

Going Green in Manchester

The Lesbian and Gay Foundation recently launched a new campaign 'Go Green' in conjunction with Manchester City Council, aimed at getting LGBT people to increase cycle trips, halt the decline in walking and increase the trips to the city centre made by means other than the private car. In the first of three features, **Sarah McDermott** looks at the physical and mental health benefits of **Going Green!**

Cast your mind back to the start of January. How were you planning on bettering yourself this year? Were you going to finally find a new job? Sort out your love life? Quit smoking? Or, like so many of us, do you just want to shed that extra weight that you've been worrying about?

Whatever your plans, it's getting to the stage where many of us have faltered in our resolve or lost hope altogether. As worthwhile as our ambitions may have seemed, in the cold, harsh light of February they seem so much less... achievable.

But before you reach for the Häagen-Dazs in despair, there's still hope for your New Year reinvention. If you 'Go Green' with Manchester City Council you can boost your carbon brownie

points and enrich your life by making only a few changes to your daily routine.

Going Green in Manchester means one thing: getting out of the car and onto the street. Whether you walk to a friend's house, cycle to the shops or catch the bus to work, using public transportation is better for the planet, better for the community and better for you.

Recent years have seen a sharp decline in walking. People living in households with cars are particularly at risk, walking almost half as much as those who do not own cars. According to the Rambler's Association, men who are the main drivers of company cars, walk least of all: 131 miles per year on average.

Research suggests that lesbian and bisexual women are more likely to suffer from obesity than heterosexual women. Recreational alcohol and substance abuse is also higher among members of the gay community than it is among heterosexuals. Young LGB people are four times more likely to suffer major depression and three times more likely to be diagnosed with anxiety disorders. In short, we're not in great shape.



Now, if you need to sort out your clinical depression, most doctors would agree that walking to work isn't going to magically alleviate your symptoms. And it'll take more than a bit of cycling to do away with a generation's ingrained urge to binge drink. On a personal level, however, ditching the car could soon have you walking back to happiness.

Like any other form of exercise, walking works off calories while raising your metabolism so that

fat is burned off faster. Regular, brisk, walking can increase fitness, strengthen bones and make a body's muscles and joints more flexible. It improves circulation and strengthens the lungs. Walking is particularly good for the heart and can reduce the risk of heart disease.

Escaping the car is also good for your mental health. The exercise you get from walking instead of driving releases endorphins, the chemical stress-busters in your brain that help you relax. It also

5 things that make you 'Go Green' in 2008



WALK TO AND FROM WORK Clear your mind from the daily grind. Abandon the car, de-stress and maybe even check out the eye-candy!



USE PUBLIC TRANSPORT Make use of the transport in and around Manchester. There's a busy tram service and there's even a FREE bus service in the city centre, so it's cost-effective!



JOIN TEAM LGF! We have a host of charity challenges to enter including The Great Manchester Run and the first ever Walk Against Homophobia! Plenty to aim for and motivate you!



stimulates the production of serotonin, acting as a natural antidepressant. And with all the weight burning off, you'll soon be looking great and feeling even better about yourself.

On top of the health benefits, walking to work can help you de-stress. Instead of the road-rage that driving through the city can provoke, taking time to walk allows you to clear your mind and concentrate on more calming things. Stepping out for a walk can let you break away from the daily grind and walk your anxieties away.

There's no need to plunge in head-first and start trekking up mountains. If the walk to work seems daunting then start small – if you take a bus then get off one stop early. A few extra blocks' walk can get you back into the habit of using your feet. If the prospect of traipsing

through the streets seems like the duller thing in the world to you, there's plenty you can do to perk up the pavement. Dragging a friend along for company is an easy way to liven up a walk. Or, if your friends have better things to do than act as your personal entertainment, you can always grab a pair of headphones. In these days of cheap mp3 players, the old worries of tapes cutting out or CD tracks skipping are a thing of the past.

Walking can also bring the community closer together. After all, when was the last time you turned someone's head from inside your car? Driving might get you to work faster but you'll arrive with a spring in your step if you meet someone new while you're on your way. So if you still need an incentive, remember: in Manchester the streets are paved with eye candy.

So, what if you're still convinced that you wouldn't be seen dead on a pavement? There's always another option. Want to lose the motor but keep the speed? Hop on a bicycle! Up to five million people cycle to work in Britain every day.

With second-hand bikes cheaply available and new ones costing under £500, they're more affordable than a car. And without the palaver of topping up fuel, buying tickets or paying

for parking space, they may be the most convenient form of transportation available.

Manchester commuters may be surprised to learn that there's more to Canal Street than nightlife. The canals that run through Manchester provide a traffic-free route for pedestrians and reach as far as Salford.

The vicious cycle of inaction means that it's only when you begin exercising that any motivational hormones will start being produced. Once you're up and running, though, you'll soon discover that exercise is never as unbearable as it seems. In fact, you might even find yourself taking a walk just for the joy of it.

If you can't face taking to the streets alone, you can always fall back on organised events. The LGF's first Walk Against

Homophobia takes place in May. You can also join 'Team LGF' as part of BUPA's Great Manchester Run on May 18th or July's Manchester-Blackpool bike ride, which is open to people of all abilities. The LGF will be holding training sessions in the evenings leading up to the run, open to all members of the LGBT community who are hoping to get into shape.

Interested in getting fit and fundraising? Please email emma@lgf.org.uk or simon@lgf.org.uk or check the Get Involved section of our website for updates on our charity challenge events.

In the next couple of issues of outnorthwest, we look at the environmental health benefits and the Manchester-wide benefits of Going Green!



BUY A BIKE! Ok, so it's not a car, but it's certainly more affordable and there's no hassle of looking and paying for a parking space to worry about.

USE CANAL FOOTPATHS Yes, in case you didn't know, you can easily walk to and from the city via canal footpaths and avoid the busy roads and fumes that go with it!

LGBT Sports Groups and Clubs

The LGBT community in Manchester have a host of sports groups and clubs for anyone to get involved in and stay fit and healthy. For a full list of these groups, please go to the scene and listings section of this magazine.