

PARC Study, UKCRC Centre of Excellence for Public Health (NI), Queen's University Belfast

An exciting environmental development in east Belfast, the Connswater Community Greenway, is due to start later this year. The project will involve the creation of a nine kilometre linear park through east Belfast, with 19 kilometres of cycle and walkways connecting the existing open and green spaces from the Castlereagh Hills to Belfast Lough. The aim of the project is to regenerate the area to create a purpose built environment to encourage local residents to be more physically active and improve their quality of life.

Current guidelines recommend that adults should try to take 30 minutes and children should take 60 minutes of physical activity a day. There is strong evidence to show that regular physical activity can lower your risk of stroke, coronary heart disease, diabetes, cancer and improve your mental health. Researchers from Queens University have teamed up with the East Belfast Partnership to study the impact of the Connswater Community Greenway on the physical activity, health, and quality of life in the local residents. This will involve a face-to-face survey with nearly 1000 residents, to ask about their usual physical activity and ask what they think about their neighbourhood. Changes in the walkability of the neighbourhood will be assessed by measuring the features in the neighbourhood such as street connectivity and land use.

Over the coming months a number of physical activity initiatives will be developed in order to encourage individuals and communities to be more physically active. One such exciting project is the use of an innovative loyalty scheme where wearers of wristbands will earn points according to how far they walk in the Greenway, which can be exchanged for shopping vouchers or donated to charity.

As well as informing policy on future redevelopments, we anticipate that the project will have direct benefits in the local area through the creation of new opportunities for residents to become more physically active. For more information, contact Dr Mark Tully m.tully@qub.ac.uk or visit our website www.qub.ac.uk/coe