

Local businesses and communities can reap the benefits of improved walking and cycling facilities says Environment Minister Jane Davidson. The Minister was speaking from the Welsh Assembly Government's third Walking and Cycling Conference which is aimed at getting more people in Wales to walk and cycle regularly.

This year's conference was held in Port Talbot. The location was selected because of the council's efforts to develop high quality walking and cycling facilities and its progress in encouraging both the local community and visitors to the area to utilise them.

Speaking at the conference, the Minister said:

"The benefits of walking and cycling are not just restricted to health and wellbeing.

"New and improved walking and cycling routes often act as a catalyst for new businesses and facilitate the growth of existing ones.

“We have seen numerous examples of bike hire enterprises, cafes, hotels and B&Bs flourishing as a result of improvements to walking and cycling provision.

This in turn results in increased job opportunities within the local community and a more vibrant local economy.”

One good example of this is the economic growth stimulated by the mountain bike trails at Afan Forest Park. Just last week Afan Lodge, a hotel that particularly targets cyclists that use the local trails, won the ‘Best New Business’ award at the National Tourism Awards.

European funding has been secured to develop routes for walkers and cyclists. This will help attract visitors to Wales as well as providing useful paths for local people.

The promotion of walking and cycling can also result in growth in the third sector. Projects such as Pedal Power in Cardiff, which uses the Taff Trail as a safe environment for people with disabilities to enjoy cycling, have enjoyed great success over recent years and have provided opportunities within the community that would not otherwise have been available.

The Assembly Government’s Walking and Cycling Action Plan outlines exactly how it will encourage much greater participation in walking and cycling across the board. The plan is available to view at <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/transport/integrated/walkingcycling/>

The Minister added:

“ We have set ourselves some ambitious targets in the our Walking and Cycling Action plan, not least our goal to triple the proportion of adults and children who cycle to work and school.

“Whilst these are challenging targets, in my view they are definitely achievable.

“Our first annual report of the action plan showed that a good deal of progress has already been made. Our priority now is to build on that progress so that walking and cycling in Wales becomes a natural choice for both travel and recreation.”

Leader of Neath Port Talbot Council, Ali Thomas said:

"The Council is pleased that this important conference is being held here in Neath Port Talbot.

"We believe walking and cycling is key to improving the health and well being of our citizens and helps improve our environment.

"Improving our network of routes will also help attract visitors to enjoy our great countryside. We launched our own walking and cycling strategy earlier this year, which sets out our commitment to developing these activities throughout the county borough.

"We must now increase awareness of all the benefits to be gained and promote how cycling and walking can easily be a part of everyday life."