

You may not realise it, but May is National Walking Month and as you can imagine, as sports minister, I love this initiative. Walking is a much underestimated and undervalued form of physical activity. When I was developing the sports strategy in the early days of my appointment I was keen to look at other forms of exercise than traditional uber competitive, team or ultimately sweaty activities, and walking fits firmly into that.

We are lucky locally that there are many good walks available. Not only do we have the Lakes, several official walking routes and rights of way but we also have the newly opened river path from Aylesford to Allington Lock. Most are flat, and many are tarmac paths so can be used by people with different mobility needs, but all contribute to one of the easiest and cheapest ways to stay fit and healthy. Walking not only strengthens your heart but reduces the risk of heart disease and strokes.

In fact, a brisk walk for 30 minutes every day is said to reduce your risk of a stroke by 27%. If this wasn't enough, it also reduces bad levels of cholesterol, helps with weight loss but can be great for your mental health too. When I first had Freddie, I used to love escaping the house and going for a walk up to Sainsbury's. It might have been only a mile round trip, but it kept me sane and had the benefit of helping me shed those baby pounds too.

I cannot praise walking enough and there are some excellent walking for health groups locally that organise trips for all age groups and needs. In summary the routes are available, the groups are active, the days are getting longer, and the sun is breaking through – there are no more excuses; it is time to go for a walk!