

# CREATING AN ACTIVE WIRRAL

STRONGER • HEALTHIER • HAPPIER

A Sport and Physical Activity  
Strategy for Wirral 2021 - 2026

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# INTRODUCTION

## FOREWORD

It has long been recognised that sport and physical activity make a positive difference to people's lives. They strengthen communities, bring people together and directly improve the health and wellbeing of our residents.

This strategy, along with the Wirral Plan 2026 sets out our ambitious plan to provide opportunities that help our residents to live happy, healthy, independent, and active lifestyles. It also seeks to balance our position as a provider of facilities with tackling inequality through preventative, outreach and early intervention work.

As we look to the future, moving on and progressing from the coronavirus pandemic, we have a clear vision - to make sport and physical activity part of everyone's everyday life.

Working with our partners and local people, we need to collectively re-think how we can make sport and physical activity available to everyone by creating accessible and affordable opportunities.

The statistics around the quality of life for Wirral people show there are still vast differences across the Borough. They demonstrate that there is still a long way to go and many improvements can be made.

As Chair of the Tourism, Communities, Culture and Leisure Committee, I am pleased to support and endorse this strategy. Having always lived in the Borough, I've seen the positive impact sport and physical activity has on people's quality of life and I wholeheartedly believe that we can make changes to help our communities by working together.

I would like to thank all the organisations, partners, stakeholders and members of the public who have contributed towards this strategy, and I look forward to working with you to deliver this plan.

### **COUNCILLOR HELEN CAMERON**

Chair Tourism, Communities, Culture and Leisure Committee



# VISION

Creating an Active Wirral is our five-year vision to transform our residents lives and communities through sport and activity.

As a Borough, we have many great physical and community assets. Ranging from outdoor green spaces such as playground parks, play pitches and golf courses, to our open countryside, marine lakes, beautiful coastlines and superb gyms, sport halls and swimming pools.

Activities, facilities and opportunities are offered by a wide range of providers, including commercial, voluntary and community groups as well as Wirral Council and other public sector organisations.

The benefits of an active lifestyle are well documented, and this strategy will use the power of sport and activity to improve the lives of our residents and create a stronger, healthier, and happier society.

As we rebuild from the coronavirus pandemic, we need to collectively re-imagine how we can make sport and physical activity part of everyone's lives.

THE VISION IS:

TO MAKE **SPORT** AND  
**PHYSICAL ACTIVITY** PART OF  
**EVERYONE'S** EVERYDAY **LIFE.**

# THE CASE FOR CHANGE

The Sport England, Active Lives Survey (2019/20) reports that 62.4% of adults in Wirral are physically active (above the national average of 61.4%) with 24% of people physically inactive meaning they do less than 30 minutes of weekly activity at a moderate level.

In previous years, overall activity levels in Wirral had been rising. The number of 'active' people in the area increased from 159,500 in 2014/15 to 168,300 in 2018/19, and the number of 'inactive' people fell from 65,800 to 59,300 in this same period. However, when considering the most recent data obtained through the Active Lives Survey, the number of 'inactive' Wirral residents has increased by 3,900 as of November 2019/20. Although data from more recent COVID-19 impacted years has not yet been released, we envisage a continuation of this trend resulting in even less 'active' residents.

Physical inactivity in later life is now estimated to cost the NHS £92 million per year and is projected to increase to over £120 million by 2030. If left unaddressed this means the NHS will spend over £1.3 billion on later life physical inactivity between now and 2030 (**DEMOS, 2019**).

It is critical that as a Borough we provide an offer that encourages and enables our residents to build physical activity into their everyday lives.

The benefits of our residents becoming more physically active include a reduction in:

- **The risk of diabetes by 50%**
- **The risk of developing mental health conditions and dementia by 30%**
- **The risk of Coronary Heart Disease and Stroke by 35%**
- **The likelihood of experiencing loneliness and social isolation**
- **Involvement in anti-social behaviour and crime**

As well as,

- **Increases in skills development and academic achievement**



Estimates provided in Sport England's 2014 'Local Sport Profile Tool', detail the health costs of physical inactivity in Wirral related to cancer (GI), breast cancer, diabetes, coronary heart disease and cerebrovascular disease (stroke) as totalling £7.3 million.

Sport England commissioned the Sport Industry Research Centre at Sheffield Hallam University, to calculate the social impact and the economic importance of sport and physical activity in England. They found that when measured against costs of engagement and providing opportunities, for every £1 spent

on community sport and physical activity, a return on investment of £3.91 was generated for individuals and society. Across England the combined economic and social value of taking part in community sport and physical activity was £85.5 billion.

Increasing physical activity has direct benefits for the local environment. By increasing the number of journeys made on foot or by bicycle, beneficial reductions in CO2 emissions will be delivered that will significantly contribute to Wirral's latest Climate Change Strategy, Cool 2.

# SUMMER 2021 PUBLIC CONSULTATION

## Adults:

- 73% of residents saw improving their personal fitness and health to be their main motivation for engaging in sports and physical activity. The main activities currently conducted by residents are walking, swimming, and cycling, with the majority of these taking place at council leisure centres.
- Over 40% of residents said that they want an increase in the availability of different/additional exercise classes, with preferences for more swimming sessions and more variety in classes, as well as sports specific coaching and family activities. Additionally, residents wanted to see more opportunities for outdoor activities, including swimming.
- The main barrier to physical activity was life commitments (39.5%), followed closely by activity timing and cost, with lack of availability of classes and facilities also being notable themes in comments.
- To encourage more physical activity, increasing activities in residents' local areas was an overwhelming theme reported by 73.4% of respondents, followed by the provisioning of activities outside of leisure centres.





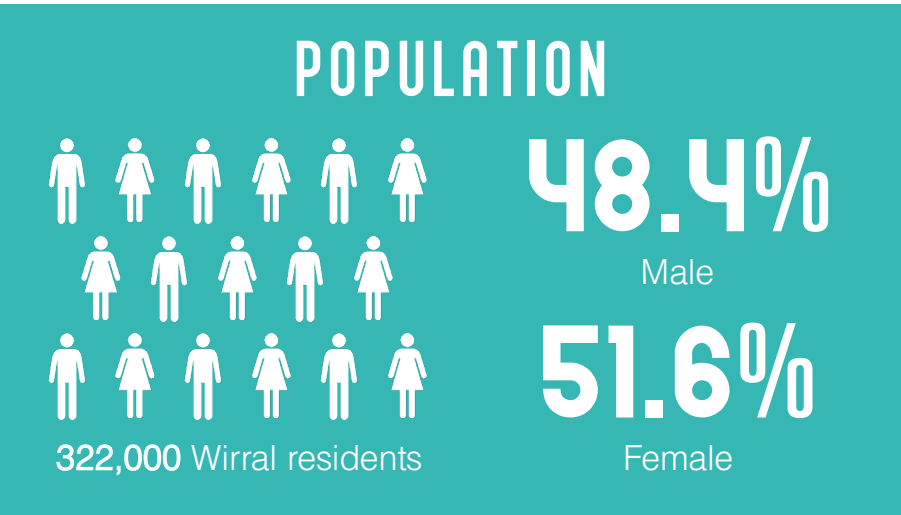
## Children and Young People:

- In terms of motivations for engaging in sports and physical activity, the majority of young people consulted, reported socialising with friends, indicating a preference for fun over functionality.
- The most common response regarding current activity that young people engage in, was playing outside (60.5%) followed by football and walking. Young people most commonly detailed this activity to take place in local parks or open spaces for 30 minutes to one hour.
- Young people reported that their preferences on future sports was for sports specific coaching, but also included holiday sports programmes and sports competitions. Sessions lasting one hour or 30 minutes and taking place at twilight or at any time in the day were also most reported.
- One of the top barriers to engaging in sports and physical activity was not knowing what activities were available, which was reported from over 70% of respondents. Cost, a fear of trying activities, not knowing anybody, and issues related to transport were also reported as barriers.
- To encourage young people to engage in more physical activity, the top responses in the consultation were an increase in the availability of activities in the local area, as well as being able to bring a friend or relative, and having beginner sessions or classes.
- Comments from 33% of young people were provided related to improving the safety of cycling, with other comments made on facilitating trial activities at schools.




# ABOUT WIRRAL

The context for Wirral is stark:



Over **63%** of Wirral's young people are in the **bottom 20% decile** for health index compared to the England average of 19.9%.  
**(195,456)**

Nearly **80,000** of Wirral's young people live in the **bottom 20% decile** in the wellbeing index, and **nearly 62,000** are in the **bottom 10% decile**.

**23%**   
23% of Wirral residents have a limiting long-term illness.

**44%**  of Wirral residents self-report experiencing low levels of anxiety.


 **28%**  
28% of households have no access to a car.

Although life expectancy across Wirral has actually increased over recent decades, healthy life expectancy has decreased. Therefore, additional years of life are being spent in poorer health and adding more strain to health and social care resources.

Over **1/4** of residents live within the 10 most deprived communities in the country.  
**82,000**

 **69.3%** of adults are overweight or obese compared to the 62.8% England's average.  
 **24.3%** of children are overweight or obese compared to the 23% England's average.

  
The onset of poor health begins at age **61 for men** and **63 for women**, up to 5 years before pension age. The disparity in these ages however varies across the Borough, and can be up to 19 years before pension age, from two different wards on opposing sides.

There is a clear **east-west** split in the Borough with the **M53** motorway being a defining line through the area. 

Over **13%** of young people live in poverty, however, in our most deprived wards, this rises to **> 33%**

Nearly **50%** of Wirral population are in the **bottom 20% decile** in health deprivation, and **70%** of those **(107,408)** are in the **lowest 10% decile**.

# STRATEGIC OVERVIEW

Our strategy consists of four main themes that are the priorities we believe are key to increasing activity levels of our residents.

We will continue to work collaboratively to develop an action plan to ensure the strategy is implemented and our ambitions realised.

This vision is closely aligned to that of the Wirral Plan 2026, to secure the best opportunities and outcomes for our residents, in particular through contributing to the active and healthy lives of our residents, giving them the opportunity, environment and support they need to lead active, healthy and happier lives.

This strategy will support the Council's Economic Strategy and wider regeneration place aspirations in delivering over 21,000 new and affordable

homes. The strategy will play an active and effective role alongside all partners to shape and achieve “good growth” for Wirral; creating great places for people to live, work, learn and enjoy, with active travel solutions linked to walking and cycling, and ensuring Wirral's infrastructure is sustainable for the future.

We promote active lifestyles. We're proud of our reputation as the 'Leisure Peninsula', and our residents benefit from quality opportunities for leisure, sports and exercise – through our gyms or in our world-class parks, beaches and open spaces. Where people need extra help to stay healthy, we commission outstanding services to help people live healthier lifestyles.

In order to achieve the outcomes, the strategic objectives have been defined in the following thematic areas:

## ACTIVE PEOPLE



To provide opportunities for all Wirral residents to be more active.

## ACTIVE PARTNERSHIPS



To build partnerships and collaborations that provide inclusive activities for all.

## ACTIVE SPACES AND PLACES



Influence place-shaping to ensure a network of high quality and accessible spaces that make it easier for people to be active.

## ACTIVE FACILITIES



To create accessible, affordable, environmentally sustainable facilities offering a quality experience and environment that encourages Wirral residents to be more active, more often.

# THEME 1: ACTIVE PEOPLE

Inactivity presents the biggest health risk in our time and this strategy places delivering better health and wellbeing outcomes for our residents as our number one priority. In order to support our most inactive residents become more active, whilst retaining the number of residents who are active, we will work collaboratively to design and shape opportunities that meet their individual needs. We will be working universally across the Borough to drive up activity levels as well as targeting the specific groups we know are at greater risk from inactivity.

## 1 FAMILIES AND CHILDREN:

The Sport and Physical Activity Strategy is aligned with the emerging Early Years Strategy, to focus on making Wirral great for all, including children, young people, and their families, driven by their voice, wants and needs. Over the last 10 years, Wirral's deprivation rates have increased at a rapid rate, with 35% of its population living in deprived areas. This figure increases in Wirral's most deprived wards, with child poverty being as high as 45% in Birkenhead and Tranmere, Bidston and St. James, Seacombe and Rock Ferry, where at least 1 in 3 young people live in poverty.

## 2 RESIDENTS LIVING WITH A LONG-TERM CONDITION OR DISABILITY:

There are approximately, 72,000 residents over the ages of 16 living in Wirral with a long-term limiting illness, which accounts for 23% of residents in comparison to England's national average of 13%. Despite this number being higher than the national average, the number of residents with long term illnesses and conditions continues to grow, with the most common being; respiratory diseases, mental health, cancer and cardiovascular disease. In Wirral, the spread of health deprivation and disability is vast, and there is a great difference between two wards on opposing sides of the Borough, with a particular area in Birkenhead, being ranked as England's 2nd worst area for health deprivation and disability.

### 3 RESIDENTS LIVING IN POVERTY:

Approximately 35% of Wirral's residents reside in an area of deprivation, and over 25% of residents live in the 10 most deprived communities in England. Poverty is something that affects all areas of the Borough, affecting on average 13.4% of Wirral residents compared to England's national average of 11.8%. However, the disparity of wealth between the east and west sides of the Borough, means that in some cases, poverty levels can be as low as 5.9% in Heswall, and as high as 34.5% in Birkenhead and Tranmere, with an average of nearly 30% in the 5 most deprived wards in Wirral.

### 4 WOMEN AND GIRLS:

Girls in Wirral are less active than their male counterparts with 51.8% of boys and only 35.2% of girls classified as active in the most recent Sport England Active Lives survey. When it comes to adulthood, the number of active women and men are equal. As a result, we would like to better understand and make efforts to reduce this activity gap in girls' participation.



## AMBITION - TO PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL WIRRAL RESIDENTS TO BE MORE ACTIVE

### WE WILL DO THIS BY:

1. Developing opportunities for Wirral residents to move more.
2. Better understanding and engaging with groups with the highest identified needs to codesign opportunities that are right for them.
3. Continuously reviewing our offer to ensure that it remains exciting and attractive to a broad cross-section of users.
4. Encouraging positive behavioural change and increased activity through targeted interventions.
5. Maximising income to fund initiatives that address highest identified priorities.

### WHAT WE WANT TO ACHIEVE:

- Support a decrease in the number of physically inactive residents, with a particular focus on underrepresented groups – families and children, residents with long term health conditions and disabilities, women and girls and residents living in deprived areas. As well as retaining the number of physically active residents.
- Support children and young people to ensure that they have the best start possible, so they can achieve their ambitions. To encourage regular participation and increase their enjoyment in physical activity to reduce childhood obesity levels, and support their general wellbeing, providing them with the necessary life skills to be the best that they can be.
- Better health and social outcomes for our residents through sport and physical activity.



# THEME 2: ACTIVE PARTNERSHIPS

Here in Wirral, we have a thriving network of sports clubs, third sector organisations and partners, all who encourage our residents to be active. Underpinning this are hundreds of volunteers and employees who all contribute to driving activity levels in the Borough.

These organisations have told us that they would like to work with us to deliver better health and social outcomes for our residents and would like to be involved in the design and development of future partnerships.

**AMBITION -** TO BUILD PARTNERSHIPS AND COLLABORATIONS THAT PROVIDE INCLUSIVE ACTIVITIES FOR ALL

## WE WILL DO THIS BY:

1. Working with stakeholders to meet national and local priorities.
2. Communicating and delivering an offer that supports the achievement of shared outcomes around physical health, mental wellbeing and individual, social and community development.
3. Helping and supporting community partners to deliver place-based targeted activities designed around the needs and preferences of local people.
4. Establishing new partnerships and investment opportunities into physical activity.

## WHAT WE WANT TO ACHIEVE:

- Quality partnerships placing residents at the centre of everything we do, making sure we get the right message out and giving local people a voice in how provision is provided.
- A thriving network of organisations that want to contribute towards increasing opportunities to be active.

# THEME 3: ACTIVE PLACES & SPACES

## AMBITION -

INFLUENCE PLACE-SHAPING TO ENSURE A NETWORK OF HIGH QUALITY AND ACCESSIBLE SPACES THAT MAKE IT EASIER FOR PEOPLE TO BE ACTIVE

## WE WILL DO THIS BY:

1. Engaging with communities to develop flexible solutions to locally identified needs.
2. Working with key partners in both the private and third sector to position sport and physical activity at the forefront of the Borough's future vision, through effective place shaping and making to deliver a wide network of high quality, user friendly and accessible environments.
3. Influencing planning developments to increase participation in community sport and physical activity.
4. Positioning Wirral as a destination for sport and activity.

## WHAT WE WANT TO ACHIEVE:

- Develop more active and sustainable environments and communities.
- Increase physical activity opportunities in parks and open spaces.





# THEME 4: ACTIVE FACILITIES

## AMBITION -

TO CREATE ACCESSIBLE, AFFORDABLE, ENVIRONMENTALLY SUSTAINABLE FACILITIES OFFERING A QUALITY OPPORTUNITY AND ENVIRONMENT THAT ENCOURAGES WIRRAL RESIDENTS TO BE MORE ACTIVE, MORE OFTEN

## WE WILL DO THIS BY:

1. Working with key partners to develop a strategic plan for our facilities that creates commercially viable, fit-for-purpose, accessible and sustainable facilities that meet resident's needs.
2. Delivering value for money with the Invigor8 membership product, by providing the right activities, in the right place at the right time.
3. Providing a quality customer experience at all touch points throughout their sport and physical activity journey.
4. Working closely with National Governing Bodies for sports and aligning our activities to determine local needs.
5. Ensuring facilities are innovative and future proofed so that we can react quickly and positively to changes in leisure and activity trends.
6. Giving consideration to co-location with key partners such as Public Health, NHS, and other internal agencies.
7. Creating a 'cradle to grave' approach to our facility design and activities within.
8. Horizon scanning the leisure industry to be at the forefront of trends and technology.
9. Listening to our customers and creating clean, friendly, modern, vibrant facilities across the Borough.

## WHAT WE WANT TO ACHIEVE:

- Better connect our residents who have the greatest needs to accessible and affordable facilities. We will seek to maximise all opportunities and increase footfall year-on-year through creative and innovative programming.
- A commitment to reducing our energy consumption and waste throughout our leisure facilities.
- Investment to develop new facilities aligned with the Borough's ambitious regeneration plans.

# STRATEGIC CONTEXT



# LINKS TO OTHER STRATEGIES & PARTNERS PRIORITIES

The vision, mission, ambitions and objectives set out in this strategy are closely aligned with the strategic priorities of the Wirral Plan 2026, and a range of key local, regional and national strategies. They are informed by the careful consultation of a broad range of partners and stakeholders closely involved with promoting, supporting and delivering sports and physical activity across the Borough. Links to key informing strategies and the priorities of such partners can be found below:

We are committed to producing an Annual Implementation Plan to ensure the realisation of the Strategy's objectives and will regularly review its aims and objectives to ensure their ongoing relevance and alignment with local, regional and national priorities.

## NATIONAL

Sport England: Uniting the Movement  
2021 – 2031

Department of Culture, Media and Sport:  
Sporting Future: A New Strategy for an  
Active Nation, 2015

Sport England – Strategic Outcomes  
Planning Guidance 2019

## REGIONAL

Merseyside Sport Partnership  
Strategic Framework  
(2017-2022)

## LOCAL

Wirral Plan 2026

Healthy Wirral Strategy, 2020

Community Wealth Building Strategy 2025

Cool2 Strategy

Wirral Parks and Open Spaces Strategy  
2014-2024

Community Safety Strategy 2021-2026

# METHODOLOGY

In order to help shape this strategy, we have used a number of tools and methods. The process began with extensive desk-based research from previous reviews of leisure services, consultations, local and national data and insight. A local needs analysis was undertaken using the Oxford Consultants for Social Inclusion's Local Insight Tool, to investigate key social and economic indicators at Wirral level, to then be benchmarked against national averages to better identify the needs of Wirral residents related to sports and physical activity.

After developing a framework based on the data and insight from the needs analysis, a consultation process was adopted to help shape the emerging themes developing from the needs analysis. Council colleagues as well as over 400 organisations were contacted during the process with numerous presentations and discussions taking place.





Continuing with the consultation process, a further exploration of views was sought through a local resident's consultation, to help further the development of key emerging themes, directly using public feedback on their needs, wants and barriers. An online public consultation was carried out through Wirral Council's 'Have Your Say' portal, providing access to three consultation surveys, in which we hoped to gain insight into sport and physical activity. These were; People, Young People and Partnerships.

The consultation was developed to enable residents, young people and other key stakeholders to share their views on sport and physical activity and identify barriers participants experience to carrying out sport and physical activity as well as potential strategies for increasing sport and physical activity participation. In addition to a survey, an ideas board was available for residents to submit ideas, as well as being able to interact with other comments through a 'like and comment' feature. To ensure accessibility, respondents were able to request paper copies or an easy read version of the surveys.

Paper copies were available from a range of Council facilities including leisure facilities. Paper copies delivered via schools and youth groups were used to target young people in particular, to mitigate any factors that would prevent them in being able to engage online, such as the requirement of providing an email address. Paper copies were aggregated into online survey results to ensure their views were represented.

# 10 FREE OR AFFORDABLE WAYS TO BE ACTIVE

## 1 RUN IN WIRRAL

Run together in one of our running groups. All runs are led by our excellent qualified run leaders who will help you progress your running. There is no pressure to run the whole distance, walks are our friends! This is great way to start your running journey. All ages and abilities welcome. No challenge too big or too small! These runs are very supportive too.

## 2 INVIGOR8 MEMBERSHIP

To make the most of the Council's leisure facilities and activities then join our Invigor8 membership scheme. We offer discounts and flexible terms to a wide range of residents.

## 3 FREE OUTDOOR GYMS

Wirral has 12 outdoor gyms, all with a great choice of equipment designed to keep you fit for free! Gyms are found at Arrowe Park, Beechwood (3 sites), Birkenhead Park, Central Park (Wallasey), Duck Pond Lane (Prenton), Twickenham Drive (Leasowe), Lingham Park (Moreton), New Ferry Park, Vale Park (New Brighton), Victoria Park (Tranmere), Woodchurch and Yew Tree Green (Moreton).

## 4 OPEN WATER SWIMMING

Open water swimming at West Kirby Marine Lake takes place on Sunday mornings, from 7.30am to 8.30am, to give swimmers a safe and dedicated time to enjoy the water. The open water swimming sessions are fully accredited, and a safety team are on hand at all times.

## 5 WEIGHT MANAGEMENT

We have a new 12 week weight management programme running from our Leisure Centres supporting our residents to adopt healthier eating and activity habits.

# OUTDOOR EXERCISE CLASSES

From Nordic Walking to cycling classes we run a number of outdoor classes to suit all abilities and ages. All our outdoor classes are part of our Invigor8 membership.

## 7 TENNIS

We have a full tennis programme running at the Wirral Tennis and Sports Centre, including a coaching programme, cardio and social tennis, and return to tennis. In our parks we have 'Tennis for Free' coached sessions taking place in New Ferry and Birkenhead Park.

## 8 WIRRAL WALK ON

Wirral Walk On is our local Walking for Health scheme. Our walks are free, fun and friendly – perfect to help you get active and meet new people. Across Wirral we have 14 weekly free walks that are offered by Walking for Health volunteer walk leaders. These walks are for all abilities from those with mobility issues who can only walk for 20 mins with stops to those who will go out and walk 3 miles.

## 9 CYCLING

Wirral has great coastal and countryside routes for leisurely bike rides. This includes The Wirral Way, which forms part of Wirral Country Park, a 12 mile traffic-free route running from West Kirby to Hooton and the National Cycle Network Route 56 that runs right through Wirral, taking in Seacombe, New Brighton, Liverpool Bay and many villages.

## 10 GOLF

With our Invigor8 membership we offer unlimited golf at any of our 18 or 9 hole golf courses. Or if you are looking for something a little more try your hand at our pitch and putt courses or any of our footgolf courses. No experience necessary!

# ACTIVE WIRRAL



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Thank you to all residents, partners, sports clubs and community organisations for your time, passion and commitment.

For more information on the Sport and Activity Strategy for Wirral:

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