travel' in the WOW Travel tracker was lower (34%), possibly because those already using active travel were more likely to make a pledge than those usually driving.

Analysis of the initial survey showed that **most of the pledges involved more walking to school (69%) while 31% involved more use of 'Park and Stride', 12% involved more cycling and 1% involved more scooting.** Some families (14%) nominated multiple modes in their pledges.

There was anecdotal evidence that **the Walk to School week had a significant impact on travel patterns,** with people noticing that traffic was much lower than usual around the schools during the week. One local resident said:

> *'Good morning. I live on Belvedere Avenue, with an entrance to Highfield School on our road. This morning, there's hardly any traffic associated with the usual school run! A successful start to the walk to school initiative, it would seem. Well done to all involved!' (Community feedback via social media)*

WOW Travel Tracker data collected by Living Streets (up to end May) reported that **the proportion of pupils being driven decreased dramatically (from around 55% in the baseline to 18% in May) while 'Park and Stride' increased from around 9% to 28%. Active travel increased from around 34% in the baseline to 53% in May** (with walking/wheeling increasing from 30% to 45%, cycling increasing from 2 to 3% and scooting/skating increasing from 2% to 5%). Living Streets reported that the WOW Travel Tracker showed a noticeable change in behaviour when each school started using the tracker and then again during the Walk to School week in early May.

Survey data on what people actually did during Walk to School week is more limited, being based on only 74 responses to the final survey. Almost all of those responding to the final survey reported that they **completed their pledge on all four school days in the Walk to School week (7-10 May).** But this data may be biased because those who found the pledge easy were more likely to complete the final survey.

When asked what strategies they used during Walk to School week, **just over half (54%) of final survey respondents said that they used walking, while 14% used cycling to school and 8% used scooting to school.** About 8% used Park and Stride while 16% used a combination of strategies (e.g. active travel on some days and Park and Stride on others). These figures don't necessarily represent 'new' or 'experimental' behaviours, because the responses included people who normally walked, cycled and scooted anyway.

Analysis of qualitative responses to the final survey shows that **relatively good weather** during the Walk to School week (7-10 May) was an important factor contributing to successful take up of new travel modes during the week. Other factors that helped were **children's own enthusiasm**, the fact that people had made a pledge and careful

planning. Some families were able to carry through their pledges because they lived a short distance away or they already used active travel for their usual school journeys.

Factors identified in the final survey as making it more challenging for people to carry through their pledges included **work, time pressures and other commitments,** as well as the weather. A few people mentioned childcare and logistics (e.g. because their kids were picked up or taken to school by a childminder).

When asked whether their experience during Walk to School week would influence their ongoing behaviour vis a vis travel to school, about 46% of final survey respondents said that they were already using active travel before Walk to School week (i.e. the Walk to School week had no influence on them). This is very similar to the 45% reporting in the initial survey that they already used active travel and to the 45% in the final survey reporting that fulfilling the pledge was 'very easy'. However, **42% said that the week had influenced their future behaviour to some degree** (e.g. by demonstrating that it was relatively easy to use active travel to get to school). A further 4% said that the week would not influence their future behaviour while 6% gave no response to this question. 78% of families responding to the final survey who had not previously used active travel said that their future behaviour was likely to be influenced by the Walk to School week.

What has been the carbon impact of the project/activity?

One of the aims of this case study is to assess the carbon impact of the Alwoodley Walk to School week. Families who normally drive to school were encouraged to calculate their daily carbon emissions from travel to and from school, using an online carbon calculator operated by 'Mission Emissions'. The method is similar to that used in the CAL carbon measurement tool, but more of the detailed calculations are done directly by the user. We used the outputs from the Mission Emissions carbon calculator, as inputted by 157 families to the initial survey, to calculate that the average CO2e emissions by drivers was **670 g CO2e per driving family per day** (covering journeys to and from school). We then estimated the direct carbon impact of the Walk to School week for two groups of families who will generate the greatest carbon saving:

- **Group 1:** families who normally drove but who committed to use active travel only during the Walk to School week (i.e. walking, cycling and/or scooting). While the final survey might suggest that most families carried through their pledge every day, we have accounted for bias in the final survey sample by assuming that families on average carried through their pledge on 3 rather than 4 days out of 4. There were 101 such families across all seven schools.

- **Group 2:** families who normally used a mix of modes (e.g. Park and Stride OR some driving and some active modes) but who committed to use active travel only during the Walk to School week (i.e. walking, cycling and/or scooting). We have assumed, conservatively, that this changed their travel behaviour on 1 day out of 4, since they were already using some active travel. There were 160 such families across all seven schools.

Conservatively, we have not attributed any carbon savings to families who shifted their mix of modes slightly, nor those who committed to do more 'Park and Stride' during the Walk to School week. By focusing on carbon savings for Groups 1 and 2 only, we avoid attributing carbon savings to families who were already using active travel every day.

We estimate that **310 kg of CO2 equivalent** was saved directly during Walk to School week across all seven Alwoodley schools (comprising an estimated 203 kg from Group 1 and a further 107 kg from Group 2). Details of our calculations, and further impact data, is available in the full version of this case study.

Climate Action Leeds case study (summary version): Alwoodley Walk to School Week 2024

However, there is evidence from the final survey that – for some families – the Walk to School week may have a lasting impact on their travel to school behaviours. By encouraging families to experiment with active travel, and through them finding that active travel was relatively easy (at least when the weather was favourable), the Walk to School week may have a lasting impact on carbon emissions. We combined findings from the initial and final survey to estimate that 78% of families in Groups 1 and 2 may continue to use active travel for (on average) one day per school week, for 30 out of the 38 weeks in the school year (allowing for some bad weather). On this basis, we estimate that the lasting carbon savings from the Alwoodley Walk to School week are likely to be around **4 tonnes of CO2e for a school year** across all seven primary schools. This figure could be improved through continued interventions (e.g. ongoing promotion of Living Streets' WOW (Walk Once a Week) tracker and ongoing activities by individual schools).

What could the carbon impacts be if this project/activity was scaled up to a Leeds city level?

We have used the estimates of carbon savings per school to estimate the impact of every primary school in Leeds running a 'Walk to School' week. We note that some other schools in the city may already be doing this but we recommend that Leeds City Council should take the initiative and support a city-wide 'Walk to School' week, including street closures and parking arrangements to support active travel and 'Park and Stride'.

We calculated the potential city-wide impact by scaling up from 7 to 227 state primary schools across the city[1]. The estimated total carbon savings from every primary school running a 'Walk to School' week, or a similar Active Travel Campaign', would be **10 tonnes CO2e direct savings during the week** itself, and an **estimated 130 tonnes per annum for lasting behaviour change** on the part of some families who continued to drive less and use active travel more as a result of taking part in the Walk to School week. While these calculations suggest that carbon impacts appear to be modest (compared to total annual CO2e emissions of about 6-13 tonnes per person per annum in the UK[2]), more active travel would generate air quality, health, well-being and other socio-economic benefits for children and families.

What helped make this a success?

Success factors were identified in the final survey and in a feedback session held with representatives from Alwoodley 2030 Climate Hub, the Transition Partner team, the Living Streets team and local schools. These were:

- Making it fun for kids and engaging them through the WOW Travel Tracker, badges, certificates and poster design competitions, so that they were using 'pester power' to influence their parents.
- Engaging with the WOW Travel Tracker and Living Streets created an initial 'surge' in active travel behaviour, with a further surge during Walk to School week.
- The intensive week generated a sense of community, so that people weren't making changes on their own.
- Substantive support and resources being provided by Living Streets (see below).

[1] http://schoolswebdirectory.co.uk/leasearch.php?lea=leeds&where=1&submit=Submit

[2] The UK Government estimated around 6 tonnes of CO2e per person in 2023, but this only includes emissions within the UK. When adjusted for emissions associated with imported and exported goods, this footprint rises to an estimated 13 tonnes CO2 per person per year. See further detail here.

Climate Action Leeds case study (summary version): Alwoodley Walk to School Week 2024

- Extensive engagement and communications activity with each school being undertaken by Alwoodley 2030 Carbon Hub and the Living Streets team, alongside input from key members of staff at each school (e.g. sustainability leads, head teachers etc).
- Significant focus on measuring and monitoring, not only through the WOW Travel Tracker but through additional surveys before and after the Walk to School week, and through use of a convenient carbon calculator.
- Running the free Bike MOT workshops, which were popular and helped to raise awareness of the Walk to School week. Even if MOTS were done for bikes that weren't actually used for school travel, a significant uptick in pledge activity was reported after each of the Bike MOT workshops.
- Good luck in having dry weather during the Walk to School week – beyond the organisers' control but it all helped!

What resources were needed?

The estimated costs of running the Walk to School week across 7 schools were:

- **School subscriptions to the WOW Travel Tracker** and other resources provided by Living Streets were fully funded by the Government via Active Travel England. As a charity, Living Streets covered the cost of staff travel. They estimate that the WOW package would have cost an average of £500 per school, if not funded by ATE and Living Streets.
- **More than 20 days** contributed by the Alwoodley 2030 Hub Worker to organise the Bike MOTs, build relationships with the schools, organise the pledge system and organise publicity for the Walk to School week.
- **About 2 days** contributed before the Walk to School week by the Transport Transition Partner.
- **Several days** being contributed to Bike MOT by a local bike shop (2-3 mechanics per pop up shop per school)
- **Materials** (e.g. air pollution sensors, signs and banners, flyers, badges) costing more than £4,000. This was covered by a small grant from Climate Action Leeds plus a grant of £500 from Leeds Tidal.

What did you learn from this?

The Alwoodley Walk to School week was a pilot and the CAL team has learnt from it for future initiatives. The team now has a better sense of what they would ask schools to sign up to. Key learning points were that:

- Weeks like this will be much more effective if child-led and school-led. The key is to stimulate and harness their enthusiasm!
- It can take a lot of support and guidance for families to start cycling their school commute so, in this context, even a modest increase in cycling (e.g. from 2% to 3%) is a great achievement!
- The weather will affect the outcome, so choose a week when there's a reasonable chance of the weather being dry. There is an official UK Walk to School week (held from May 20 to May 25 in 2024). Schools can think

about how to prepare for the possibility of bad weather and make some provision to support active travel (e.g. making wellie racks available and making sure families know about these).

- Monitoring and measuring can help to motivate people and show the difference they're making. Involve the kids in doing the monitoring so that they are learning from it too!
- Bear in mind that you won't be able to assess the long-term impact of the week until later, after the week itself. You may want to plan some follow-up monitoring activity, such as continued use of the WOW Travel Tracker for a period after the Walk to School week.
- It's worth investigating whether the council can help to generate/provide traffic count data, air quality monitoring data and local weather data to add even more impact to the analysis.
- Think about whether the materials you use as incentives (e.g. badges) are climate friendly and emphasise this when handing them out. The Alwoodley badges were made locally, from recycled and recycleable materials, but this could have been communicated better.
- One school representative mentioned that she and her colleagues felt a bit bombarded with information at one point, in the run up to the Walk to School week. Communicate with schools early on so they know what information/resources to expect from you and when.
- Having strong commitment from the head teacher is a priority. The level of take-up in a given school is highly dependent on the effort that volunteers and staff are able to put in to promoting the badges and pledges to kids. This means that the organisers need to spend considerable time going into schools, building relationships and developing a team of volunteers in each school.
- Badge distribution can be time consuming and could be streamlined. This was undertaken on a school by school basis in multiple waves, ahead of Walk to School week. While this helped to build up excitement amongst the kids, it involved considerable time inputs from the hub worker, the lead volunteer and staff at each school. And make sure you print enough badges first time round!

What are the next steps on this project/activity (if any)?

Living Streets will undertake further impact analysis including WOW Travel Tracker data for June 2024. The CAL team, across the Alwoodley 2030 Climate Hub and Transport Transition Partner, are also planning to analyse local air pollution data, to provide further evidence of impact.

The Transport Transition Partner is planning to develop a toolkit to support roll out of Walk to School weeks across other schools in Leeds. There is potential for the Alwoodley schools to repeat a Walk to School week in future years, becoming a regular annual event. Research undertaken by Living Streets in Scotland found that behaviour change programmes are most cost-effective if undertaken for two years, but that subsequent years of activity continue to add benefit.

Alwoodley 2030 would like to convene local people in Alwoodley who indicated interest in working on long term behaviour and infrastructure change and are hoping to partner with Living Streets to explore options to present to local volunteers to take this forward.

Climate Action Leeds case study (summary version): Alwoodley Walk to School Week 2024

Links to any sources of information that were important for this project/activity

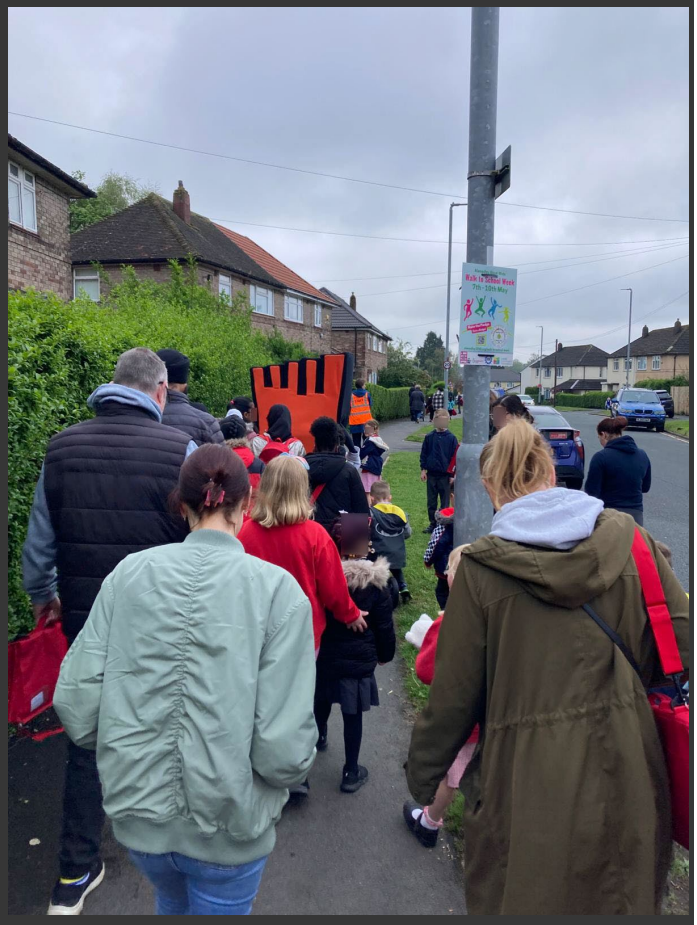
Alwoodley 2030 Climate Hub (supported by Climate Action Leeds and National Lottery Communities Fund)

Living Streets – Walk to School initiatives

WOW Travel Tracker

Missions Emissions (online carbon calculator for transport emissions)

Each school used posters designed by the kids



'A life-sized foot-shaped character 'Strider' helped to inspire pupils to walk and scoot

Contact: Jen, Hub worker, Alwoodley 2030 Community Hub; info@alwoodley2030.org