

# Moving in the right direction

## **Increasing physical activity in Northumberland**



**Northumberland**  
County Council

[www.northumberland.gov.uk](http://www.northumberland.gov.uk)

# Contents

Forewords .....	2
Active People .....	4
Boosting health and wellbeing .....	4
A little bit makes a big difference .....	5
Taking the first step .....	7
Northumberland's people.....	8
Being active in Northumberland .....	9
Barriers to being active .....	10
Active Opportunities .....	11
Building on Northumberland communities' strengths .....	11
Places Leisure .....	12
There's plenty of support out there .....	15
Playzones .....	18
Active Neighbourhoods .....	19
Human powered travel .....	20
Designing active places .....	21
Health Impact Assessments .....	22
Active Communities .....	23
Working together to achieve more .....	23
Northumberland County Partnership.....	24
Recommended next steps .....	25
Acknowledgements .....	27

# Forewords



**Gill O'Neill**

*Executive Director of Public Health Inequalities  
and Stronger Communities*



**Improving and protecting the public's health is my core statutory responsibility within Northumberland County Council. Working to ensure equity in health outcomes and aspiring to close avoidable and unacceptable inequalities residents face is a responsibility I take incredibly seriously.**

It is a privilege to work in Northumberland where I am surrounded by colleagues and partner agencies who also want to improve and protect the health and wellbeing of our residents and communities. As a collective we can create the conditions to better enable people to maximise their health and social outcomes. We have a County Mission in Northumberland to change a generations' health over the next twenty years. Having such a long term commitment across partners is the only way to be steadfast in our ambition and have unwavering determination to create the building blocks for a good life. I want all residents to live, learn, work connect and grow old well in Northumberland.

Last year my report focused on ageing well. As the population of Northumberland has an

older age profile compared with surrounding areas, we must adapt to reduce the number of years people live in poor health. The report focused on the strengths and assets available across Northumberland to encourage and enable people to live independently for as long as possible. One of the recommendations was to focus more on mobility and physical activities. As people age the importance of retaining good mobility is essential.

This year's report is focused on being more physically active and is a follow up to last year's recommendation.

Over the last twelve months there have been exciting developments with regards to our physical activity offer in Northumberland. A new long-term contract with Places Leisure has commenced with a focus on encouraging the inactive to become active. This will help to maximise the benefits of our exemplary leisure centres and be proactive reaching into communities furthest away from leisure centres and targeting effort with residents who are less

able to be physically active. Joining up with community based offers across Northumberland.

I appreciate you may all be thinking 'Yes, yes I know being physically active is good for you.' Not new news. Sometimes the hardest messages to give are the ones that have been heard before but not acted upon. Now is the time to act because it will improve health and social outcomes in a short period of time.

Being more physically active can reduce the need for prescribed medication such as blood pressure tablets, anti depressants and painkillers. It can prevent or delay the need for operations such as knee replacements. More fundamentally it can reduce the risk of falls and can enable people to live independently in their own homes for longer. The benefits are both mental and physical.

Being more physically active also often means you are more socially active too thus reducing isolation. There are many inspiring case studies to demonstrate it is possible to do this! Give it a go as there is something for everyone in Northumberland.

The content of the report highlights that small changes can make big differences.

Please be an advocate in your professional / community leadership roles to champion being more physically active. Have a conversation with friends and family about doing more. It doesn't have to cost money and is a vital intervention. Going from nothing to something is brilliant. Start and keep going is my challenge to you all.

**Gill O'Neill**

Councillor  
Veronica Jones



**Northumberland County Councillor Veronica Jones, cabinet member for Public Health:**

*"We know that being active every day is a good foundation for a healthy life and the more time we spend being active, the greater the health benefits are.*

*"Regular activity is also associated with improved learning and attainment among our children and young people, better mental health, cardiovascular fitness, and healthy weight.*

*"This report helps to identify where we are already succeeding and how we can work together to use the knowledge and skills we have to ensure we support all Northumberland residents to be active and lead healthy, happier lives."*

**Councillor Veronica Jones**

Councillor  
Jeff  
Watson



**Northumberland County Councillor Jeff Watson, cabinet member with responsibility for Healthy Lives, said:**

*"The environment we live in has a major impact on our quality of life and the amount and type of physical activity we do. Over recent years the County Council has undertaken a countywide £105 million investment programme to upgrade and transform sport and leisure facilities across Northumberland.*

*"In Northumberland, we are lucky to have many opportunities to participate in physical activities right across the county, with large areas of countryside and coastline, and a network of parks and open public space.*

*"This report explores the evidence and looks at how we can build on the work that has been achieved to date, and how we can move forward to support Northumberland communities to stay active and healthier, protecting themselves against a range of chronic conditions such as coronary heart disease, type 2 diabetes, obesity, mental health problems and social isolation."*

**Councillor Jeff Watson**

# Active People

**Physical activity is any bodily movement produced by skeletal muscles that results in energy expenditure.<sup>1</sup>**

Being active every day provides a foundation for a healthier and happier life. The more time we spend being active, the greater the health benefits. However, being active doesn't have to take up hours of time or require lots of equipment, nor does it require high levels of skill. Small changes make a big difference and step by step increases in the amount of activity we do contributes to improvements in health and quality of life. Activities we can build into daily routine such as using the stairs rather than the lift, getting off the bus a stop earlier and walking the rest of the way, or carrying our shopping home are all small changes that can make a big difference over time.



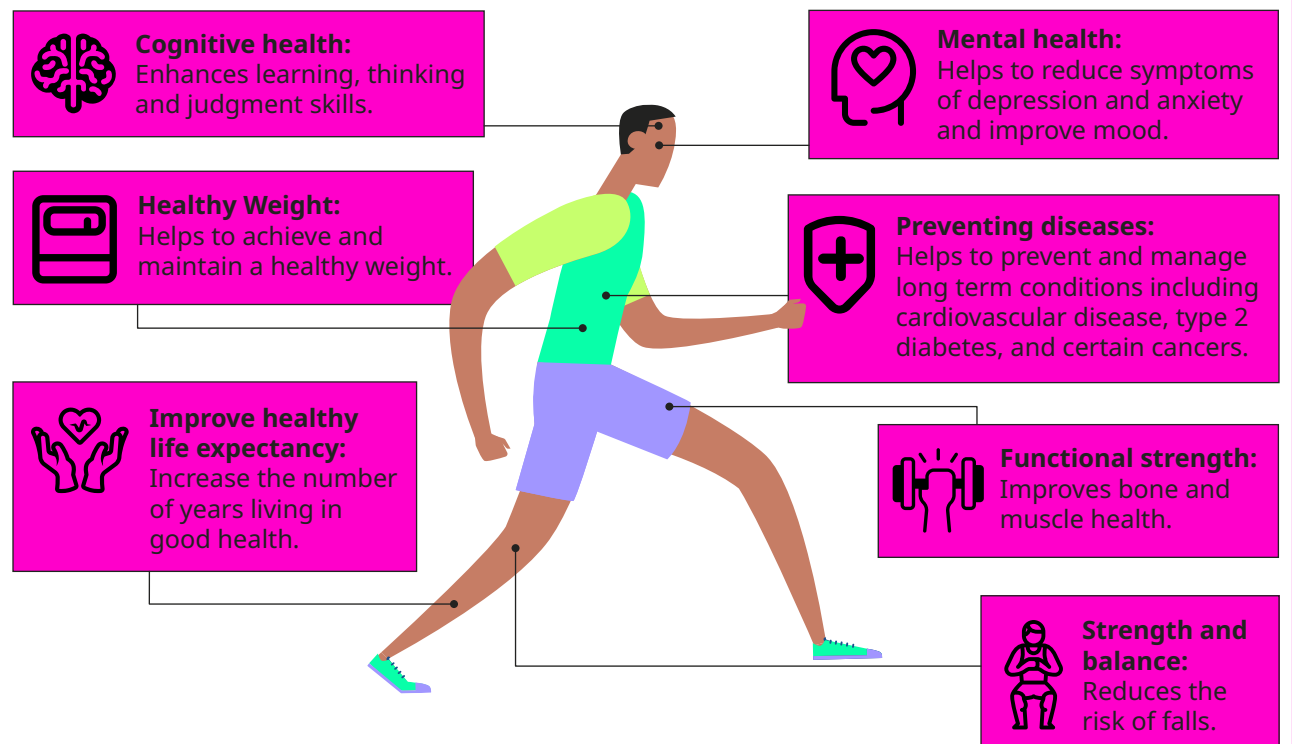
## References

<sup>1</sup> Caspersen, C.J., Powell, K.E. and Christenson, G.M., 1985. Physical activity, exercise, and physical fitness: definitions and distinctions for health-related research. Public health reports, 100(2), p.126.

## Boosting health and wellbeing

**There is compelling evidence that physical activity improves our health and wellbeing. Regular activity is associated with improved learning and attainment among our children and young people, better mental health, cardiovascular fitness, and healthy weight.**

Physical activity also protects against a range of chronic conditions such as coronary heart disease, type 2 diabetes, obesity, mental health problems and social isolation. This in turn delivers cost savings to the health and care system, as well as delivering wider social and economic benefits for individuals and communities.





Sedentary behaviour such as sitting for long periods of time without moving is also linked to poorer health outcomes. This can be the case even for those who also exercise on a regular basis.

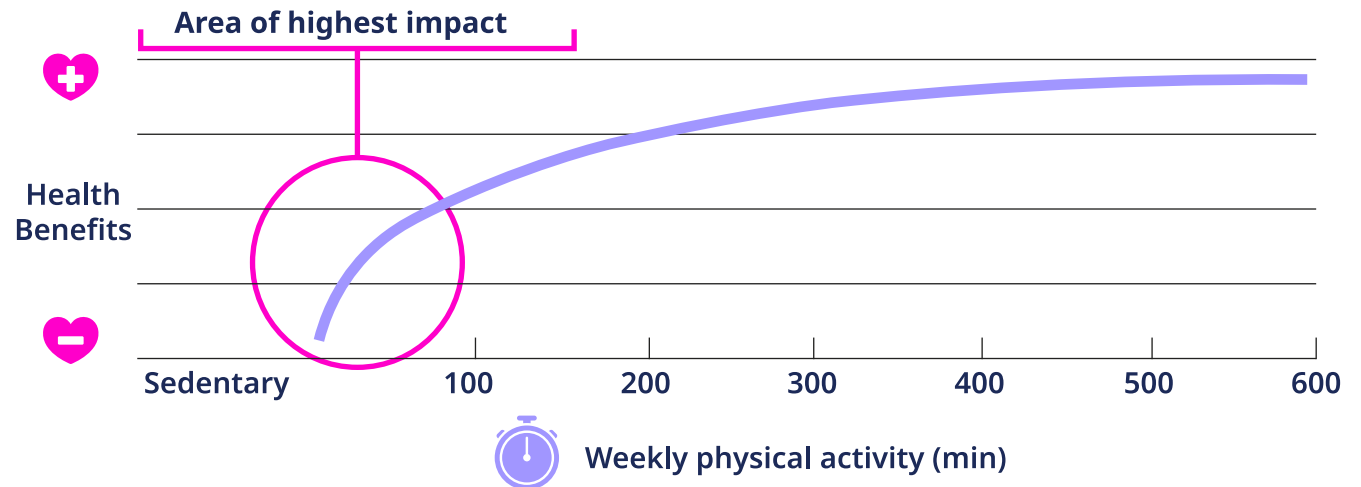
Last year's Director of Public Health Report highlighted just how important being active is to ageing well. It can promote physical, mental and social functioning, keep us independent and therefore live and contribute for longer periods within communities. Reducing the risk of ill health by regularly exercising, may also help to increase years lived in good health and reduce pressures on our health and social care services.

In addition to the many health and wellbeing benefits brought about by being physically active, moving more also makes for a more vibrant economy. Businesses with physically active workforces often benefit from increased levels of productivity, fewer occupational accidents and reduced number of days lost through sickness absence. People walking and cycling is good for local business too. A significant proportion of sales in small, local businesses often comes from those travelling by an active mode of transport that make frequent visits to town and village centres often increasing retail spend.

Physical activity is important for maintaining strength and balance, which helps maintain good physical function and reduces the risk of falls. Typically, muscle mass and strength reach their peak at around 30 to 35 years of age. After that, muscle power and performance decline steadily and then faster after age 65 for women and 70 for men. Doing regular strengthening activities can help maintain strength and slow these declines.

## A little bit makes a big difference

The greatest health benefits from physical activity are gained when moving from low levels of physical activity to increased levels.



### Free medicine - try it

Regular physical activity alongside health care, can play an important role in managing long-term conditions.<sup>2</sup> Research shows that being active can reduce symptoms such as musculoskeletal pain, tiredness, shortness of breath or chest pain. Regular exercise has also been found to reduce likelihood of falls and improve energy levels. Those with a long-term condition should look to increase their exercise slowly and seek medical advice around the best exercise for their condition.



#### References

<sup>2</sup> Sports England. (2021) *Physical activity benefits outweigh risks for people with long-term health conditions*. Available at: <https://www.sportengland.org/news/physical-activity-benefits-outweigh-risks-people-long-term-health-conditions> (Accessed 2nd December 2024)

## Parkinson's Movement to Music

Parkinson's Movement to Music is a weekly exercise class based in Ashington that supports people living with Parkinson's Disease engage in physical activity through movement and music. The classes enhance physical mobility and mental well-being while also offering a platform for social interaction and support. Sessions are designed to be adaptable, with participants having the option to stand or remain seated, depending on their comfort and mobility levels. The movements are specifically tailored to help improve balance, coordination, and flexibility. Attendees have reported that the classes have improved their balance, flexibility and overall strength, as well as improving their ability to perform everyday tasks. It also empowered them to manage their condition, reduced isolation and boosted their confidence.



“

**If physical activity  
were a drug, we would  
refer to it as a miracle cure,  
due to the great many  
illnesses it can prevent and  
help treat.**

”

**UK Chief Medical Officers'  
Physical Activity Guidelines**



## Mary's story: Managing COPD through physical activity

Mary is a retired 62-year-old woman who is married and lives in Ashington. She has been living with Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) and was struggling to walk even short distances. Recently she started attending exercise classes at the Age UK Round House Centre in Ashington after a referral from the pulmonary rehabilitation team to try and improve her fitness levels. A programme of activities was developed with instructors including gym sessions, Zumba classes and belly dancing! Mary continues to love attending her exercise classes and has noticed a big difference in her physical and mental health. She has more energy, has noticed her muscles getting stronger in her legs and has stopped having recurring chest infections.



# Taking the first step

Chief Medical Officers within the UK are responsible for issuing guidance on the amount of physical activity we should complete using the most up to date evidence base. Guidelines show the volume, duration, frequency and type of physical activity we should be completing across the life course to achieve health benefits.

These two diagrams show the guidance for children and young people and adults and older adults. Other guidelines can be found at: [www.gov.uk/government/collections/physical-activity-guidelines](http://www.gov.uk/government/collections/physical-activity-guidelines)

## Physical activity for children and young people



## Physical activity for adults and older adults

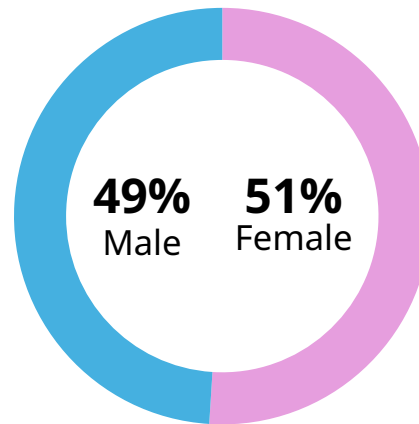


# Northumberland's people

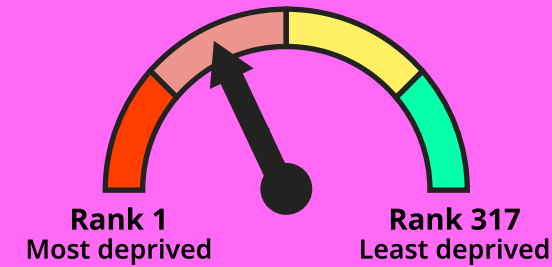
Population  
**324,400**  
People



**96% of people**  
classed themselves  
as White British

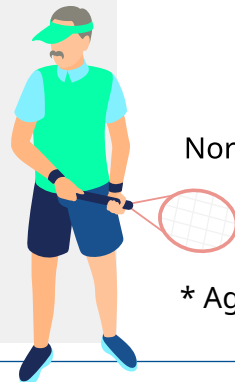
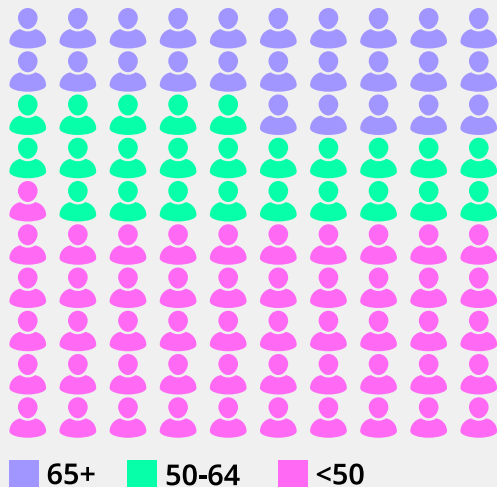


**Ranked 131 out of 317**  
Local authorities in the Index of  
Multiple Deprivation

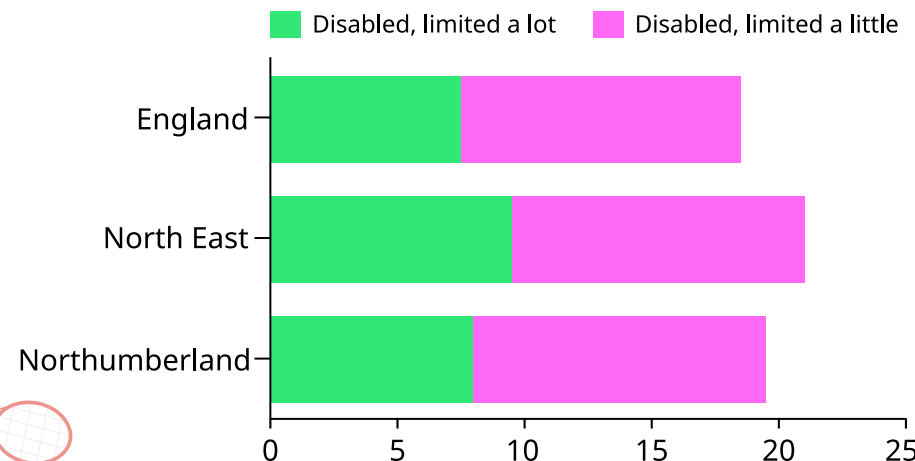


**We have a higher proportion of areas with greatest level of deprivation than the England average**

**Almost half** of the population  
are aged 50 or above



**19% of people have a disability\*.** This is higher than England average, but lower than the North East average.



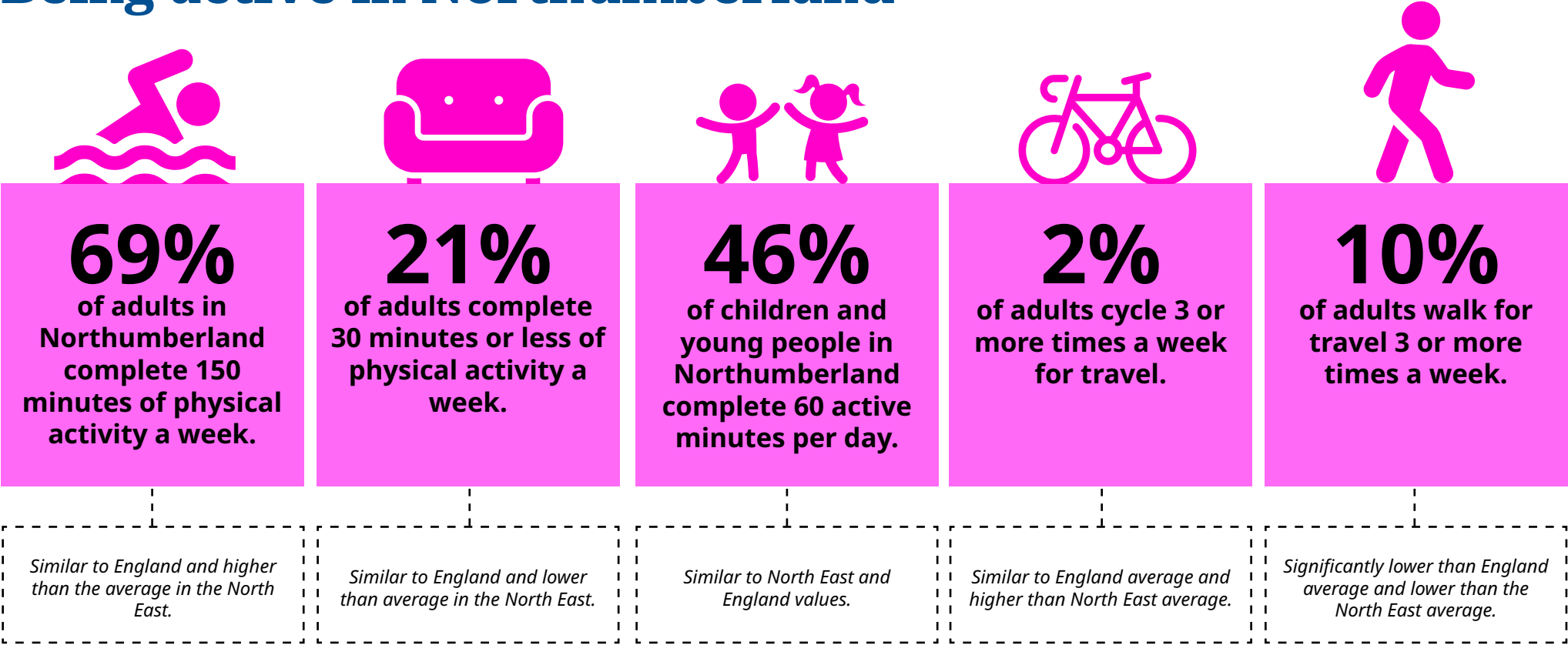
\* Age standardised proportion, as reported by ONS.



[Reference for above statistics](#)

Office of National Statistics mid-2023 population estimates. Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government. *The English Indices of Deprivation 2019*

# Being active in Northumberland



### Inequalities in physical activity

We know from wider evidence that we are less likely to be physically active living in Northumberland if we are in an older age group, female, have a lower income, be from an ethnic minority group, have a disability, or have a long term condition.

Older age

Women

Low income groups

Ethnic minority groups

People with disabilities

People with long term conditions

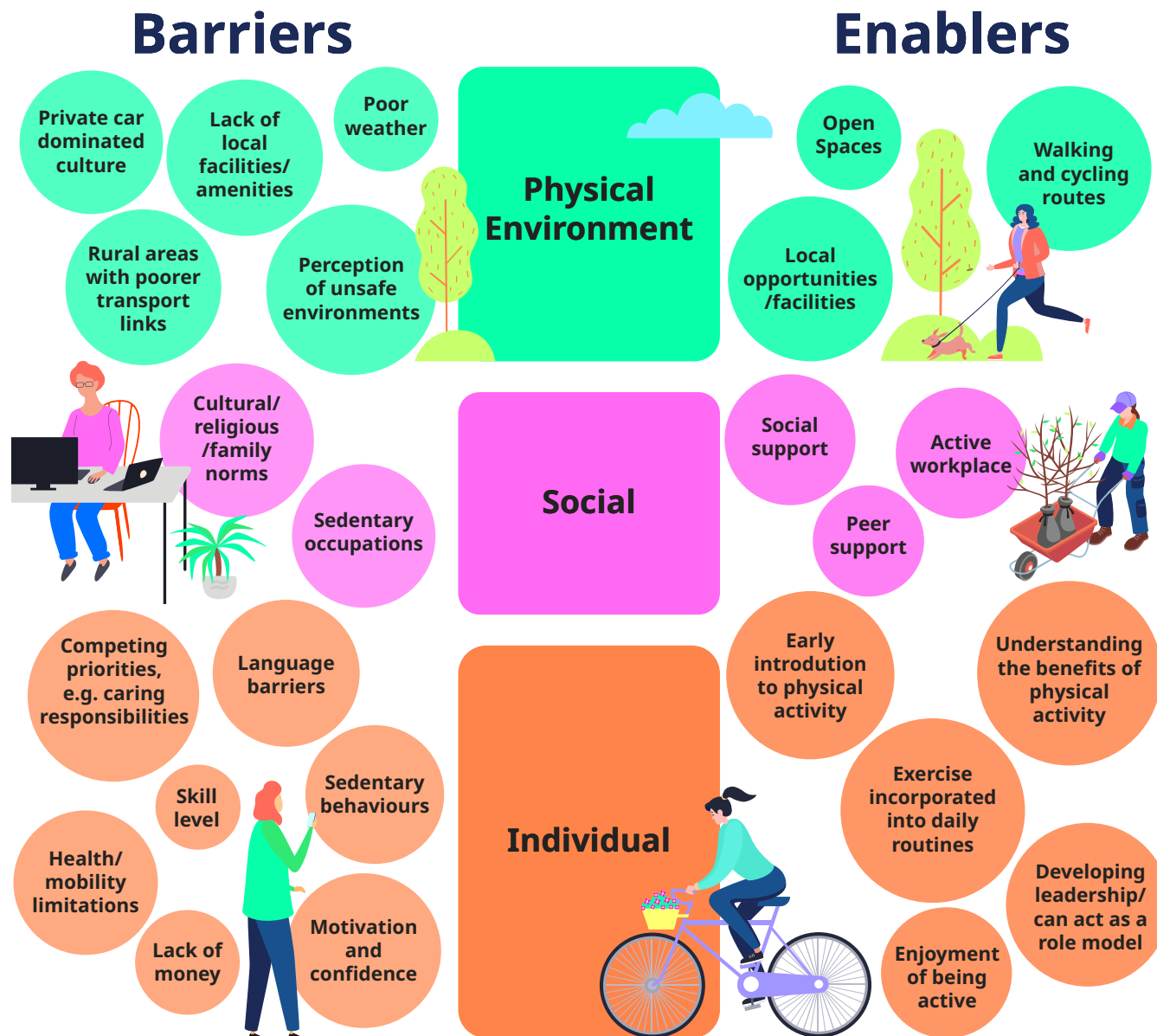


# Barriers to being active

It has become harder for many of us to incorporate physical activity into our daily lives, particularly with the growth of motorised transport and increased use of screens for work, education and recreation.

However, there are a wide range of factors that influence our physical activity levels. These can be broadly grouped into individual, social and physical environmental factors (see diagram). There are deep-rooted social inequalities that mean that physical activity is more challenging for particular groups, whether due to lack of financial resource, poorer health, social norms, perceived neighbourhood safety or access to activity opportunities.

**“For good physical and mental health, adults should aim to be physically active every day. Any activity is better than none, and more is better still.”**  
(Chief Medical Officer Physical Activity guidelines)



## References for barriers and enablers diagram above

<sup>9</sup> Mbabazi et al. (2022). *Barriers and Facilitators of Physical Activity*. Journal of Health and Allied Sciences NU.

<sup>10</sup> Hesketh et al. *Barriers and facilitators to young children's physical activity and sedentary behaviour: a systematic review and synthesis of qualitative literature*. Obes Rev. 2017 Sep;18(9):987-1017

<sup>11</sup> Peng et al. *Barriers and facilitators to physical activity for young adult women: a systematic review and thematic synthesis of qualitative literature*. Int J Behav Nutr Phys Act. 2023 Feb 27;20(1):23.

# Active Opportunities

## Building on Northumberland communities' strengths

Across Northumberland we are increasingly taking an Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) approach that focuses on using the assets, strengths and potential within communities to improve health, rather than focusing on deficits or problems. This approach means working differently with communities, moving away from 'doing to' or 'doing for' ways of working, to 'doing with' and 'doing by'.

ABCD helps us to:

- enable communities to build on local assets; from individuals' gifts and skills to physical assets such as community buildings and green spaces.
- develop strong community connections, partnership working and increased community resilience.
- help communities to address the factors that matter most to them.

Taking an ABCD approach to promoting physical activity, where communities take the lead, is likely to be the most effective and sustainable way to overcoming barriers to physical activity and improve health and wellbeing.

### Northumberland Frontline

Northumberland Frontline is an online signposting and referral platform to help connect people to local services and support, including physical activity opportunities. There are currently almost 400 organisations registered on the platform. During April-June 2024 there were around 1,000 referrals and nearly 4,000 signposts - <https://northumberlandfrontline.org.uk>

In Northumberland, we want to apply ABCD principles across everything we do. We have three questions we ask ourselves:

- What is it that communities can do best?
- What do communities require help with?
- What do communities need outside agencies to do for them?

### Our community assets



Local people with local knowledge & ideas



Volunteer networks that can sustain initiatives



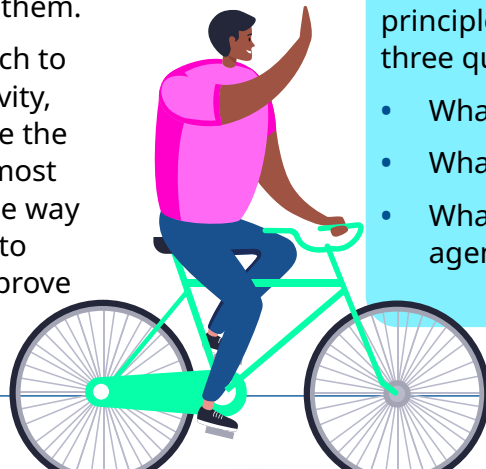
Public open spaces such as parks and recreation grounds



Facilities such as community centres, leisure centres, and religious and cultural venues

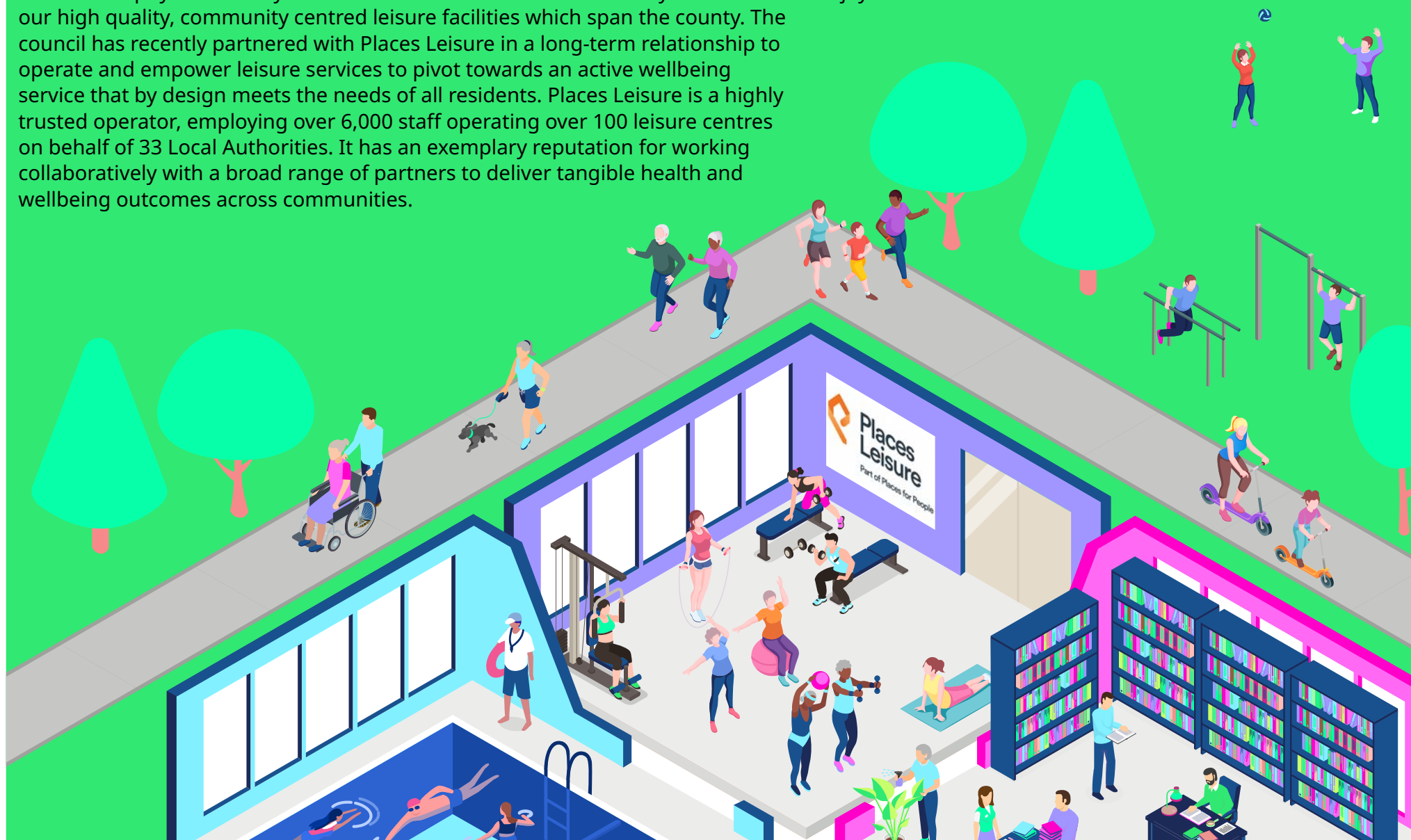


Local organisations, such as charities and health services, that can work with communities to promote well-being



# Places Leisure

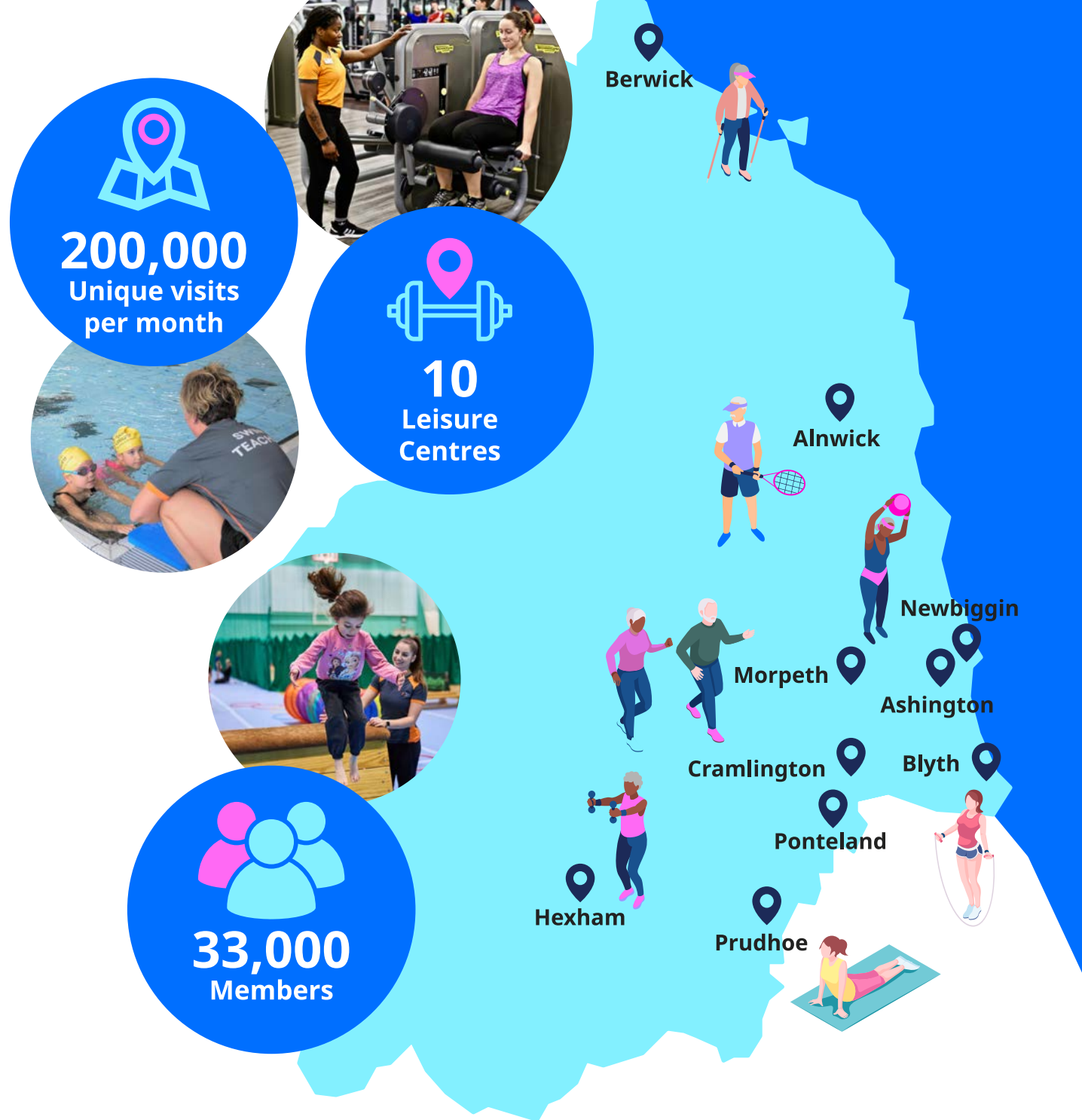
Our Leisure and Wellbeing Service plays an important role in the council's ambition to increase and sustain physical activity across Northumberland. We want everyone to use and enjoy our high quality, community centred leisure facilities which span the county. The council has recently partnered with Places Leisure in a long-term relationship to operate and empower leisure services to pivot towards an active wellbeing service that by design meets the needs of all residents. Places Leisure is a highly trusted operator, employing over 6,000 staff operating over 100 leisure centres on behalf of 33 Local Authorities. It has an exemplary reputation for working collaboratively with a broad range of partners to deliver tangible health and wellbeing outcomes across communities.



Our Leisure and Wellbeing service will consider what can be done to address inequalities in every area of the service through planning, delivery and monitoring. A recent Health Equity Audit (HEA) has been the foundation used to determine the physical activity needs of the county and guide Places Leisure in developing its offer and close the inequality gap by improving access to physical activities for identified inequality groups.

Through our new Active Communities Programme the ambition is to support leisure opportunities in neighbourhoods where leisure centres are not located. This will involve local communities in shaping their activities.

The new leisure landscape within Northumberland is an exciting time for residents. We want to ensure communities are at the heart of our leisure offer. This means constantly listening to their needs, valuing their input and allowing communities to shape how they develop approaches to increase their own levels of activity.





## Exercise on referral to Places Leisure

The Exercise on Referral service delivered by Places Leisure is a 12-week targeted intervention programme which enables life changing health and wellbeing outcomes, encompassing an initial consultation, tour of the facilities and a bespoke, supervised programme of physical activity and advice. Each patient is provided with the support, guidance and inspiration required for them to make their personal lifestyle change in a familiar and friendly environment. Access to the programme requires referral by a health professional.



## Visually impaired football

In partnership, Vision Northumberland and Ability2Play hosts a weekly football session for people with visual impairments with the session running out of Newbiggin Sports and Community Centre. The programme has increased participants levels of physical activity, fostered a sense of belonging and community, reduced feelings of isolation, and improved social integration.

## Sports Development Service

Northumberland County Council's Sports Development Team delivers, supports, and manages a number of initiatives and workstreams aimed to engage residents in physical activity. Adopting an asset-based approach, the team work with a range of individuals and partners to offer a route into sustainable sport and physical activities.

The Sports Development team fulfil a range of responsibilities across Northumberland providing advice to sports clubs, leading on activity infrastructure capital projects as well as delivering programmes of activity to various audiences.



## Parkrun

Parkrun is a free, community event where people can walk, jog, run, volunteer, or spectate a 5km route. These events take place every Saturday morning across different locations in Northumberland including Blyth Links, Newbiggin Promenade, Ashington Community Woodlands, Carlisle Park- Morpeth, Druridge Bay Country Park, Tyne Green – Hexham, and The Pastures – Alnwick. A junior Parkrun also takes place in Blyth every Sunday Monday which is a 2km event for 4–14 year olds and their families. Parkrun is a global charity and ran entirely by local volunteers. It encourages people of all abilities to take part to improve their health and wellbeing.





# There's plenty of support out there

There are many opportunities to participate in physical activities across Northumberland. This section gives some examples of community groups taking the lead and some of the people who are benefiting. Much more is happening across other settings including schools, workplaces, health and care, and within people's homes.

## Boxing Well

Boxing Well is a free community led programme in Blyth using non-contact boxing to support residents to be physically and mentally well. The programme was set up during the COVID pandemic by a local resident, who was inspired to create an uplifting community after witnessing first-hand the growing mental health crisis and tragic losses to suicide in the Northeast.



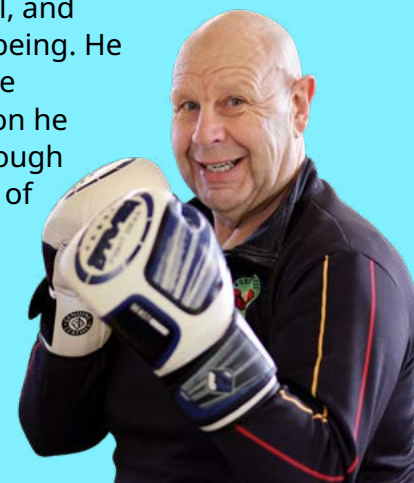
“  
I wish I  
could bottle this  
place up and give it  
to doctors and  
nurses.”

”  
(Boxing Well  
participant)

At Boxing Well, they believe exercise uplifts both the body and mind and their core values are centred around compassion, teamwork, health, inclusiveness, and community, creating a supportive and non-judgemental atmosphere for everyone that attends their classes. The programme includes community sessions run throughout the week, and specific sessions for those with reduced mobility, autism and mental health. Using a person-centred approach that tailors exercise to the individual, has led to life changing improvements in both physical and mental wellbeing for many residents in Northumberland. For example, just some of the benefits include significant weight reductions, substantial improvements in mobility, improved social skills and confidence and the tools and support to cope with day-to-day stresses. More information can be found at [www.boxingwell.co.uk](http://www.boxingwell.co.uk)

## George's story: Battling cancer

In 2020, George was diagnosed with bladder cancer. Due to his weight, he was unable to undergo a lifesaving operation to remove cancer cells, he was also in chronic pain and living with poor mental health. George was referred to Boxing Well and started to attend the community fitness classes at the Blyth Boxing Well gym. Over several months, he went on to lose ten and a half stone through regularly attending classes several times a week. Due to reductions in his weight, George was then able to have the needed cancer treatment which has now left him cancer free. Two years on from joining Boxing Well, George continues to attend the classes on a regular basis and has seen improvement in his mental, social, and physical wellbeing. He states that the transformation he has gone through with the help of Boxing Well has been lifesaving.



## Wellbeing Walks

Wellbeing Walks are free, short walks based in local communities. They are great for individuals looking to increase their activity levels, explore their local community, and meet new people. Every individual that attends a walk has different goals, for example some people attend to lose weight, whereas others join for social interaction. Wellbeing Walks are available for everyone, are free of charge and start from a variety of community venues. Northumberland County Council Health Trainer Team currently offer five short beginner Wellbeing Walks covering Haltwhistle, Blyth, Cramlington and Prudhoe. More information can be found at - [www.livingwellnorthumberland.co.uk](http://www.livingwellnorthumberland.co.uk) and further walks led by volunteers are offered at [www.ramblers.org.uk/go-walking/wellbeing-walks](http://www.ramblers.org.uk/go-walking/wellbeing-walks)



## Harry's story: Walking for wellbeing

Harry found out about the Prudhoe Wellbeing Walk after seeing a poster on social media page and felt it would help to increase his exercise levels and make new friends. Harry has now attended eight health walks with the group which takes place once a fortnight from the Miners Lamp Café and Community Hub. He has felt an improvement in his mental wellbeing as well as feeling fitter and has also enjoyed meeting like-minded people who enjoy walking as much as he does.

## Building strength and balance

Comrades in Chairs was set up in 2015 and is a community-based group that meets weekly in the Comrade's Club in Blyth. This social group welcomes anyone who has mobility issues to access chair-based exercise delivered by an Age UK trained instructor, as well as social activities, advice, and emotional support. One individual stated that the group is their 'friendship club'. Members have reported improvements in both physical and mental wellbeing after attending the Comrades in Chairs exercise classes, with many individuals saying that it plays an important role in combating loneliness. One member said they can now 'lift their hands over their head' since completing the classes and a visually impaired woman who is a member of the group, has gained the confidence to lead one of the exercise classes. Long term the group hope to continue building their membership and support those in Blyth to be physically and mentally well.





## Walking to school in Stannington

Modeshift Stars is a national award scheme for schools that aims to replace short car journeys with walking or cycling. This helps increase physical activity levels and create healthier people and places. Schools can demonstrate progress by logging sustainable travel, establishing road safety initiatives, and developing a school travel plan.

Stannington Primary school has been engaging with Modeshift Stars for the past five years to reduce traffic congestion and promote walking, scooting and cycling, to school. It has been awarded a Modeshift Stars platinum accreditation, twice, as a result of this work.

Since the school started this scheme there has been a dramatic fall in the number of pupils being driven to the school gate, reducing from 23% to 2.5% over the past five years. Instead, many are walking or cycling, with walking up from 19% to 38% and cycling up from 4% to 13% in the same period.

Some of the key achievements have included:

- A no parking zone around the school. The aim is for pupils to either walk, cycle or scoot to school daily and if this is not possible for the whole journey, to Park and Ride or Stride.
- Taking part in Living Streets Walk Once a Week, using the Travel Tracker where pupils log how they've travelled each day and can earn monthly badges for travelling actively to school.
- Walk to School Month and designing regular walking trails to school from a designated drop off point.
- Installing bike and scooter parking, offering Biker's Breakfasts and scheduling cycling slots for each class on the weekly timetable.
- Creating a traffic free cycling track within the school grounds.
- Three members of staff have completed their Ride Leader training to help with the aim that every child will be able to ride a bike by the time they leave primary school.
- Taking part in The Bikeability Trust's Get Cycling Programme which trains Early Years staff to deliver balance bike training to pupils and provides a fleet of balance bikes.



# Playzones

Playzone projects within the county will deliver new or refurbished outdoor mini pitches designed for football and other sports and activities that allow priority groups to be active. Aimed to tackle inequalities in physical activity, Playzone facilities are predominantly community-led spaces providing safe and inclusive environments for four main target audiences:

- Lower Socio-Economic Groups
- Women and Girls
- Disabled People and Those with Long-Term Health Conditions
- Ethnically Diverse Communities

Playzone projects in Northumberland have been identified using a data driven focus alongside community engagement. Community partnership conversations over the last two years have ensured that Playzones have been designed to meet the needs of local communities, ensuring the right mix of activities is provided. Capital funding comes mainly from the Football Foundation with 25% match funding from various sources, depending on the playzone location and partners involved.





# Active Neighbourhoods

- something for everyone

## Places to go:

Having a range of things to do, and places to go locally can encourage people to go out of their homes and move more. These could include places like shops, libraries, community hubs or social clubs.

## Outdoor spaces:

Accessible and high quality open space across cities, towns and villages to provide opportunities for sport and physical activity, as well as active travel connections and public spaces for people to meet up.

## Walking and cycling routes:

A good network of paths for both walking and cycling that encourage people to travel actively for short journeys, rather than using private cars. They should be built with high quality materials, street furniture in the right places and easy-to-follow signage.

## Neighbourhood design:

Designing new developments to support active behaviours so that it makes it easier for people to be active in their everyday lives.

## Connections to public transport:

Good access to public transport options encourages people to travel further distances and usually involves elements of active travel.

## Street Environment:

Safe, attractive and welcoming streets that are people-centred in their design and encourage people to spend time in and travel through. They should be easy to cross, have good shade and shelter, have places to rest and have clean air.



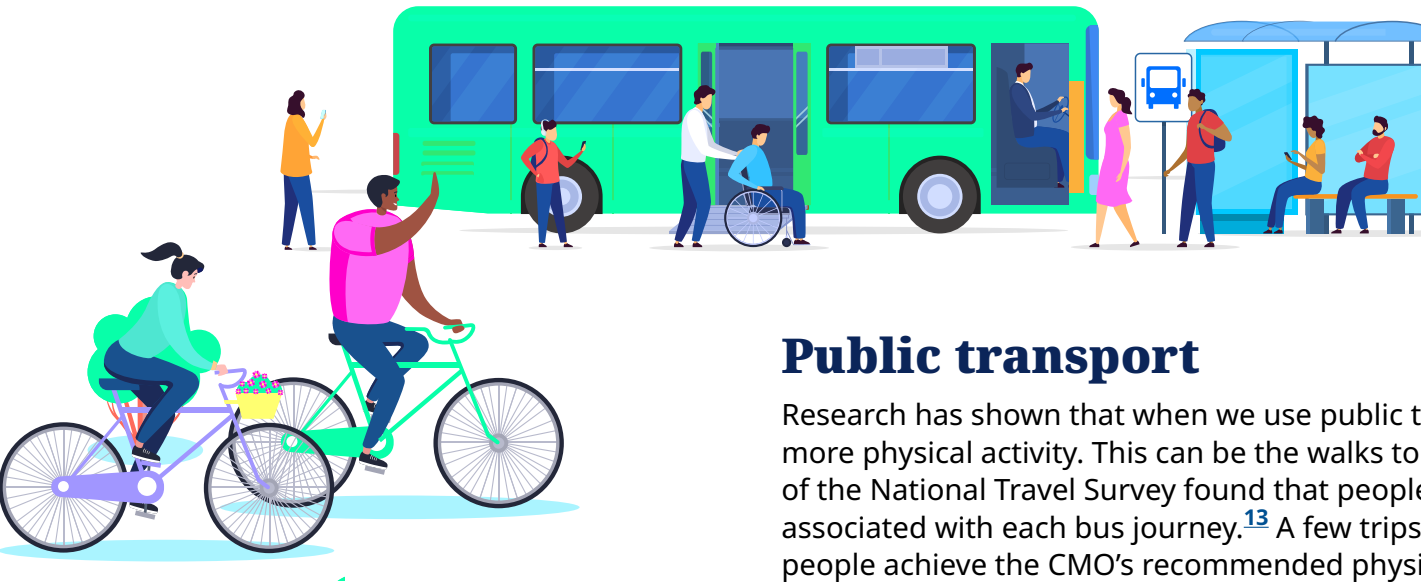
# Human powered travel

Active travel is movement around an area that involves physical exercise, such as walking or cycling.

Active travel is a key way to integrate physical activity into our everyday lives. The majority of journeys made in Northumberland are between three and five km, which for many people is achievable by active travel. Our walking and cycling routes link people to destinations they wish to visit, and to transport hubs which enable onward connections using public transport.

The street environment can influence how comfortable we feel travelling actively. For example, we are more likely to walk or cycle if streets are welcoming, have less traffic, feel safe, have good quality footpaths and crossings, and places to rest.<sup>12</sup>

Walking and cycling routes must now comply with national design standards. They have five core principles which is to ensure active travel is Coherent, Direct, Safe, Comfortable and Attractive.



## Public transport

Research has shown that when we use public transport instead of private cars, we tend to do more physical activity. This can be the walks to and from bus stops or at interchanges. An analysis of the National Travel Survey found that people do on average 16 minutes physical activity associated with each bus journey.<sup>13</sup> A few trips by public transport per week, can help many people achieve the CMO's recommended physical activity levels.

## Creating new routes for active travel

A new route opened in July 2024 that connects the centre of Ponteland to Callerton Park Metro, which enables onwards connectivity to Newcastle City airport and Newcastle Central Station. The route also connects to three schools, Ponteland library and leisure centre.

Two active travel corridors are planned. One in Blyth and one in Ashington. Delivery for Ashington took place in Autumn 2024 with Blyth due to follow in June 2025.

A route between Hexham and Corbridge, and a West to East connection in Bedlington are also planned. Construction for both schemes is due for delivery by March 2026.

### References

<sup>12</sup> Healthy Streets (2024) *What is healthy streets*. Available at: <https://www.healthystreets.com/what-is-healthy-streets> (Accessed 2nd December 2024)

<sup>13</sup> Patterson et al. *Physical activity accrued as part of public transport use in England*. J Public Health (Oxf). 2019 Jun 1;41(2):222-230

# Designing active places

## Healthy housing and neighbourhoods

There is increasing evidence to suggest good quality homes help us stay healthy and can improve our wellbeing, while poor homes can increase demand on health, other public services and the economy. The Town and Country Planning Association (TCPA) Healthy Homes Framework describes elements that make homes good for human health and wellbeing and includes the location, layout and quality of our homes and neighbourhoods. One key element for a healthy home is that they are built in a place with good access to sustainable transport, walkable services and physical activity opportunities. We are working towards the creation of a countywide housing strategy informed by our County Partnership, the Joint Health and Wellbeing Board, a housing steering group and a series of topic specific focus groups. The impacts of housing on physical activity will be an important consideration in the strategy and its recommendations.

## Design code

A design code is a set of simple and concise design requirements for the physical development of a site or area, and their content should be informed by the ten characteristics of good places set out in the National Design Guide.<sup>14</sup> Design Codes can play a key role in ensuring healthy places. They can help (alongside the Local Plan and other plans and strategies) to ensure that places are designed, developed or improved in ways that promote physical, mental and social health and wellbeing.

The Northumberland Design Code is currently in its preliminary scoping stages but is likely to inform the design of the built and natural environment through requirements and guidance. A clear early emerging priority for council stakeholders is the health and wellbeing agenda including the importance of physical wellbeing. This could include for example improved access to green and open spaces; environments that promote community and social interaction; and walking and cycling links; and improvements that encourage more active sustainable travel.



### References

<sup>14</sup> Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. (2021) *National Design Guide*. Available at: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/602cef1d8fa8f5038595091b/National\\_design\\_guide.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/602cef1d8fa8f5038595091b/National_design_guide.pdf) (Accessed 2nd December 2024)

# Health Impact Assessments

Northumberland County Council's Local Plan requires planning applicants for all major developments to submit either a Healthy Planning Checklist (HPC), a Rapid Health Impact Assessment (RHIA) or Full Health Impact Assessment (HIA) for any new major developments. Each of the types differs in how complex they are, the range of stakeholders who might be involved in the process and the time they take to complete.

A Health Impact Assessment (HIA) is a checklist or set of questions that someone who is planning to build a new development should use, to identify the potential health effects of a policy, programme or project on a population, and to ensure that potential opportunities are maximised and potential detrimental impacts are mitigated. Amongst other potential impacts, within these checklists<sup>15</sup>, developers are asked to look at several areas that may impact on residents being active. For example, questions look at how easy it is to use active travel from one area to another, number of open spaces and access to nature. The responses to the questions should highlight the negative and positives of the scheme, and applicants should demonstrate building on positive aspects and mitigating ways to improve negatives. For example, applicants may consider the introduction of cycle access or parking, an active travel policy or active travel linkages to a town, village centre, or place of work to make exercise easier. This is particularly important when a development involves vulnerable or disadvantaged groups.

## Open spaces

Within Northumberland, we are lucky to have large areas of rich environment, including countryside, coast and a network of green infrastructure, including parks and open public spaces. However, it is important to note that due to the scale and size of Northumberland, large attractions and pleasant environments may be less accessible to some people, particularly those without access to a private car. Some smaller green areas can be found in most community areas which are important assets to support physical activity.



### References:

<sup>15</sup> Northumberland County Council (2022) *Northumberland Local Plan 2016 – 2036 (Adopted 31 March 2022)* Available at: [www.northumberland.gov.uk/Planning/Planning-policy/Plan.aspx](http://www.northumberland.gov.uk/Planning/Planning-policy/Plan.aspx) (Accessed 2nd December 2024)

# Active Communities

## Working together to achieve more

For our communities to be more physically active we will need to work together across all parts of society. It will require a range of approaches, that include the main areas within this report: active people, active opportunities, and active places.

## Eight investments that work

The International Society of Physical Activity and Health (ISPAH) is a global wide organisation whose focus is on promoting physical activity across the life course. They identified eight key investments for physical activity which need to be considered to improve activity levels within an area. These are whole of school programmes, active transport, active urban design, healthcare, public education including mass media, sport and recreation for all, workplaces and community-wide programmes. Within Northumberland, we have been running workshops to look at the 8 different investments and how we can improve these areas going forward. Feedback from these workshops will inform the Northumberland's Physical Activity Strategy.



## Healthy Weight Alliance

The Northumberland Healthy Weight Alliance (HWA) is a multi-agency group which brings communities and agencies together, to ensure a coordinated approach to healthy weight across Northumberland. The vision for the HWA is to see an increasing trend in the proportion of people in Northumberland achieving and maintaining a healthy weight across all groups within a decade. The HWA includes a work stream on the built environment, which will look to increase active travel and incorporate exercise into day-to-day activities. This work will particularly target support to our most deprived areas within Northumberland.

## Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy

The Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy for Northumberland recognises physical activity as an important part of health and wellbeing for residents in Northumberland. The strategy aims within its 'best start in life' priority to develop and implement partnership approaches that build on existing community strengths to promote physical activity including a whole systems approach. Within the Increasing Equity in Access to transport priority, the strategy supports schemes that encourage active and sustainable travel in communities.

# Northumberland County Partnership

In Northumberland we have established a County Partnership that brings together partner organisations that are rooted in Northumberland and are working together on a shared mission to tackle inequalities and reduce the gap in experience residents have across health, education, employment and social outcomes. We are using the eight evidence-based Marmot principles to guide our countywide approach and increasing physical activity, particularly for the least active people links to a number of the principles, particularly in strengthening the role and impact of ill health prevention.



Our County Partnership will build on Northumberland's Inequalities Plan which was developed by senior leaders from Northumberland County Council, the NHS, voluntary and private sector including businesses, who worked together to ensure the whole system works collectively to tackle inequalities. The plan included a commitment to:

- Looking at everything through an inequalities lens.
- Listen to the voice of residents and better data sharing.
- Community strengths are considered first.
- Enhancing services to ensure equity in access to opportunity.
- Maximising civic/statutory level responsibilities.



## Eight Marmot principles to tackle inequalities





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The illustration depicts a large, red, 3D staircase that ascends from the bottom right towards the top right. Several diverse people are engaged in various activities around and on the staircase. At the top of the stairs, a person in a yellow shirt and grey pants stands with arms raised in celebration. Below them, a person in a purple shirt and blue pants sits on a step, also with arms raised. To the left of the stairs, a person in a blue shirt and purple pants is in a dynamic pose, possibly dancing or stretching. Further left, a person in a red shirt is pushing a person in a pink shirt who is seated in a wheelchair. In the background, a person in a blue shirt is using a shovel to dig, and another person in a brown shirt is kneeling next to a small tree, possibly planting it. A wheelbarrow filled with brown soil sits nearby. At the bottom right, a person with long dark hair, wearing a green and pink shirt, is holding a string attached to a kite that is flying in the sky. The entire scene is set against a light blue background with stylized geometric shapes.

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## Notes

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# Acknowledgements

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