

Changing the sport and physical activity system in Doncaster: the role of the Local Delivery Pilot



This is the first in a series of briefings reporting key findings from the evaluation of the Local Delivery Pilot (LDP). It draws upon a variety of data sources and summarises both the progress of the LDP against its intended outcomes and key learning up to March 2020.

About the Doncaster LDP

Doncaster is one of 12 LDPs funded by Sport England to develop approaches and solutions to increase physical activity levels in response to the specific needs of their communities.

On a day-to-day basis it is managed by the Get Doncaster Moving (GDM) Core Team, which includes staff from Doncaster Council, and supported externally by capacity from Sport England.

The Doncaster LDP seeks to achieve two main outcomes:

1. **Systems change** – Enhancing capacity for the strategic leadership of physical activity across Doncaster. This will be achieved by both strengthening and expanding the physical activity network and challenging stakeholders to proactively and independently consider how they can increase the physical activity levels of residents in their day-to-day work.
2. **Increased physical activity among residents** – By supporting communities to take responsibility for addressing barriers to physical activity in their areas.

The LDP is focused on the whole borough with additional work directed on three target groups.

The three target groups are:

- The physically inactive (those undertaking less than 30 minutes of physical activity per week)
- Families with children and young people
- People living in income deprivation (including low-income or precarious work)

As of March 2020 the Doncaster LDP had received two years of funding and prioritised five key strands of work (new strands of activity are currently being developed):

- **System leadership and engagement:** Building connections and partnerships to enhance the strategic leadership of physical activity, especially among those partners for which it is an important but not a core responsibility.
- **Marketing and communications:** Developing and co-producing a communication strategy for stakeholders and residents to promote physical activity.
- **Active Communities work:** Addressing inactivity by taking an Asset-Based Community Development approach to health and wellbeing in targeted communities. This seeks to build on the assets that are found in communities and mobilise residents and organisations to come together to realise their strength and potential.
- **Major events:** Piloting interventions to identify effective ways to increase the engagement and physical activity of residents during major sports events.
- **Future Parks:** Developing the expertise and capacity to improve parks and open spaces in the borough.



System leadership and engagement

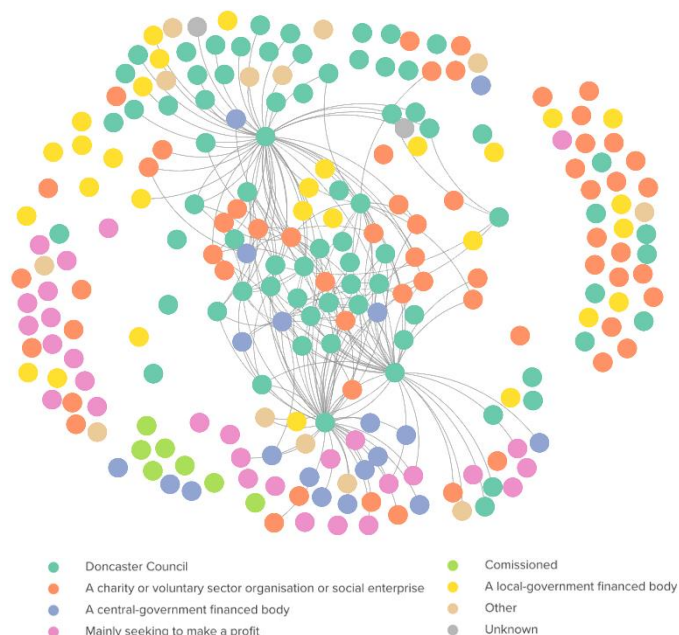
The physical activity network has expanded

Since the start of the LDP the GDM Core Team have focused on building new relationships with stakeholders for which physical activity is not a core responsibility. This is intended to distribute leadership and ensure all partners understand the role they can play in the physical activity system.

There is clear evidence (Figure 1) that the physical activity network has grown significantly in size since the LDP's inception. Importantly, many of these new relationships are strong and communication is frequent, leading to collective decision making and problem solving rather than being transactional in nature.

Figure 1: The current physical activity network

Each dot represents a person. Those without lines are new to the physical activity network since July 2018.



Stakeholders understand the role of physical activity in addressing priorities

Those in the network understand the important role physical activity plays in addressing Doncaster's strategic priorities as well as the need for collective responsibility and collaborative action.

Growing the network remains a priority with further work planned to engage those under-represented. This includes departments in the Council and external partners such as the health sector, schools and businesses. Key to building relationships is providing evidence that initiatives work, sharing success stories, identifying the right time to engage, and considering the strategic offer such as identifying how tackling physical inactivity can support partners in their role.

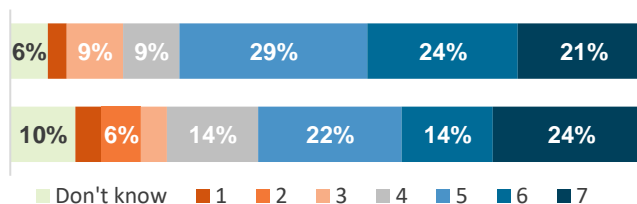
...but GDM remains central to addressing physical inactivity

Whilst the physical activity network is expanding the Council currently plays a vital role in its strategic leadership and funding (Figure 2). The GDM Core Team in particular are critical to the advancement of the network and driving forward changes to address physical inactivity.

Figure 2: Views on the importance of Doncaster Council and the LDP expressed by partners

Without the Sport England LDP fewer organisations would take action to address physical inactivity

Without Doncaster Council fewer organisations would take action to address physical inactivity



Scale: 1-7 where 1=strongly disagree and 7=strongly agree.

Further action will help to achieve distributed leadership

Across Doncaster there is evidence of stakeholders championing physical activity both within their organisation and externally. This could be further enhanced by clarifying the ‘ask’ of GDM which may be preventing others from engaging or taking action (including departments within the Council). The GDM Core Team at the outset deliberately elected not to dictate how stakeholders should support the agenda. However, the findings indicate that there is an appetite for greater direction to harness the momentum that has been achieved to date. This could include more information about the remit of GDM and recommendations about how stakeholders could work together.

There has been a reduction in barriers to working together

Stakeholders perceive that there has been a reduction in some of the barriers to collaborative action including a lack of resources and insufficient coordination or conflicting local priorities.

However, for some, these remain. Prioritising physical activity can be a challenge especially for those for whom it is not central to their role. This is often as a consequence of competing priorities, limited resources and funding uncertainty. Overcoming these challenges is a key objective.

Marketing and communications

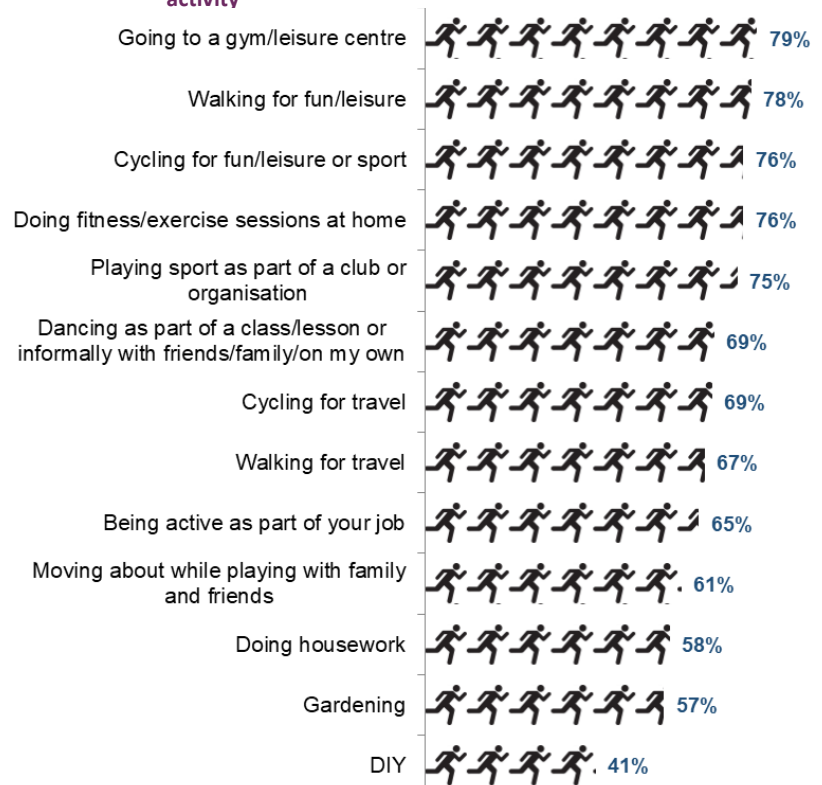
Some uncertainty remains about what constitutes physical activity

Increasing physical activity requires residents to understand the breadth of options available to them as well as the benefits it can bring. This includes more formal types of activity, such as sport or fitness classes, and extends to other forms, such as walking or cycling.

Some stakeholders questioned the consistency of the message about physical activity across Doncaster. This may impede work in the community where many residents also hold a traditional view about what constitutes physical activity (Figure 3). These are anchored in sport and exercise rather than activities which have another primary purpose, such as travel, housework or gardening, but bring health benefits.

Messaging should encompass the wide range of ways in which people can be active. This will ensure all parts of the physical activity system recognise the role they play and communicate effectively with residents in order to increase activity levels.

Figure 3: Percentage of residents who consider items as ‘physical activity’



The LDP's marketing and communications campaign will seek to address this when launched. Initially considered a 'desirable' activity by the GDM Core Team, it is now deemed as a critical element to ensure everyone understands the messages they are promoting.

Active Communities

Gaining trust in communities is the first step to supporting residents to take action

The LDP has match-funded four Well Doncaster Officer posts to support eight target communities in Doncaster to improve their health and wellbeing, including increasing their levels of physical activity. Well Doncaster Officers have made considerable progress in developing relationships with a wide range of organisations and community groups enabling them to gain visibility and earn trust. This has allowed them to engage with residents, and represents the first step to facilitating changes in the physical activity system.

Residents spoke positively about the Well Doncaster Officers and their role in the community, and highlighted the importance of having someone who listens to them. This is especially important as there has been a lack of trust historically as projects have come and gone in the borough. Building trust with communities takes time and the timings for the achievement of the LDP's outcomes need to reflect this.

Well Doncaster Officers have set up a range of activities in their area focused on health and wellbeing including health screenings, peer support groups, support to access funding and sourcing training for local organisations on accessing grants. At this stage only a few examples are explicitly focused on physical activity (e.g. a walking group); however, they fall into the broader remit of the Well Doncaster Officer's role and are seen as critical in setting the right conditions for someone to be physically active. For example, someone can be prevented from taking part in physical activity if they lack confidence or are experiencing poor physical or mental health.

The next step is to support residents to make changes in their local area and engage those who are currently not represented within the community groups with which the Well Doncaster Officers engage. One route to achieve this is the Active Communities Grant which was launched in early 2020. A grant fund of £150,000 has been made available for local groups and individuals supported by the Well Doncaster Officers to design ideas to help residents be active.

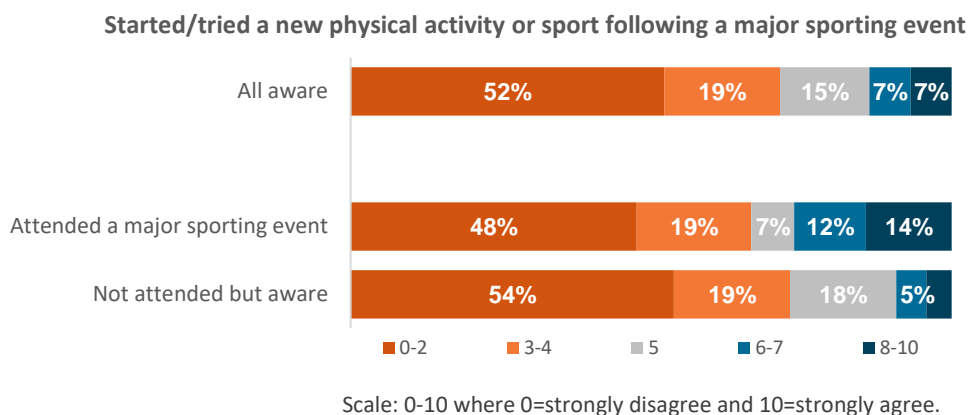
The Well Doncaster Team plan to expand its work to new areas and undertake appreciative inquiry to engage a wider range of residents. A Community Connector role is also in development with an ambition to employ well-connected local people to further engage residents.

Major sport events

Major sporting events can inspire both residents and stakeholders

Awareness of the major sports events in Doncaster is high whilst more than one in ten residents have attended an event. These have inspired residents to start/try a new physical activity or sport (Figure 4) although this is greater for those who have actually attended an event.

Figure 4: Residents' views on the influence of major sport events



However, the more significant impact of these events has been in encouraging partners to see the value of physical activity, ensuring it remains a priority in the area. The Tour de Yorkshire in particular represented a turning point by helping a range of stakeholders to understand the wider benefits that sport and physical activity could bring to Doncaster.

Influencing factors

Moderating factors have brought both challenges and opportunities

Whilst the period covered by these findings precedes the COVID-19 pandemic, considerable challenges were still encountered in Doncaster. The floods in November 2019 significantly affected some areas of the borough and subsequently impacted the work of the LDP by diverting the resources and capacity of staff, including the GDM Core Team, and adversely impacting residents' lives. Elements of planned activity for the LDP were suspended for a period of time while recovery action was undertaken. The floods continue to affect areas of Doncaster, with work still ongoing.

However, the floods also brought communities together to help tackle a shared problem. Adaptability is at the heart of the LDP and GDM have embraced this where possible, actively encouraging the Well Doncaster Officers to build relationships with residents in the neighbourhoods affected. This experience of dealing with a critical incident has helped prepare the GDM Core Team and its partners to respond to the challenges of COVID-19 which will influence the LDP's progress.

A long-term approach is required to achieve the LDP's ambition

The ambition of the LDP is vast and GDM remained committed to a long-term, sustainable strategy. In some areas progress has been slower than anticipated at the outset. Building new relationships takes time and is especially challenging where the importance of physical activity is not understood. These challenges have been exacerbated by the specificities of the Doncaster context which includes a large number of stakeholders and organisations across multiple communities. Trying to decide who to engage, how to engage them and what to engage them on takes time.

On reflection, the GDM Core Team consider the pace of the work undertaken is about right. They understand that adopting a long-term strategic approach with sustainability at its heart will inevitably mean that the pace of change will be slow at times. The GDM Core Team and their stakeholders believe more progress will be seen over the next year, once the challenges of COVID-19 are overcome, having taken time to embed their initial approach since the outset of the LDP.