



# Fit for the Future

The Physical Activity and Sport Strategy for Essex, Southend and Thurrock 2021-2031

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# Vision

## An active Essex to improve everyone's health and wellbeing

Being physically active is one of the most effective ways to enrich the lives of the people of Essex and the communities we live in.

This vision is for everyone who lives in Essex. To get everyone active means levelling up the playing field across Essex – supporting those who are already active and tackling head on the inequalities that currently prevent everyone from the life changing impact of an active lifestyle.



## Sport England 'Uniting the Movement' –

There is a strong synergy between the Sport England 'Uniting The Movement' strategy launched in January 2021 and this new Essex, Southend and Thurrock strategy. Both set a long-term 10-year vision, and both are committed to the importance of an active lifestyle for everyone, no matter how people choose to be active. Both strategies focus on tackling stubborn inequalities that prevent so many people from reaping many benefits that being active brings. Sport England has a strong track record of supporting the development of physical activity and community sport in our county, including the award to Essex of one of the 12 Local Delivery Pilot's that are using innovation and system change to tackle population levels of physical inactivity in our disadvantaged communities.



Read the Uniting the Movement Strategy

# Mission



## Working together across systems to make physical activity a part of everyday life for everyone

One organisation cannot do this alone. Delivering the huge ambition of this strategy will require the effort of thousands of Essex organisations all pulling in the same direction. Our foundations are strong in Essex. There is already great partnership work and collaboration to enable people to play sport, stay fit, and be active. Active Essex will provide leadership to deliver this strategy, and work with partners across different sectors, different systems, and different places to deliver our 10-year vision.

Active Essex engaged hundreds of organisations, leaders and citizens to understand what is important to them for this new strategy for Essex. There is a wealth of energy and enthusiasm across Essex to enable everyone to enjoy and benefit from an active lifestyle. All of this was captured in the Shaping our Future document published in September 2020, which received overwhelming support and has paved the way for our new strategy and 10-year vision.

## Climate Change -

Tackling the climate emergency is one of the highest priorities for Essex. Around a quarter of Essex greenhouse gas emissions come from transport, and in 2017 over 90% of total domestic transport greenhouse gas emissions were from road transport. Changing people's mode of travel choice from cars to walking and cycling will significantly reduce carbon footprints and enable Essex to meet its climate goals.

The economic, human and environmental costs of inactivity, climate change, air pollution, and traffic congestion are huge. Active travel can help combat all of these as well as making the places where we live healthier and more pleasant. Pedestrians and cyclists take up far less space than cars. Short journeys make a big difference to reduce climate change and air pollution emissions. Walking or cycling to school, to work or the local shops helps to achieve the 20 minutes of active travel a day needed to stay healthy. Businesses can play a vital role by avoiding non-essential work-related travel, invest in cycle parking and changing facilities, and encourage employees to engage in active travel.

As we adapt to the necessary changes in Essex in response to the climate change emergency, how we travel in our daily lives and live more sustainably will become increasingly important to us all.

## COVID-19 -

This strategy for Essex, Southend and Thurrock is launched as we are recovering from 15 months of the coronavirus pandemic. Covid-19 had a detrimental effect on physical activity levels in Essex, as well as creating serious challenges for our sector that provides sport, fitness and physical activities for local communities across our county. The pandemic clearly raised the importance and profile of physical activity to heights we have never seen before. This strategy builds on the positive spotlight that the pandemic has shone on physical activity. The pandemic also created an outpouring of active citizenship and neighbourliness, and saw hundreds of organisations across Essex working so well together towards a common purpose.

## Physical activity creating opportunities for economic growth -

Focusing on health as an investment will deliver significant economic returns for Essex. Better health promotes economic growth and prosperity by expanding the workforce and boosting productivity while also delivering immense individual and social benefits. Health is an important determinant of employment enabling Essex to attract and retain quality employment. A healthy workforce is an important element of levelling up because people with poor health in Essex have a much lower employment rate, impacting on individual wellbeing and the county's economic prosperity.

The economic contribution of the Essex sport, fitness and physical activity sector is significant. Today, there are 12,070 jobs in Essex working in community sport and physical activity, across the private, public and third sector. The direct contribution of sport and physical activity to the economy in Essex is valued at £0.5bn every year. Sport England's research on the social and economic value of sport published in 2020 showed that every £1 spent on community sport and physical activity generates £3.91 in economic and social return.



# This is Essex



**1,597,822**

Adult (16+) population of Essex,  
Southend and Thurrock

**248,833**

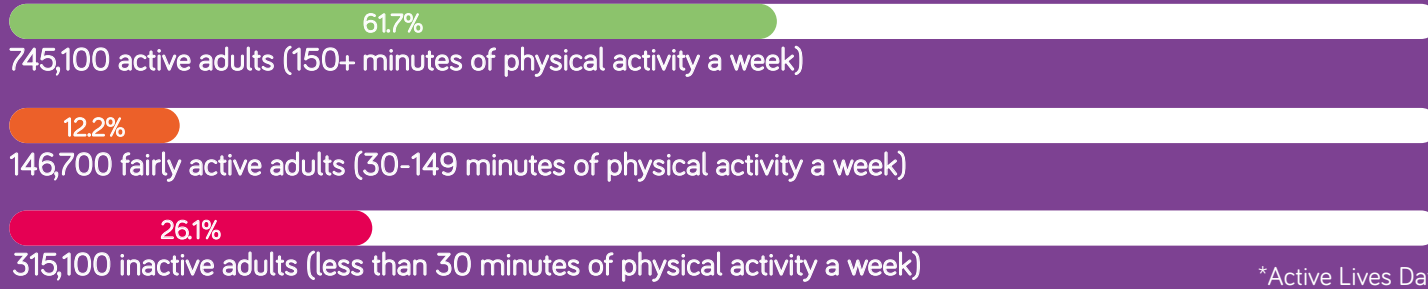
Child (<16) population of Essex,  
Southend and Thurrock

\* ONS, 2019

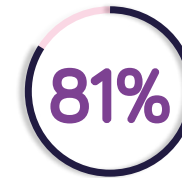
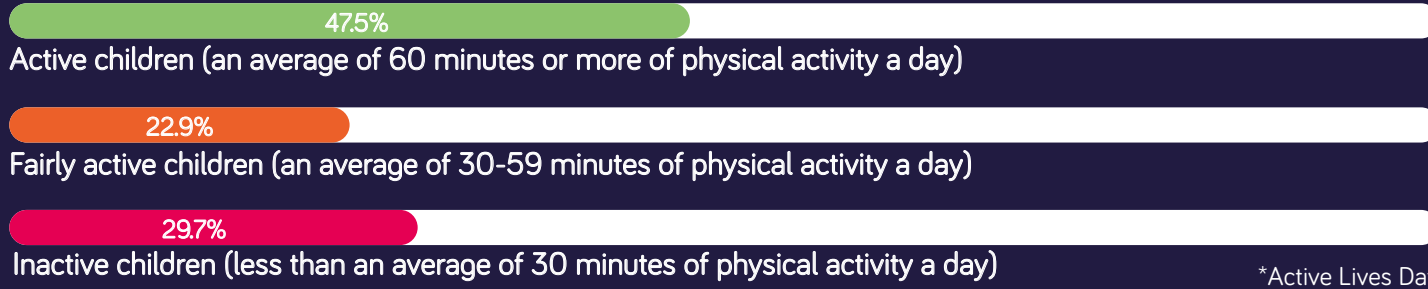




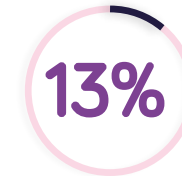
Weekly Sport & Physical Activity Levels for **adults** (16+) in Essex, Southend & Thurrock, November 2020:



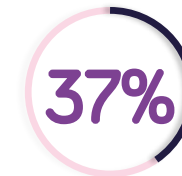
Daily Sport & Physical Activity Levels for **children** (year 1-11) in Essex, Southend & Thurrock, Academic Year 2019-20:



Adults reported going for a walk of 10 minutes or more in the previous 7 days \*



Adults reported going for a bike ride in the previous 7 days \*



Adults reported doing some fitness activity in the previous 7 days \*

\* State of Life Survey, March 2021

**The Economic opportunity gained by investing in physical activity**

The forecasted value\*\* of every additional 10,000 people who we invest in to become regularly active, will save:

\*\* Based on Sheffield Hallam and Sport England Report, 2021



**£2,610,000**

On Residents Physical Wellbeing

Value of changes in productivity, with a reduced risk of developing long term health conditions and instead developing good health



**£12,740,000**

On Residents Mental Wellbeing

Savings in health and social care, with improved life satisfaction and social capital derived from social networks



**£5,820,000**

On Social and Community Development

Savings in criminal justice systems and the non-market benefits acquired by organisations using sports volunteers

# Five Strategic Priorities



## Strengthening Communities

Use the power of physical activity and sport with citizen-led and asset-based approaches to strengthen communities.



## Sport and Physical Activity Sector

To support the recovery, development and growth of our sport and physical activity sector, in order to collectively increase the opportunities for all.



## Children and Young People

Ensuring every child in Essex has the best start in life which is active, healthy and happy.



## Active Environments

To work collectively to develop and provide well connected, accessible places and spaces that encourage people to be active.



## Levelling up Health and Wellbeing

Change behaviours, enabling and empowering people to do things for themselves and their local communities. Physical activity is the highest priority for good health.

# Strengthening Communities

A community is a group of people that can relate to each other, either living in the same neighbourhood, or sharing similar interests or life experiences. Communities benefit enormously from being physically active as it builds connections, confidence and trust.

Strong communities are so important for Essex as they create a sense of belonging and purpose which dramatically improves overall health and wellbeing. The pandemic showed everyone in Essex the incredible acts of generosity, neighbourliness, and community spirit which sustain us in bad times and in good times. There is no greater power than a community acting together on the issues they care about. This power shown by citizens, volunteers, faith groups, charities, social enterprises and community groups has to be championed and supported if we are to improve the lives of everyone in Essex, Southend and Thurrock.

As individual citizens and neighbours, we must see our strength and passion as assets to build upon. All organisations must strive to put citizens in the lead wherever possible. The old days of doing things to communities have gone. We must put communities at the heart of policy making, increasing community power and community spirit that is genuinely citizen led from the grass-roots, in order to create healthy and vibrant local democracy.

Communities are best placed to understand their own cultures, their own needs and how they can help each other. Communities are at the centre of the mission of 'levelling up' our county to tackle the persistent inequalities that are so prevalent in many of our communities across our county. Physical activity and sport is a major part of the social fabric of communities since this is where thousands of people find enjoyment and purpose in their daily lives. Physical activity develops connection, inclusion and resilience. Acting on what you care about with your neighbours builds civic strength and pride. Communities that promote and provide physical activity are our most powerful agents of change for the creation of an active Essex for everyone.



# Sport and Physical Activity Sector

Throughout the pandemic, the government prioritised the importance of physical activity, permitting basic exercise at all times. We need to capitalise on this momentum to ensure our sport and physical activity sector is capable of supporting Essex's economic recovery, reconnecting our communities and ultimately changing people's lives.

For tens of thousands of Essex residents, taking part in organised sport and physical activity is the preferred choice for being active. Being part of a local club, group or leisure centre gives people a real sense of belonging and wellbeing. Regardless of the venue or activity, the benefits for Essex residents are huge. Despite this, many parts of the community still do not, or cannot, access organised sport and physical activity. They face a range of inequalities and challenges that excludes them.

The Essex sport and physical activity sector is broad and dynamic. Covid-19 has severely tested the resilience of our community sports clubs and organisations, and they have risen to the challenge magnificently. As we recover and rebuild, we need to listen, learn, and better understand our communities. Our sport and physical activity sector can play a key role in tackling inequalities and reaching a wider audience.

We need a highly skilled and diverse workforce who are equipped to meet the wide-ranging needs of Essex communities. In order to achieve this, there needs to be a collective commitment to upskill our existing and future workforce. The creation of a sport and physical activity skills plan will help to identify the skills needs, refocus and drive new investment into the sector.

Essex has a strong and vibrant sport and physical activity sector which must be protected, supported, and nurtured. Our sector of sports clubs, leisure centres, voluntary organisations and sector professionals will play a pivotal role in the achievement of our 10-year vision that sees everyone benefitting from an active lifestyle.



# Children and Young People

**Every Essex child should have the best start so they can lead a healthy, active, happy and resilient life. Positive experiences of being active at an early age are much more likely to mean an active adulthood. We are born to be active, but to continue with this lifelong behaviour, we must make sure that experiences are fun, positive, and safe for children and young people.**

Children who are physically active are more confident, more resilient, healthier and happier. Child obesity in our county is getting worse, as are levels of poor mental health. These trends can be changed by encouraging and supporting children and young people to move more as part of their everyday routine.

Across Essex, Southend and Thurrock, the inequalities that exist in being active and playing sports start from a very young age. We must ensure that all children have the opportunity to achieve their potential and can access a variety of safe, top-quality opportunities and spaces to participate in lifelong movement, sport and physical activity. Positive experiences will be their foundations for a long healthy life.

Our children and young people have rapidly changing needs and an amazing range of options competing for their leisure time. Their experiences of sport and physical activity must be fun and meet their needs, with a focus on those who are likely to be less active. Those children that want to compete will be able to do so at a level that suits them, allowing opportunity for talent development through clear progressive pathways.

Children and young people spend a high proportion of their lives within education settings. It is essential therefore that these settings embrace and embed physical activity as part of a child centred approach to learning and development. Developing active-friendly environments, offering a variety of opportunities for movement throughout the school day, and encouraging walking and cycling from home to school will all contribute to high activity levels.

Safeguarding of our children and young people must be at the heart of all of our provision of sport and physical activities across Essex, Southend and Thurrock by ensuring that all organisations have robust safeguarding policies and procedures.



# Active Environments

This area of work is important because it brings to life our commitment to place-based working. Creating attractive spaces and places that allow and encourage people to walk, cycle and run are transformational and have an enormous impact on physical activity levels.

We must design physical activity into buildings, parks, green spaces, coastal paths, and streets. It is essential that active environments meet the specific needs of the people who live there to foster pride and enjoyment of where people live.

The policies that design our future built environment in Essex must prioritise physical activity. This includes the enormous house building programme that will see 180,000 new homes built across Essex by 2036.

The award-winning Essex Design Guide for sport and physical activity has set national standards and will play a crucial role over the next 10-years in creating well designed, high quality places and spaces to nurture healthy and active behaviours.

Similarly, the design of schools must ensure they are active places, encouraging active travel to school through collaboration with the highways and transport system.

Large employers and anchor organisations throughout our county will be challenged to develop and implement active travel plans for their employees, students, and clients.

A significant increase in active environments and active travel will improve air quality and support the work to reduce climate change and carbon production.

All local authorities across Essex need to work closely with Sport England to use their local plans to implement the statutory requirements for playing pitches and community sport facilities. We must protect and maintain our current stock of sports and leisure facilities and encourage them to be as inclusive as possible. Green and blue space are important parts of the facility stock available to Essex residents, and as highlighted by Covid-19 are very much needed for physical and mental health and wellbeing.



# Levelling up Health and Wellbeing



**Good physical and mental health is our most precious asset in life. The benefits of physical activity to our health are so enormous that it is described as a 'miracle drug' by the world's leading scientists. That's before we talk about the indisputable link between being physically active and good mental health.**

This strategy boldly places physical activity as the highest priority for good health. We want all agencies in Essex, Southend and Thurrock that have health outcomes to do the same. The collective impact of all health organisations prioritising physical activity will be unprecedented and change the lives of so many people across our county.

Physical activity will be the foundation to recondition people who have been affected by Covid-19, especially the most at risk groups. People living in our most disadvantaged communities face the worst health inequalities. An active lifestyle significantly increases the likelihood of better health. We must increase our understanding of why people are sedentary, often associated with a person's capability, motivation, and opportunities to be active.

Health at scale will prioritise the importance of physical activity, empowering people to do things for themselves and their local communities. The NHS, local authorities, voluntary sector, employers, and commercial sector can all play their part in encouraging everyone to be active for their own health. Physical activity can stop health problems developing. People with poor health will need extra support to enable them to be active. A healthy population is a productive one. Today, the mental and physical health of our Essex workforce has never been more important to contribute to the wellbeing of all employees and the development and prosperity of the Essex economy. Being in good quality work supports health and wellbeing because work is an important source of social status, and offers an income to participate in society and to live a healthy life.

We will prioritise physical activity in social prescribing programmes across Essex. The prescribing needs to be simple and personalised, with ongoing support if needed. We need to ensure there is a frictionless experience to becoming active and that people's emotional wellbeing is considered at every stage. We will educate all health and social care professionals about the benefits of physical activity for health. We will ensure that physical activity is in all primary and secondary care pathways including pre-and post-operative care, mental health and all long term conditions.

# Six Foundations for Success

Everyone is active in their own way. Many people are active informally, enjoying activities like walking, running, and cycling on their own or with friends and family. Others are active to get from one place to another, often for work, school, college, or shopping. Our most familiar way of being active is through organised activities such as sports clubs, fitness classes, and parkrun. There is no right or wrong way to be active – the important thing is enjoying the experience.

Data and insight have the power to make a huge difference to understanding how to increase physical activity levels and how to demonstrate the positive impact that is happening. It is important to measure physical activity levels in Essex, Southend and Thurrock over the next 10-years to understand the trends and demographics. One million adults regularly active in Essex is still an important and achievable target in the short term. A priority is to measure the progress that is being made against the five strategic priorities of this strategy using a common approach. An important tool is the collection of rich stories which will bring to life the impact of physical activity on individuals, families and communities.

Our vision to have everyone in Essex leading an active life depends on changes to existing systems and sectors through ongoing prioritisation of physical activity. This will involve the measurement of less visible impacts such as system change, tackling inequalities, place-based working, increased collaboration and partnerships, realigning budgets in favour of physical activity, and changes to policy and practice. We must capitalise on the opportunity to grow the economy of Essex by increasing the health and wellbeing of all our workforce. We need to understand what works and what doesn't work so that we can scale up and replicate successful practices and interventions. This requires robust evidence to understand why different approaches are successful. It is also vital that strong communications are disseminated across the county to reach all residents in order to successfully achieve behaviour change.

The six foundations that are the bedrock of this strategy are tackling inequalities, system wide change, place based working, people development, supporting economic growth, and measuring impact and sharing learning.







## Tackling Inequalities

1 in 4 people are not active at all in Essex. In our more disadvantaged communities, this rate can rise to 1 in 2. This strategy must level the playing field so everyone has the opportunity, capability, and motivation to enjoy being active and reap the many rewards. We must break down the barriers to enable more people to be active – barriers such as where people live, how much money they have, gender, sexual orientation, disability, health conditions, and ethnic background. We must ensure that an active lifestyle is promoted and offered to everyone in Essex. However, the resources that exist in our Essex system for physical activity must be used proportionately to the level of need. The important principles of proportionate universalism ensure that greater resources and support are targeted at those who need it most. This is fair, especially when the investment is coming from the public purse.



## System-Wide Change

Traditionally, enabling people to get active in Essex was mainly the responsibility of the hundreds of hard-working voluntary sports clubs and community sport organisations across our county. In recent years, it has become clear that other systems and sectors can also play a vital role. There is huge untapped potential by collaborating with health, social care, transport, education, employers, and planning. This means a significant culture change of doing things differently in the future to ensure physical activity is a priority across all systems in Essex.



## Place-Based Working

The places and spaces where people live and work have an enormous impact on how active we are. Streets, parks, open spaces, estates, squares, canal paths, and buildings have a positive or negative impact on physical activity. Most of us live our lives locally, and our activity habits are shaped by the place where we live. A shared sense of place unites us. Rather than focus on isolated and siloed interventions, a bottom-up, place-based approach understands the culture and needs of a local place and joins everything up by meeting the unique needs of all the people who live there.



## People Development

The thousands of people in Essex who advocate the importance of an active lifestyle, or deliver physical activity and sport as coaches, instructors and leaders, are our most important and precious resource. All of these people, both volunteers and professionals, need to be recognised, supported, and developed so they can meet the changing needs of their audiences and communities. It is vital that professionals and practitioners in all of our system settings have the knowledge and confidence to hardwire physical activity into their core business. Physical activity and sport in Essex needs to be managed and delivered by a diverse range of people who are inclusive, highly skilled, and able to make a full contribution to the health and social fabric of Essex.



## Supporting Economic Growth

The physical and mental health of our Essex workforce has never been more important to contribute to the wellbeing of those who are employed and seeking employment, and to enable the Essex economy to grow and thrive. Employers have an important role to play investing in the physical wellbeing of their workforce to deliver both economic and health benefits. Physical activity is a major part of good health, and plays an important role in people accessing jobs, sustaining employment, and reducing absenteeism through ill health. There are exciting opportunities ahead of us to improve the physical and mental health of the Essex workforce to support our economic growth over the next ten years.



## Measuring Impact and Sharing Learning

It is vital that there is a spirit of sharing all of our learning about how we are increasing physical activity levels to enhance health and wellbeing. Only by sharing our learning of what has worked well and what hasn't can we make progress together, ensuring scarce resources are used most effectively, and create a culture of informed decision making that leads to positive outcomes. All of these benefits accrue from measuring impact.

# Fit for the Future Summary



# FIND YOUR ACTIVE

## A major new behaviour change campaign for Essex, Southend and Thurrock

Due to Covid-19, physical activity is now positioned as essential to health and wellbeing. Every organisation and person across Essex, Southend and Thurrock must now act on the vital importance of an active lifestyle. Now is the time to take the bold step of creating a major new behaviour change campaign called **Find Your Active** to ensure physical activity is a top priority for everyone.

The **Find Your Active** campaign celebrates the fact that everyone can enjoy the huge benefits of being active - it's just about finding what is right for you. For some, it will be getting active in the gym or at a sports club. For others, it will be a short walk or bike ride with a friend around their local park. Find Your Active shines a light on all of the different ways and opportunities to get active around Essex.

**Find Your Active** aims to bring together all of the providers of physical activity and sport in Essex, Southend and Thurrock to promote their offer using the same brand with a clear message that being active is fun - good for you, and for everyone. 1 in 4 of the Essex, Southend and Thurrock population are inactive doing less than 30 minutes physical activity per week - yet the gains from just a small amount of activity are enormous. Many people need support and encouragement to be active, which is why **Find Your Active** encourages every community to have an ambassador to champion movement.

There are lots of ways to get involved in the **Find Your Active** campaign, just head to:  
[www.activeessex.org/find-your-active/](http://www.activeessex.org/find-your-active/)



# The Physical Activity and Sport Strategy for Essex, Southend and Thurrock 2021-2031

For more information, visit: [www.activeessex.org](http://www.activeessex.org) or use the QR code below

