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‘You feel unusual walking’: the invisible presence of walking in four English cities

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Abstract

Walking is widely recognised as good for health and for the environment, yet many short journeys in urban areas continue to be undertaken by car. This paper draws on research from a large multi-method project to analyse the factors that limit walking for everyday travel. It is argued that although most people see walking in a positive light, and almost everyone walks on some occasions, as an activity it remains barely visible within society, and is rarely recognised in the planning of urban infrastructure. Our research shows that under current urban conditions constraints imposed by family and life-style factors, perceptions of safety and convenience, and expectations about what means of everyday travel are normal severely restrict levels of walking for many people. We argue that while low levels of walking for particular purposes, especially leisure and health, are common and expected, walking is rarely seen as a visible or viable form of everyday transport. To step outside of these norms of expectation by walking more is constructed as unusual behaviour, and the fact that a substantial amount of walking does take place on urban streets is barely acknowledged. We argue that there is need to recognise fully the walking that exists, and to plan more effectively to accommodate pedestrians so that walking is perceived as an expected way of moving around urban areas.

Highlights:

- Many people are discouraged from walking for everyday journeys because of concerns about safety and lack of time due to other commitments.
- However, a major factor is the lack of visibility of walking in the urban environment and the extent to which walking for everyday journeys is viewed as abnormal.
- The paper argues that the needs of pedestrians should be more fully incorporated into urban planning, thus making it easier for people to realise the health benefits to be gained from walking regularly for everyday travel.

Key words: Walking; normality; risk; family; travel; planning; health

Total word length: 6796 (including abstract, highlights, boxes and references)

'You feel unusual walking': the invisible presence of walking in four English cities

1. Introduction: walking in 21st century Britain

'*More walking ... for short journeys has benefits for individuals in terms of their health – they are more likely to achieve a healthy weight and to have better mental well-being. There are benefits for communities too with safer and more pleasant streets, better air quality and lower carbon emissions, and reduced congestion*' (DfT/DoH 2010, p.4). These words, written by the then Ministers of State for Transport and Health in the UK Government's Active Travel Strategy seem unproblematic. The benefits of active travel are clear, and are supported by extensive research. For instance, a number of recent reviews have demonstrated the role that exercise, including walking, can have in reducing levels of obesity and a range of associated life-style related diseases (Ogilvie et al 2004, 2007). A reduction of traffic volumes in urban areas would not only create a more attractive local environment for pedestrians, but could have further advantages in terms of reducing the incidence of respiratory illness caused by traffic-related pollution (Briggs et al. 2000, 2008). At a larger scale, switching short trips from cars to walking also reduces greenhouse gas emissions and contributes to the UK's carbon reduction targets (DfT 2011a). With transport contributing 25 per cent of the country's greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions this could be significant (European Commission 2009). Finally, in heavy traffic conditions and on certain routes walking in urban areas may be quicker and more convenient than driving.[1] However, effecting changes in the embedded travel behaviour of the British public is difficult and despite a substantial commitment of resources to sustainable active travel including walking and cycling (DfT 2011a) there is little evidence of significant change in the travel behaviour of the majority of the population. For instance the proportion of all trips undertaken on foot or by bike in Britain has dropped from 29 per cent 1995/7 to 24 per cent in

[1]. Evidence from field work in case study towns.

2012 with no evidence of a recent upturn in active travel. Walking forms the vast majority of this active travel and fell from 27 per cent in 1995/7 to 22 per cent in 2012 (DfT 2013). Of course such figures exclude the walking that takes place as part of as multi-mode trip, and that which occurs indoors in shopping malls and similar locations. For many people this could account for a substantial part of their total walking activity.

From an international perspective people in Britain do not walk less than those in most other comparable countries, and rates of walking are substantially higher than in either North America or Australia. In much of continental Europe (for instance The Netherlands, Sweden, and Germany) walking accounts for 22-23 per cent of all trips and in North America and Australia it is below ten per cent. In Europe only Spain (35 per cent) and Switzerland (45 per cent) record levels of walking that are substantially higher than those found in Britain (Basset et al. 2008). Thus, it can be argued, that walking in Britain is already at a relatively high level and this may, in part, account for the limited success of campaigns to increase active travel through walking. However, comparisons with cycling are also instructive. Compared to parts of continental Europe levels of cycling in the UK are very low - two per cent of all trips are by bike compared to 25 per cent in The Netherlands and 15 per cent in Denmark (Basset et al. 2008) – and much greater resources have been put into promoting cycling than promoting walking (see websites of organisations such as Cycling England, Sustrans, CTC). However, these campaigns have also had limited success and, with a few notable exceptions such as parts of central London, levels of cycling in Britain have remained stubbornly low. This implies that the problem of promoting active travel (through walking or cycling) is more fundamental than any suggestion that walking is already at or close to its maximum potential level.

The comparative data cited above are mostly taken from national travel surveys and should be interpreted with caution. Few such surveys are directly comparable, with methodologies changing over time and varying between countries, and it is not uncommon for short walking trips and, especially, walking as part of a multi-mode journey, to be under-recorded or omitted completely (Kunert et al. 2002). However, the broad trends can be taken as being reliable and there is clearly potential to increase levels of active travel in the UK. For instance in 1975/6 almost 35 per cent of all trips were undertaken on foot (DfT 2013): a reasonable aspiration might be to return to this level which would bring Britain more closely in line with the best-performing European nations. This paper uses data drawn from a large multi-method research project to examine the reasons why attempts to increase levels of walking in Britain have met with limited success. Our focus is on utility walking in urban areas because this is the context in which walking could most easily be built into everyday routines. There are many short journeys (of under about three km) that are currently undertaken by car or public transport that most people could accomplish on foot on at least some occasions. This could make a significant contribution to improving health and wellbeing. It is argued that part of the problem relates to the way in which walking is viewed by most people in Britain, and this is explored further in relation to theories of stigma and everyday life as developed by Goffman (1959, 1963). We also argue that because walking for enjoyment and the provision of attractive pedestrian spaces are seen principally in the context of leisure activities rather than as part of planning for everyday urban transport, walking is rarely seriously considered as an option for utility travel. Moreover walking tends to be given low priority in planning because it fares badly in the models which support transport planning, most of which prioritise economic factors over sustainability (Banister 2008). In addition there is a belief that increased traffic is causally related to economic growth which has led to the marginalisation of sustainable measures (Marsden et. al. 2014).

2. Researching walking

There is a substantial body of research literature on walking, but relatively little that focuses specifically on walking as an everyday form of transport. Three main strands of walking research can be identified: the study of walking as an embodied activity or performance (Ingold 2004, Wylie 2005, Ingold and Vergunst 2008, Lorimer and Lund, 2008, Middleton 2010, Lorimer 2011, Scheldeman 2011, Shortell and Brown 2014); the planning and promotion of urban walking for everyday journeys (for example DfT 2004, TfL 2012; Middleton, 2009); and the role of walking in promoting good health (Andrews et. al. 2012, Gatrell, 2013). In this brief review of walking-related research attention is focused only on the latter approach. Life-style diseases associated with inactivity and obesity are a major problem in most developed societies, and are becoming increasingly problematic globally. There is extensive research that demonstrates the beneficial effects of even moderate exercise in improving both physical and mental health. Most of this is conducted from a biomedical perspective and focuses on the physiological benefits of exercise generated from walking (Ogilvie et. al. 2007). Concern has been directed especially at problems of obesity in children, where lack of exercise when young may store up health problems for the future, and in the elderly. In the context of an increasingly aging population regular exercise can significantly improve health and wellbeing for all (Murphy et al. 2007; Fogelholm 2010, Buehler et al. 2011, Labans et al. 2011, Robertson et al. 2012). In this context geographers have also examined the ways in which modern lifestyles create 'obesogenic environments' in which sedentary living and travelling becomes the norm and exercise is perceived as both too difficult and, in some cases, too dangerous (Hinde and Dixon 2005, Lake and Townsend 2006, Lake et al. 2010). While some such literature does emphasise the ways in which more active travel can be incorporated into everyday routines, including activities such as walking upstairs rather than taking the office lift or walking to the corner shop, the majority of literature that promotes walking for health tends to focus on leisure activities (see for example the NHS and Natural England websites 'walking for health'). Walking becomes something that you do for both

pleasure and good health but it is largely divorced from utility travel and everyday life. Research reported in this paper focuses explicitly on the barriers to walking for practical purposes as part of everyday activity. Such activity could not only contribute to good health, but would also relieve pressure on urban transport systems helping to reduce both congestion and pollution.

In this paper we argue that, to date, academic research on walking is somewhat unbalanced. There has been extensive discussion of the cultural meaning and performance of walking, and of the role of walking in promoting good health; but relatively little attention has been paid to practical issues of how people use walking to move around urban areas, or to the multiple barriers that may make walking for short everyday journeys difficult for many. This paper focuses on precisely these issues. Through conversations with people going about their everyday journeys in four urban areas, together with observations of how people walked in their localities, it focuses on both the ways in which walking is (or is not) incorporated into everyday routines, and on the reasons why people do (and do not) walk. We argue that although issues of infrastructure and lifestyle are important, the key factor influencing the willingness of people to walk in urban areas is the perception of normality. Unless walking is perceived by most people as the obvious and normal way of undertaking short trips in urban areas it is likely to remain a marginalised activity.

Data used in this paper are drawn from a large EPSRC-funded project that used multiple methods to research aspects of walking and cycling in four English towns.[2] Full information about the methods used, and appraisal of their strengths and weaknesses, has been reported elsewhere (Pooley et al, 2011, 2013) and only brief details are given here. Although the project focused on both walking and cycling, only data relevant to walking are discussed in this paper. A range of both quantitative and qualitative methods were used, but this paper draws only on the in-depth interviews, ethnographies and observations carried out in the four case study towns of Leeds, Leicester, Worcester and

[2]. The terms town and city are used interchangeably in this paper.

Lancaster. These were selected to represent a range of provincial communities with varied social and economic structures and with different levels of existing intervention to promote active travel. In all the qualitative interventions the focus was on analysing how and why people travelled in their everyday life, and the role that walking (and cycling) played in these movements. The sample population was drawn from across the four cities and included people who used all forms of everyday travel (not only those who walked or cycled). It was almost evenly divided between males and females and included respondents from a wide range of adult ages (children were not included in the study) and from most social backgrounds. In addition special attention was focused on one neighbourhood in each city, chosen to reflect a specific type of community (one area of inner city social housing, one of mainly private housing with a large multi-ethnic population, and two more suburban locations, but all within walking or cycling distance of urban services). The researchers immersed themselves in the neighbourhoods studied and used a wide range of research tools adapted to local circumstances. These included both static and mobile interviews, household ethnographies, mobility inventories, observations and mobility mapping exercises. In total the data used for this paper consist of transcripts from 80 interviews (both mobile and static) and 20 in-depth and prolonged ethnographic encounters. Full details can be found in Pooley et. al (2013).

3. Results: the experience of walking in four English cities

We start by briefly reviewing what people told us about their experiences of walking in the four English cities studies. In qualitative research much depends on interpretation, and evidence presented is necessarily selective (Limb and Dwyer, 2001; Mason, 2002). Quotes provided in the text and in boxes 1 and 2 were distilled by a rigorous process of qualitative data analysis undertaken by the entire research team. Full details can be found elsewhere (Jones et. al. 2012, Pooley et. al. 2013). Many respondents in the case study cities stated that they gained enjoyment from walking with positive attributes including being in the fresh air, relaxation, control, convenience and the ability to interact more with the locality. Some respondents stated that they deliberately extended an

everyday walking journey so that they could explore and gain additional exercise. Walking was also seen as beneficial because it saved money by not using a car or public transport, was sociable and improved health. In some instances the short distance of a journey made walking the obvious choice. For some respondents the ability to undertake many of their everyday activities on foot was so central to their lifestyle that it was a major factor in determining their choice of where to live. A selection of typical quotes illustrating these points is given in Box 1. Given these positive discourses around walking it may seem strange to argue that walking is seen as in any way abnormal and that it is only rarely practiced. However, our central argument is that there is a large gap between what people say and what they actually do. This has been articulated elsewhere as an attitude-behaviour gap and occurs commonly in areas where an activity or behaviour is generally perceived to be beneficial (or where people might feel that such views are correct and appropriate), but where for a range of reasons such values and attitudes are not translated into everyday practices (Kollmuss and Agyeman 2002, Kennedy et al. 2009, Shove 2010).

When talking about walking, sometimes while walking, respondents identified a range of practical factors that restricted travel on foot. These were often articulated in the same interview that also gave a positive assessment of walking. Negative views on walking included problems of the urban infrastructure, ranging from uneven and broken pavements to the impact of traffic and pollution, concerns about personal safety, conflicts with pavement cyclists, the weather and family and life-cycle constraints. A common complaint was that the urban environment was designed for cars and not for pedestrians and that this made walkers feel like second class citizens. Although most respondents understood why many cyclists used pavements - cyclists are as marginalised in the urban environment as pedestrians - some respondents did see pavement cycling as a genuine threat. The impact of the weather was more muted with some saying they would walk in any weather but others stating they were fair weather walkers. Most significant of all were the family and life-cycle effects. Walking with children was seen as hard, and if there was anyone in the family with an

infirmity that restricted mobility this tended to also limit walking for all family members. Those who walked most frequently, and who incorporated walking into their routine everyday activities, were most often young, without children or other dependents, and often had financial or housing circumstances that made car ownership problematic. Many families did walk for leisure purposes, but this often entailed a trip by car to the countryside to walk in an off-road scenic location. One consequence of the relatively low rates of walking in the cities studied is that at some times of day many streets can be almost devoid of pedestrians. This low footfall is a further disincentive to walking because empty streets were usually perceived as unsafe streets, especially at night. Box 2 provides selected typical examples of the testimonies provided by respondents in the four case study cities.

From our analysis of the things people told us about walking in four cities we argue that one crucial factor that determined whether or not someone walked was the degree to which walking was seen as a normal and rational thing to do, and the extent to which it had become an habitual part of an individual's or family's lifestyle. Whereas some respondents had taken steps to make walking easy, for instance having outdoor clothes and shoes handy and a willingness to use these, other respondents found that walking was not compatible with their preferred clothing and considered that walking in stout shoes and a waterproof would make them stand out and be perceived as odd. A related factor was past experiences. Many of those who walked regularly had been doing so for a long time and had been brought up in households where walking was seen as normal. Such behaviour can be passed from one generation to another and become embedded in everyday behaviour. These differing views of the normality and acceptability of walking are summed up in the testimonies of two respondents whom we use as exemplars. Vince (age 45-54, car owner, in work and living with his adult daughter) stressed his family history of walking, his enjoyment of walking and his willingness to wear appropriate clothes: '*We have always been walkers. We have always enjoyed walking. ... I have plenty of wet weather gear that I put on*' (Vince, Leeds, interview). Clearly

for Vince walking was a normal means of travel which he comfortably incorporated into his everyday routines. Lara, also from Leeds, had a more ambiguous relationship with walking. She was young (under 25), lived with a flatmate and worked as a management trainee. She did not own a car and walked regularly. However, she also saw walking as sometimes problematic stating that: '*People still assume that there's something wrong with you if you don't drive'.* Although she did walk in all weathers she also admitted that she found this difficult and often did not have the right clothes or shoes: *' I would walk a lot more if I could. Often I don't have the right shoes with me*' (Lara , Leeds). The impression that Lara gives is that she walks from necessity, she accepts this and mostly does it cheerfully, but that if she could drive (and had access to a car) she would use that most of the time.

In addition to talking to people about walking, and walking with people through four cities, we also undertook detailed ethnographic field work in which multiple interactions with respondents were combined with prolonged observations of how walking was carried out in four contrasting neighbourhoods. In this brief section we use selected examples of these observations to contextualise, analyse and explain the experience of walking in the four case study towns. Our analysis is based on field notes, observations written after each intervention, and on recorded visual evidence. The account is deliberately impressionistic and is designed to convey the feelings that we, as researchers, had about walking in four English cities.

Most accompanied walks contained elements that were pleasurable but also occasions when walking was difficult or problematic. This is conveyed in the account of one accompanied walk in Leicester. Al was in her late 30s and had one daughter age 3. She lived with her partner and worked two days a week. The following notes were made during and after an accompanied walk home from work via her daughter's nursery.

'*Approximately 2.5 mile walk home from (work) via daughter's nursery. Al works two days/ week and makes this journey on each of those days. Rainy evening walk. Al tends to walk regardless of weather. She was wearing a rain coat and trainers –this (footwear) is what she also wears in work. The walk to the nursery was mainly along city centre shopping streets, and a shopping centre, most of which are pedestrianised. Al noted that she usually walks at a brisk pace for this part of the journey. After the nursery, Al was accompanied by her 3yr old daughter, and a pushchair. As her daughter has a long day at nursery, she goes in the pushchair for at least part of the journey home. ... Al had substantial difficulty in getting the pushchair up and down kerbs, even where the kerb is dropped but still has a lip. Al also noted concern about cars doing illegal U turns where she uses pedestrian crossings on some of the busy junctions, and she also noted a concern at the possibility that a car could go onto the pavement and present a risk to her daughter. Al and her daughter use the walk home as time for talking and playing –and consequently sometimes it takes 2 hours to get home. Al noted that talking could be difficult due to the noise of traffic, and she frequently stops walking in order to hear her daughter. Al's daughter notices things such as cobwebs and leaves, and likes to run about on a patch of grass they pass, and uses a wall as a climbing frame.* (Observations by CM during go-along with Al, Leicester)

This extract, typical of all four cities studied, conveys effectively the ways in which walking, especially with others, can be a pleasurable and sociable time. The walk provided space for Al's daughter to run, play and explore her surroundings, and time for Al to interact with her child. Al is also well-prepared for walking with outdoor clothes and footwear, and is willing to walk in most weathers. However, these positive aspects are balanced by the difficulty of negotiating kerbs, the intrusive noise of traffic and the perception that the behaviour of drivers could put Al and her daughter at risk. Like many others, Al walks, and gets pleasure from walking but does so in an environment that is constructed for cars rather than for pedestrians, and in which there are many factors that could conspire to discourage walking.

This simple description encapsulates many of the themes that we identified from living in the four study areas and from observing how people moved around. Walking was commonplace, either on its own or as part of a multi-mode journey, in some circumstances it was enjoyed, but it could also be fraught with difficulties and was rarely considered as a means of transport. It was simply something that you did to carry out the tasks necessary for everyday life. What was most obvious was the fact that urban environments are rarely constructed with the needs of pedestrians in mind, but that most people were very accepting of the constraints imposed by the environment through which they passed. However, this is not to say that all the places we studied were the same. Although they shared the characteristics that we have ascribed (above) to urban walking, they also reflected them in their own distinctive ways, though there is not space in this paper to develop this theme further.

4. Concluding discussion

In this paper we have presented selected evidence taken from an intensive series of interviews and field observations carried out in four English towns to argue that although most people walk some of the time as part of their everyday life, this activity is rarely noticed or recognized as a means of transport. It is, in other words, an almost invisible presence on the streets of these English cities. For most people some travel on foot is a necessary part of their everyday life, but it is not something that they consciously recognize. It is a habitual activity, almost as unnoticed as breathing, which does not form part of their conscious identity. When walking is done more obviously – for instance choosing to walk further than is necessary such as substituting a walk for a bus journey – it is perceived as odd. Some people choose to do this, and thus construct walking as part of their everyday identity, but for most residents visible and deliberate walking beyond that which is necessary to carry out everyday tasks is seen as abnormal. The only exception to this is walking for pleasure: recreational walking in a park or in the countryside for reasons of health and sociability is

mostly perceived as normal and beneficial. But it is viewed as a very different form of activity compared to utility walking for everyday travel.

To explain this situation we suggest that Goffman's classic work on interaction, everyday life and stigma may be of value. Walking (and indeed all forms of travel) is clearly an activity that involves performance and which constitutes an important aspect of social interaction in everyday life (Goffman 1959, De Certeau 1988, Butler 1990, Jensen 2013). Although an activity such as walking does not fit comfortably into Goffman's original three-fold categorization of the sources of stigma (defects of the body; defects of character such as mental illness; and membership of extreme or marginalised groups based on factors such as politics, religion, ethnicity or gender (Goffman 1963)), we argue that the ways in which most people view walking places those who do visibly and actively walk more than society normally expects in the position of being a member of an extreme and marginalised group. In Goffman's terms we suggest that they experience stigma and are constructed by the majority of society as abnormal because they 'mis-perform' or 'over-perform' walking. While walking is done only where necessary, or for recreation and pleasure, it is seen as acceptable and normal; but beyond these limits it becomes an aberrant activity undertaken by enthusiasts who are choosing to behave in ways that society does not currently construct as normal. Although these characteristics were represented in different ways in the four contrasting localities that we studied in detail, we argue that such attitudes to walking are not primarily class-based but are so deeply rooted in society that they transcend class distinctions (Bourdieu 1984). In most cases engaging in walking is not viewed as sufficiently different or threatening to generate hostility, but it is viewed as sitting outside the norms of behaviour embraced by most people. These norms reflect a society in which car use is seen not only as usual, but also necessary to negotiate everyday activities effectively and safely. The concept of behavioural norms has been extensively applied across a range of topics, including travel behaviour, consumption and environmental practices (see for example Anable 2005, Gatersleben and Uzzell 2007, Shove et al. 2009, Shove 2010, Nigbur et al. 2010), but walking as a

form of transport has received only limited attention, and much of the research on travel practices has been strongly quantitative. We believe that the qualitative evidence provided in this study sheds distinctive new light on the ways in which walking as transport is viewed within contemporary society.

Although our data are based on only four towns, we also argue that these conclusions have important implications for wider transport policy, and our detailed proposals have been spelled out elsewhere (Pooley et al. 2011). While walking is not viewed as a normal means of transport by most people (it is simply a necessary way of carrying out certain tasks and routines in everyday life), then it is unlikely to be taken seriously in transport planning (Hillman and Whalley 1979, Lumsdon and Mitchell 1999). Despite increased awareness of the importance of sustainable urban transport, most urban planning and design focuses on the provision of infrastructure and this necessarily privileges those forms of transport that are perceived by society to need most space: principally motor vehicles but increasingly in some locations also cyclists through the provision of (usually inadequate) dedicated cycle lanes (Banister 2008, Marsden et. al. 2014). On most urban streets shared with motorised traffic pedestrians have pavements and some regulated road crossings but no other provision is deemed necessary. Evidence from our research suggests that if increased levels of walking are to be achieved for short trips in urban areas then two things need to change. First, urban infrastructure needs to be constructed in such a way that pedestrians are given sufficient space and priority (for instance at road crossings) together with an environment in which walking is perceived to be both pleasurable and achievable. This requires better maintenance of pavements, increased separation of pedestrians from road traffic (including bicycles), and restrictions on the volume, speed, noise and emissions of road vehicles so that walking can become a dominant mode of movement in urban areas. Clearly, such provision must also avoid the mistakes of past schemes that too often created segregated pedestrian spaces that were unattractive and sometimes perceived as dangerous (Hubbard and Lilley 2004, Pooley et.al. 2010). Second, and in conjunction with the above

changes, there needs to be a reconstruction of societal norms so that walking becomes usual, and thus is seen as an expected form of transport for most short trips in urban areas. We believe that this requires a re-orientation of transport policy away from motor vehicles, and a fuller recognition of the importance and requirements of pedestrians in the urban environment as well as cycle users. Only by asserting the visibility of walking in the urban environment is it likely to command respect within society and to be given priority in urban planning and politics. Such policies could make a significant contribution to human health and wellbeing and support other recent calls for reappraisal of the role of walking in transport and health policies (Andrews et. al. 2012).

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Box 1: Positive attributes of walking

I enjoy walking, I do enjoy getting out in the fresh air and to get some exercise after I have been inside at work all day. It's a long time to be indoors (Stevie, 30s, Leeds, ethno).

Walking gives me full control over movements. In a way I can control everything. You don't rely on anybody, you only rely on yourself. ... I like to think through the day, talking to myself and planning for the next day, it's a thinking and planning activity (Molly, 40s, Leicester, interview).

I try and walk wherever I go and I think that's more of a monetary thing, trying to save on the expenditure of getting a taxi or whatever it might be. ... I save a lot of money by walking places and plus it's an exercise thing really (Tim, 20s, Leicester, go-along).

By the time you go into town in the car, got there, park the car, paid to park it or whatever, you pretty much could have walked it into town (Moses and Lisa, 60s, Worcester, interview).

We took all that [ease of getting to local shops and the town centre] into consideration, before we actually accepted the flat and did our own researches to what was in the area and whether we'd be accepted at the local surgery and dentist. ... Everything's within walking distance which is brilliant (Polly, 60s, Worcester, go-along)

I like to build a walk in to whatever I do because it makes me feel physically better (Deidre, 40s, Lancaster, interview).

There is a colleague in personnel who walks maybe slightly further and we have a bonding, we like to talk about it together that we both walk and how much we enjoy it (Percy, 50s, Worcester, go-along).

We have always been walkers. We have always enjoyed walking. ... I have plenty of wet weather gear that I put on (Vince, 40s, Leeds, interview)

*In text boxes names are pseudonyms and precise locational details have been removed to preserve anonymity. Interview refers to a static interview (usually in the home but sometimes in a public space) with an individual or group; go-along refers to an interview carried out while walking with the respondent(s); ethno refers to material recorded during an intervention made during the in-depth ethnographic study. Interviews and go-alongs are recorded for people who live anywhere in the built up area of the four towns studied but ethnographic data relates only to the specific locality studied in depth.

Box 2: Negative attributes of walking

That road is awful, the pavement is very narrow, and in autumn it's covered in leaves so you slip over half the time, it's terrifying. But by car the road is fine (Linda and Paul, 30s, Lancaster, ethno).

Whoever designed this estate didn't have pedestrians in mind. ... I have to go on a narrowish path with big piles of dog dirt on it (Nancy, 60s, Leeds, interview).

If I want to go to the Post Office, there's one quite close but I'll take the car because I don't like walking through the estate. ... I feel very vulnerable walking some places because I can't run. ... Walking through alleyways can be very claustrophobic and you feel a bit scared so I tend to walk the long way round on the road which adds journey time, but it's worth it (Jen, 40s, Worcester, interview).

It's OK when everyone walks it and you've got all your friends with you, I wouldn't want to go on my own so I would get the bus (Neela, teens, interview, Leicester).

When I'm a pedestrian I sometimes feel a bit threatened by cyclists that they're going a bit too fast and they do sort of you know weave in and out a little bit sometimes. ... (Sally, 50s, Worcester, interview).

I think time between activities makes a difference, even though it may be a short journey, we probably wouldn't walk or cycle because we've only got so much time to get from one place to another (Pete, 30s, Worcester, go-along).

I can't bear the thought of [my children] walking to school and getting wet, to then sit in wet clothes all day (Angie, 30s, Worcester, interview).

I get called the bag lady, because I walk everywhere and I have quite a lot of stuff with me. (Steph, 30s, Leeds, ethno)

The whole thing with transport and not having a car, I do feel like a second class citizen, there's definitely a sense that as a pedestrian and a cyclist you are definitely second class citizens. (Jim, 40s, Lancaster, interview)