

# UPLANDS LIVING STREETS

## Uplands Living Streets: Notes from our inaugural meeting Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> July 2020

The inaugural meeting of Uplands Living Streets took place on Zoom at the weekend, with nineteen local residents coming together to find out more about Living Streets and starting to discuss ways we can work together to make Uplands and Brynmill cleaner, greener and better for everyone.

It was great to see so many faces at the meeting, including most of our local Councillors, a representative of Uplands Traders Association and Friends of Cwmdonkin Park, plus of course many local residents, all of whom were keen to share their ideas.

Some recurring themes emerged from the meeting, including: serious concerns about traffic and air quality, with discussion about how we can reduce car speeds and introduce school walking zones, plus how we can encourage the day-time economy and 'shopping local'.

These themes are interconnected and so it is difficult, and possibly unhelpful to separate them out into tidy topic areas. The wide-ranging discussion, reproduced here for those of you who were unable to attend, gives a real flavour of the interests and concerns people have.

*Please note that this is a record of the discussion held and the views expressed are not necessarily those of Living Streets; we wanted to give a flavour of the wide range of views expressed and ideas discussed, and at future meetings we will develop a clear agenda of ideas and actions for taking forward.*

**John** provided information about a recent study looking at the presence of particulates and nitrogen dioxide (both major air pollutants) in 63 cities in the UK. Swansea was at the top of the list for the worst air quality.

Statistics indicate that there are 16 early deaths in Uplands each year attributable to poor air quality. Currently, in the section of road opposite Tesco and Subway, there are five lanes of traffic for pedestrians to negotiate, and in recent years cars and lorries have gradually pushed pavement space for pedestrians back, so that there is very little space for people to walk safely, or to cross the road.

*Idea: John would like to claim back some of that space with wider pavements for people, and less air pollution, pointing out that what's good for pedestrians is also good for disabled people, people pushing buggies and older people.*

**Dawn** agreed that the amount of space given over to cars is huge. In Uplands we have a refuge in the road near Brewstones and this is crucial in enabling people to cross the road safely. Crossings need to be sited on 'desire lines', i.e. where people actually want to cross naturally, rather than where traffic systems allow them.

## UPLANDS LIVING STREETS

Although Sketty Road down into Uplands is an arterial route, it doesn't mean we can't slow things down to make it safer for pedestrians. Often local businesses fear that changing things and making it more difficult for cars is bad for business, but evidence shows that local businesses actually benefit when changes are bedded in.

***Idea: The idea of 'shared space', used successfully in other cities, could be looked at. The road surface is levelled and pedestrians have right of way. Cars have to slow down with drivers taking much greater care to negotiate their way through.***

***John suggested making ourselves familiar with the new traffic arrangements on Kingsway, a major route, which has reduced the space for cars and introduced wider pavements, with parklets, and café owners have put out tables and chairs for customers. This is an example of how it could be done in Uplands.***

**Justin** wanted to make sure we do all we can to engage with Uplands traders. He talked about how enjoyable it has been to walk more during lockdown; we don't want to lose that.

He talked about the issue of drinking and street urinating, and ***wondered if we could investigate the provision of a self-cleaning toilet, as has been introduced recently in Llandeilo.***

**Jayne** felt that we are blessed to live in an area with 5 parks, and people like to spend time there rather than on bits of tarmac. She didn't feel that all traders benefit from Uplands Market; market day affects her business because people can't park until later in the day. Stopping cars means people can't pop in to the shops for things. We've got 30 min parking at the bottom of Uplands and this is good. Jayne felt that one size doesn't fit all.

**Dawn** agreed that it is very important to all work together, and it is also important for this Living Streets group to be open and say that it is a lobby group for people friendly spaces. Just as there is a car lobby, there are lobby groups for other things.

We all want local businesses to thrive and Uplands to be safer, cleaner and greener. Over the decades car use has dominated, and the idea has taken hold that if you want fresh air, you must go to the park. But there are new ways of thinking now that suggest it's a mistake to segregate cars and pedestrians. We have to exist side by side and remove the worst aspects of car driving-which includes poor air quality and dangerous roads. We don't want to lose parking in Uplands, in fact we need more for disabled people, but we need to be thinking about shifting the balance from the car to people.

**Rob** felt that motorists and traders' views shouldn't count for more than residents. We need to explore all options and have more discussion as a whole community, to broaden the debate across the citizenry. He is interested in the idea of a chicane through Uplands to slow traffic down. He wanted a moderate discussion, with all the pros and cons of ideas debated fully.

***Rob is interested in the idea of a green corridor from Cwmdonkin, and he would like to investigate pedestrian priority ideas from Singleton Park through to Brynmill. It's important to unpack and discuss all these ideas so that we can move forward!***

## UPLANDS LIVING STREETS

**Anne** was keen to bring in more people to discuss ideas for improving Uplands and Brynmill. During lockdown there have been opportunities to get out in the fresh air with less car and lorry traffic making it much more pleasant. There has been a real community feeling amongst neighbours and she had been disappointed to see a negative questionnaire sent out about pedestrianisation ideas. ***Anne felt we need to develop a leaflet which is much more balanced, which is sent out to all households and which sets out the issues we face with pollution and traffic in the area so that people can be better informed.***

**Anne** has also enjoyed less traffic when shopping in Uplands during lockdown. She felt that the parking area outside Tesco's is very dangerous, with people trying to cross the road, reverse their cars and turn right at two junctions (onto Glanmor Road and Uplands Grove.) ***Closing the Tesco's parking bay and replacing it with some planting would be much better.***

**Hedley**, as Acting Chair of the Friends of Cwmdonkin Park, pointed out the positives of living in an area where we have so many lovely parks, and all this has been augmented in the Uplands shopping area during lockdown because of the reduction in traffic. He talked about the difficulty of crossing at the bottom of Glanmor Road—the bottom of that hill is a very dangerous spot, but you need to cross it to get to the pelican crossing to then cross Sketty Road. ***This needs looking at.***

**Nick G** talked about 20mph speed limits. As a resident for more than 25 years he has witnessed 2 road traffic related deaths in Uplands, one outside his house. The local Police Community Support Officer surveyed traffic coming along the main road in Uplands and found that most cars were travelling at 30mph, which would lead to people being fatally injured if hit.

***Nick is interested in a trial run for the pedestrianisation idea.***

He also pointed out that there is a 'secret' car park in Uplands, at the Grove Surgery, which is often empty, especially in the evenings. The GPs there are happy for this to be used by the general public at a charge of £1ph. This may go some way to alleviating the anti-social and illegal parking in the area, ***and suggested we advertise it in a leaflet.***

***Another idea is trying out the use of picnic tables. They are trying this In Southend car park in Mumbles so that people can sit and eat meals purchased at local cafes. Could we try this for a month in Uplands to see how it works?***

**Jayne** was very interested in the idea of encouraging people to shop locally and asked how we could do it.

***Dawn suggested that promotional activity could be developed to encourage more people to walk to the shops, as evidence from other cities and towns points to increased footfall for businesses where walking is easier, as it encourages people to linger for longer.***

**Jayne** was concerned that her customers couldn't park when the monthly market is on, which means that they have to postpone their shopping on that day until after 2.00pm.

# UPLANDS LIVING STREETS

**Dave** felt it was important to build on the success of Uplands Market, which has brought more people and a sense of regeneration to Uplands.

**Nick D** talked about the importance of lowering speed limits to reduce accidents, and informed the group that the Senedd has this week announced its policy of making 20mph the default speed in all residential areas in Wales. He asked about Living Streets campaigns to make walking to school safer.

**Dawn** described some of the campaigns, including ***Park & Stride, WOW (Walk Once a Week), and school street closures for cars at the beginning and end of the school day.*** Local schools would need to be engaged and there would be issues to address with drivers and local residents, but the benefits in terms of better air quality, safer streets and better physical health and wellbeing could be huge.

***Sadly, we've lost our local lollipop lady, so it would be a good idea to put other measures in place.***

**Sharon** confirmed that she had witnessed lots of near misses around the schools in Brynmill, and that ***there would need to be some negotiating with car driving parents to make any changes work.***

**Peter** mentioned his work try and introduce a Park & Stride scheme for Brynmill School in 2007. He has campaigned for 20mph limits and a one-way system designed to make things safer around the school. ***He also talked about the idea of the Rec being the venue for a Park & Stride scheme.***

He has had a bus stop converted into a parking space at school closure time to encourage people to park there rather than nearer the school, and has worked to reconfigure Kemble Street for car drop-offs.

Peter questioned whether closing streets would work.

***Anne suggested that there might be quite a few local people who are already DBS checked who could volunteer on a rota to run a Park & Stride scheme.***

**Dawn** commented that in other parts of the world broadening pavements and pedestrianising post-lockdown has been grasped as an opportunity because people have realised the benefits of reduced or slower traffic and the importance of green space.

Cycling has increased during lockdown, but currently we still have to negotiate lots of traffic to get our kids to our lovely parks to ride their bikes. Many people are put off cycling because they are too afraid to ride on busy roads.

**Dave** is interested in public transport and the benefits that a better system would have for everyone, and asked whether a publicly owned transport system was something the Council had powers to take on.

**Nick** talked about Swansea's poor public transport system, and how out of town shopping areas have killed our High Streets. Cities in Germany, Austria, Denmark, Netherlands are decades ahead of the UK. In these countries cycling is much more prevalent and urban policies make peoples' quality of life much better than here.

## UPLANDS LIVING STREETS

The key is a superb public transport system.

***We need to be thinking differently; rather than the economy versus trees, spaces, people, we should be prioritising wellbeing for all, including our traders, people and the economy together. To do this we need to think and talk together about small changes, but also the bigger picture. Cities are more than machines!***

**Mary** pointed out that unfortunately Swansea doesn't have public transport, what it does have is private and very expensive.

She emphasised the importance of recognising that the discussions we are having now are not firm plans, they are ideas we are all talking about together to see where we want to go, eventually, as a community. Nothing is definite at the moment.

**Mary** has spoken to a Highways Officer recently about how the area has developed over the years, and Uplands was described as 'hostile to pedestrians'. It is an area that has evolved to benefit cars and this is problematic.

A Welsh Local Government Association research report has recently highlighted the increased rates of asthma and respiratory disorders related to air pollution, and the fact that it affects babies in utero.

Locally we have lost some big trees on Beechwood Road near the car wash and this loss of green infrastructure has led to increased noise and air pollution which affects many people living and working in that area on a daily basis.

She posed a question about where could put more greenery in Uplands.

***20mph on our roads is a great idea-can we use greenery in creative ways to slow traffic down so we don't have to block roads?***

***Can we set up Play Streets (roads closed for periods of time to allow children to play safely near their homes)?***

**Sharon** wanted to discuss the idea of pedestrianising Gwydr Sq and whether the effect might be to divert traffic to residential streets.

**Dawn** said this was unknown as yet, but a traffic survey was due to be issued soon, and apparently the results are saying that traffic would be improved. Research indicates that rat-runs are most often used by non-local traffic, which will then seek other routes, and the likelihood is that in this case this would be Brynmill Lane. If we want to improve air quality and safety we must reduce car use, and we therefore must think about better public transport, more cycling and safer walking. This does mean change, which can sometimes be awkward; 'I have recently lost my parking space outside my house because of changes, but I didn't oppose it because the changes are beneficial to everyone as a whole!'

Dawn pointed out that this Living Streets group has no power to implement anything, and so there is no need for people to feel fearful. The group is just a voice amongst many, trying to discuss ideas to make things better and to lobby for change. The hope is that it can bring speakers in, then lobby for any changes that local people want to see happen, perhaps apply for grant funding from the National Lottery, for example.

# UPLANDS LIVING STREETS

**Dawn** talked about the local economy. The shopping we do in Sainsbury's and Tesco's goes elsewhere, to the big companies. But the money we send in local cafes and the market stays more locally, in our region.

We do have trouble with rowdy nightlife, we all live amongst this, but we also want those businesses to do well and so we need to be having these discussions with them. It is a false division and unhelpful to separate out people and business, cars and green spaces, etc.

**Laura** talked about air quality and how during lockdown it has been possible for her to reduce her long-term asthma medication, because of the reduction in air pollution. Air pollution is a serious but invisible problem for us all.

**Allyson** is a member of Wheelrights and local resident and talked about how she tries to make using her car a last resort; she tries to think about whether she can cycle and walk for every journey.

***We have many back or 'green' lanes locally, and she uses these frequently to avoid traffic. They are mostly un-used by others, but we could really benefit by having more of these.***

Our public transport is quite good locally but the Quadrant Bus Station is too small for the number of buses that need to use it, and there are very few or none at all on Sundays for many!

***Finding ways to do more walking, creating more accessible green ways and back lanes would be excellent.***

***Dawn agreed that green lanes are an under-used resource and it would be a good idea to make these safer for women and lone walkers / cyclists.***

## Next Steps

- It was agreed that we will hold a monthly meeting to build on the positive energy created in the group.
- We will develop the ideas discussed and create an agenda for action to move forward.
- We want to utilise the wide-ranging skills and experience amongst us, and it would be great if people could join and help with all the things we need to do, such as managing social media, liaising with the Council, etc.
- Everyone is invited to join Uplands Living Streets for an annual fee of £1, and to sign up to the mailing list.

<http://www.uplandslivingstreets.org/join-us/>