

Doncaster's whole system approach to reducing inactivity: How the LDP has made measurable progress



About the Doncaster LDP

Doncaster is one of 12 Local Delivery Pilots (LDPs) funded by Sport England to use a systemic approach to tackling inactivity, responding to the specific needs of communities.

Get Doncaster Moving (GDM) is a partnership which brings together organisations who are committed to supporting Doncaster's communities to become healthier and more vibrant through physical activity and sport. The LDP is Doncaster's whole-systems approach to tackling physical inactivity and it focuses capacity and resources on changes that will have a long-lasting impact on population behaviour. The learning from this approach informs how the GDM Strategy is implemented, particularly how to tackle inequality and support the least active people in Doncaster. On a day-to-day basis it is managed by the GDM Team and supported externally by capacity from Sport England. Situated within the Doncaster Council (the Council) Public Health Team, colleagues leading the approach are embedded in different areas of the Council including parks, active travel, communications, leisure and sport. They are supported by roles hosted in external organisations, including a Green Space Network Co-ordinator at Conservation Volunteers and Community Connectors within various voluntary groups.

The Doncaster LDP seeks to utilise physical activity and sport to contribute to the Council's economic growth ambitions and explore how it can support residents across all its communities to benefit from these aspirations. This will be achieved through two main aims:

1. **Systems change** – To understand and influence Doncaster's whole system so that it supports more people to move in their daily lives. This will be achieved by both strengthening and expanding the physical activity network and challenging stakeholders to proactively and independently consider the conditions needed for increasing physical activity levels.
2. **Reduced physical inactivity among residents** – By supporting communities to lead change in addressing barriers to physical activity in their areas.

The LDP takes a whole borough approach, with additional focused work directed at three specific groups.

These 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 (defined as poorly paid, unprotected and insecure)



Introduction

This process report draws together findings from three outputs to summarise the progress of the LDP against key outcomes and impacts. These include:

- The GDM Strategy Review (published in December 2021)
- The Impact Summary Report (prepared by CFE Research in December 2021)
- The Well Doncaster Quarter 3 Report (prepared by Well Doncaster in December 2021 which reviews progress against the activities led by the Well Doncaster Team)

This report aims to identify not only what is and is not changing but importantly how and why the GDM Team consider outcomes have been achieved and what it means for the LDP moving forwards.

Defining the system in Doncaster

The system in Doncaster is **broad** and encompasses “*everyone and everything that both influences physical activity and is influenced by physical activity*”. The LDP seeks not only to impact the behaviours of organisations and institutions (both with and without a physical activity remit) but **all stakeholders** who have an **interest in** or are **affected by the outcomes** it is trying to achieve. This includes organisations from across the public, private and voluntary sectors through to residents who will benefit from the changes brought about. Put simply, anyone who has the potential to support people and communities to be active, and reduce inequalities around access to opportunities to be active, are part of the system in Doncaster.

Residents are key to this: they are the catalyst for action and should be **empowered** to bring about change that will address barriers to physical activity in their specific communities. Evidence strongly supports the case for community-centred approaches to health and wellbeing, with strengthening community assets key to helping to improve the health of the poorest fastest¹.

The Doncaster LDP recognises that the system is not just made up of individuals; physical inactivity is caused by a complex relationship between a wide range of factors which includes policies (both local and national), the physical environment (such as parks, active travel routes and infrastructure), relationships between individuals and cultural norms. Stakeholders influence these and the LDP wish to influence Doncaster’s system so that it supports more people to move in their daily lives.

Within this is the acknowledgement that power and interest is **not evenly distributed** across the system, and some stakeholders have more influence in both driving and preventing change. It follows that the LDP is targeting those parts of the system which they consider will have the **greatest impact** on activity levels and is reflected in specific strands of activity which include marketing and communications, parks and open spaces, active travel, and children and young people alongside community-centred activity programmes (such as Dance On and Well Doncaster). These were informed by a substantial evidence-base which includes the outcomes of Doncaster Talks research², bespoke system mapping workshops and Appreciative Inquiry (AI) in communities.

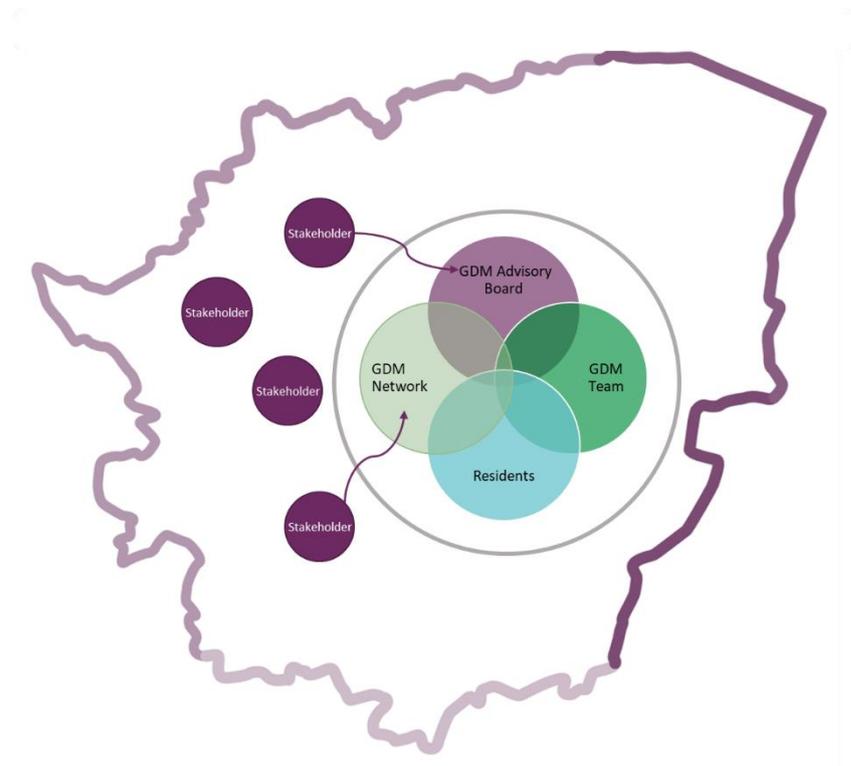
¹ Public Health England (2000). *Community-centred public health: Taking a whole system approach (Briefing of research findings)*. London: PHE.

² Team Doncaster (2019). *High Level Analysis for Team Doncaster Annual Partnership Summit*. Available from: <https://dmbcwebstolive01.blob.core.windows.net/media/Default/Corporate%20Policy%20&%20Performance%20/Doncaster%20Talks%20Analysis%20Booklet.docx>

The expansion of the network

The network of organisations and institutions working together to promote physical activity has expanded, and new relationships are strong and frequent

The physical activity network works to tackle inactivity in Doncaster through the delivery of the GDM Strategy. It comprises the GDM Advisory Board, GDM Team and a range of organisations. The network aims to grow and evolve to deliver sustainable change. Stakeholders not currently engaged in the network are being targeted to encourage their involvement. This includes those who do not perceive themselves as relevant to the physical activity agenda and are currently under-represented.

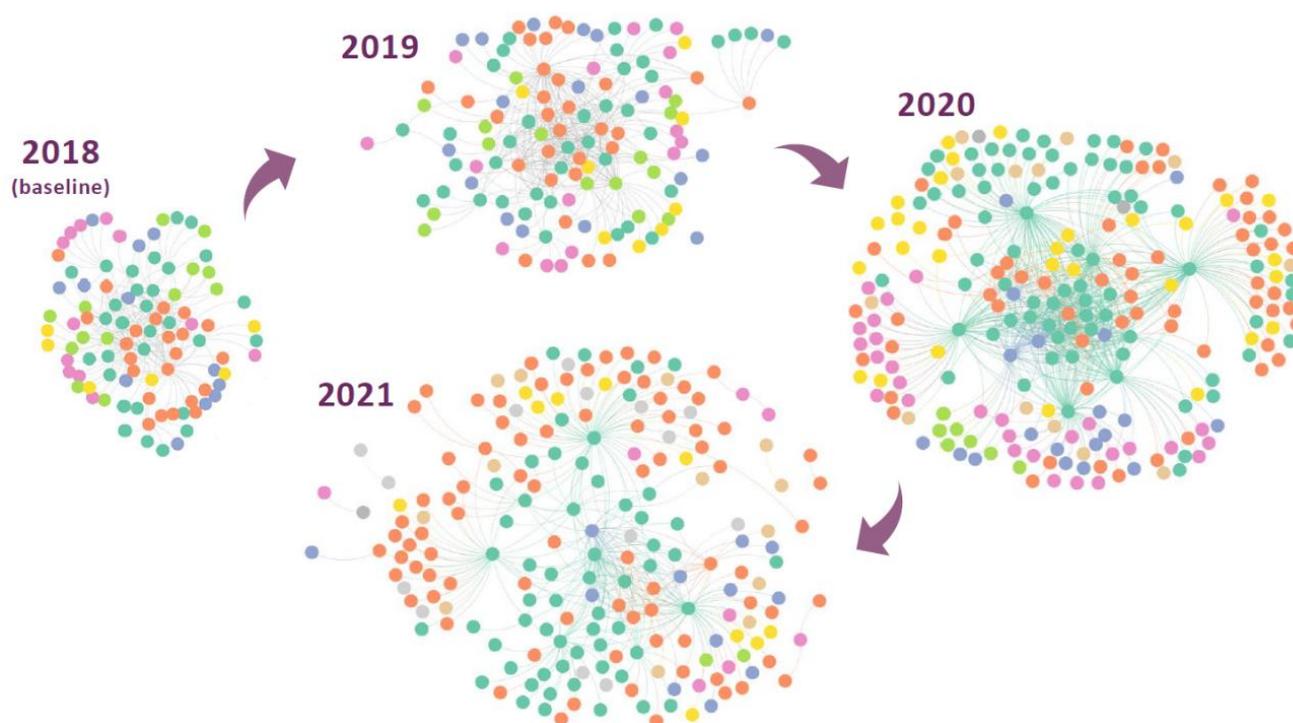


CFE's Impact Summary Report³

provides clear evidence that the physical activity network has **grown significantly in size** with more people and organisations working to achieve healthy and vibrant communities through physical activity and sport. Importantly, many of these new relationships are **strong and communication is frequent**, leading to **collective decision making and problem solving** to address challenges at the borough and local level. Although COVID-19 has made developing new partnerships difficult in some circumstances, one-third of the relationships, as of March 2021, were developed in the previous 12 months. Stakeholders are varied and cover Council departments; providers across Doncaster; the voluntary and community sector; and local, regional and national organisations.

³ CFE Research (2021). *Impact Summary Report for the National Evaluation and Learning Partner*.

Growth of the physical activity network



Proportion of connections

Strength	July 2019	March/April 2021	Frequency	July 2019	March/April 2021
Informal	15%	7%	Ad hoc	30%	25%
Formal	33%	32%	Multiple times in six months	32%	23%
Problem solving	19%	22%	Once a month	21%	30% ↑
Collective decisions	33%	39% ↑	Once a week	17%	22% ↑

Targeted engagement strategies have been instrumental in driving the expansion of the network, particularly among those previously under-represented. A series of **planned** processes, events and meetings have been implemented with the objective of **enhancing the visibility of GDM’s work** and **securing buy-in**. That said, learning also strongly indicates the importance of **reacting** to opportunities that emerge to advance the strategic ambitions of the LDP.

The GDM Advisory Board have opened new doors

Comprising senior representatives from the public, private and voluntary sector, the GDM Advisory Board share a common vision to tackle physical inactivity and oversee the delivery of the GDM Strategy⁴. It reports into the Council’s Health and Wellbeing Board which forms part of Team Doncaster, a cross-section of organisations and individuals responsible for the implementation of the new 10-year Borough Strategy *Doncaster Delivering Together*⁵.

The GDM Advisory Board play an advocacy role at a senior level, ensuring the **visibility of GDM’s work at the strategic level** in order to create opportunities for collaboration and “*open those doors*”. The Board are leaders within their respective fields with shared interests. They understand the GDM vision and have become comfortable with the language of systems change and the critical

⁴ <https://getdoncastermoving.org/strategy>

⁵ <https://www.teamdoncaster.org.uk/doncaster-delivering-together>

role they play in leading this. The GDM Team work closely with the Board. Whilst they have played a role in LDP activities since its inception, the purpose and structure of the Board has **evolved in response to the LDP's 'journey'**. COVID-19 (alongside a combination of other factors⁶) encouraged the GDM Team to consider how to distribute leadership through Board members.

Physical activity received unprecedented attention nationally from Government and partners alike as a way to improve individuals' physical and mental health during the pandemic. In Doncaster physical activity was one of the '5 Ways to Wellbeing'⁷ promoted by the Council and subsequently incorporated in the Mayor's 'Restart, recovery and renewal plan'⁸. The pandemic has also reiterated the significance of key LDP activities overseen by the Board to improve infrastructure to support physical activity, such as active travel and the use of parks. However, it also highlighted that changes were necessary to facilitate the Board's enhanced involvement in GDM.

Changes to meeting structures were introduced to support more **open dialogue and harness the expertise of the Board in problem-solving**. One development, considered critical in energising the Board and maximising its value moving forward, is the inclusion of an open space format where members can discuss the impact of COVID-19 on themselves and their organisation or talk through the latest developments and horizon scanning in their work. It gives opportunity for connections to be made and has led to individuals sharing their experiences more openly, creating a new dynamic between members. This has led to greater collaboration as a result of open and honest discussions, and increased levels of trust and empathy. Whilst the Board oversee the work of GDM, they do not operate hierarchically with all members of the Board working collegiately towards the objectives of GDM alongside the GDM Team. Changes to the Board format reinforced this way of working with any remaining barriers broken down. The GDM Team and Advisory Board are peers who learn from one other and this approach is reinforced by the Chair.

To support this, the GDM Team have worked with the Board to **sharpen their 'ask' of them**. This was intended to clarify the role they play in GDM, ensuring joint ownership of the work and championing physical activity outside of Board meetings. This has involved them strengthening their role as **system change leaders** and having greater connectivity with the GDM Team and wider stakeholders to influence change.

⁶ COVID-19 challenged the planned work of the LDP during the initial months of the first national lockdown with certain strands of delivery paused. Other factors also influenced this including the growth of the LDP and several unanticipated staff changes. The GDM Team perceived these developments as an opportunity to understand their capacity requirements and re-align where changes were required to support the achievement of the LDP objectives in the long-term.

⁷ <https://www.doncaster.gov.uk/services/health-wellbeing/ideas-to-stay-well-5-ways-to-wellbeing>

⁸ https://doncaster.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s26617/i6%20cab%20280720%20-%20Mayoral%20RRR%20Plan%20Cabinet%20280720_.pdf

Sharpening the 'ask' of the Board

The GDM Advisory Board is expected to be involved in high-level decision-making, monitoring, and co-creating solutions where necessary. The GDM Team and the Board have clarified how they will work together. The GDM Team will seek guidance from the Advisory Board on strategically significant activities through three mechanisms:



Ahead of meetings the GDM Team prepare the relevant information under one of the sub-headings and circulate it one week in advance. The Board are then clear about how they are expected to contribute to each agenda item. But this is not their only role; the Board represents and advocates GDM at a strategic level. Their role is to:

- Understand and influence the dynamics of the physical activity system in Doncaster
- Provide leadership and momentum in addressing the challenge of inactivity
- Oversee the direction of the GDM Strategy and lead its implementation
- Drive the GDM Strategy through their work area to help deliver the outcomes
- Broker conversations on inactivity to create new audiences from different sectors
- Implement and influence changes within their system that will support GDM
- Oversight of the objectives and actions within their defined areas, ensuring they are on track and making progress
- Gather and feed in local intelligence

The Board play an instrumental role in connecting the GDM Team with senior leaders with significant advances in recent months in areas previously under-represented in the network, including GPs and the cultural sector. The GDM Team are *“around the table”*. This has brokered new relationships and meant that there is a real opportunity for them to embed physical activity in the planning stages of their peers’ work.

GDM Advisory Board members are opening doors: The social prescribing agenda

One of the Board's members is a senior leader in Doncaster's health sector. He is a local GP, Clinical Chair at Doncaster Clinical Commissioning Group and Vice-Chair of the Health and Wellbeing Board. He has recently been mentoring the LDP Programme Manager to navigate the healthcare system assisting her to understand the sector and identify opportunities for collaboration. As a result of this a wide range of relationships are being strengthened between the LDP Programme Manager and health colleagues who are leading on frailty (including fall prevention), long COVID and social prescribing.

Doncaster's social prescribing model has the ability to support residents to consider physical activity. There are three projects that have the potential to bring financial investment, foster new partnerships and address some of the barriers to linking physical activity within the current model. These projects are not funded by Sport England, but the LDP Programme Manager has supported them to connect with Doncaster's priorities and structures as they provide a significant opportunity to connect with the LDP's strands of activity (e.g. Future Parks and active travel) and the wider LDP's strategic ambitions:

- The South Yorkshire Integrated Care System (SY ICS) are leading a regional programme to increase social prescribing referrals to 'Green and Blue' activities.
- South Yorkshire Housing has received funding from SY ICS to respond to mental health social prescribing referrals with physical activity stated as a referral pathway.
- Doncaster has received investment from the Department of Transport to deliver a feasibility study linking active travel to social prescribing. If successful, it will unlock further investment to deliver the proposed project over three years.

As a result of the support provided by the GDM Advisory Board Member, The LDP Programme Manager has also been invited to be involved in the current review and refresh of the Doncaster social prescribing model. This will further enable a joined-up approach to be taken with the three projects adding value to the overall social prescribing model. The LDP Programme Manager's involvement will also ensure a strong focus is placed on physical activity as part of the overall model. There is also a wider ambition to identify how the GDM Team can connect members of the GDM network (such as voluntary sector providers) with the social prescribing agenda and ensure they are included as a sign-posted exit route.

This provides an example of how work in Doncaster is changing to reflect the GDM

Stakeholders are engaging differently through network meetings

The GDM Team did not push or ask anything of organisations already embedded in the physical activity network during the early stages of the pandemic due to the complexity of meeting immediate needs across the system. They hosted a virtual network meeting in early 2021, with a focus on **re-engaging partners** by sharing updates and convening a space where partners could be heard by the GDM Team. GDM Advisory Board members took a lead role in the event, chairing and leading breakout sessions to increase their visibility to the network.

In March 2022, the GDM Team held a further virtual network meeting with the specific focus of supporting their Strategy Review work. The format of the session was purposely different to the previous event, with less focus afforded to presenting and sharing information and more time set aside for **discussion and networking**. The breakout sessions covered key topics to inform the Strategy Review process and were based on both the role partners wished to play in GDM and changes they would like to see in the system. This led to more opportunities for discussion between partners about how to tackle inactivity.

The GDM Team described a **collective shift** amongst those involved, with an **increased appetite for collaboration and willingness to take actions forward as part of a shared responsibility**. Progress at times had previously been transactional in nature. Most were now positive about the opportunity to get involved and “*up for the challenge*”, with a commitment to collaborating and working together in new and innovative ways with the support of the GDM Team. That said, a minority remain unclear about what is required of them, what has already been achieved and what the next steps are. Change takes time but holding conversations differently over time is starting to result in a shift in how the network is responding.

Those involved in the physical activity network wish to **engage with each other more regularly** in order to advance the work of GDM and increase the networking opportunities available. The GDM Team want to build on this momentum by stimulating partners to tackle physical inactivity and are currently considering the options available to them. Ideas include:

- More regular meetings and events including face-to-face networking opportunities, where possible.
- A newsletter to include ideas and information for those in the physical activity network with the content driven by members of the network.
- A partner specific area of the website with specific resources and a space to share learning.
- Establishing a Community of Practice or similar where GDM come together to discuss topics of interest facilitated by the GDM Team but with content led by the physical activity network.
- Bite size information videos of GDM learning published on a rolling programme with one to three per quarter. These will be hosted on the GDM website and launched at a lunchtime session where attendees can join, network and ask questions about the content. Initially led by the GDM Team, there is the potential for the physical activity network to take control and share ideas.

The locality approach to working in Doncaster will play an important role in the future

Doncaster Council split the borough into four locality areas, which comprise of groups of wards in the North, South, East and Central. They are sufficiently small to allow a focus on **local needs**, but large enough to ensure that issues and opportunities are dealt with effectively. The Council and wider Team Doncaster partners have embraced a locality way of working to ensure solutions are **place-based** and build on the **strengths of each local area**.

Regular locality meetings are held with various organisations (both council and non-Council) to support this, including Well Doncaster representatives who are partly funded by the LDP⁹. Originally

⁹ The role of Well Doncaster in communities aligns with GDM values and principles, with funding from the LDP used to support Well Doncaster Officer capacity within the most deprived and inactive communities. The team are building strong and trusted relationships with residents, groups and services, which is helping to grow the network of people involved in supporting residents to be active. The Appreciative Inquiry process ensures that community insight informs GDM priorities and plans whilst the PAGs (supported by the WDOs) facilitate change led by/with residents. The Well

set up to support the Council's response to the pandemic, meetings now take place on a monthly basis with an expanded remit and include staff across the organisations at different levels. Locality working was already on the agenda for the Council but the pandemic accelerated this.

Locality meetings include coverage of a **broad health and wellbeing agenda**, with Well Doncaster attending to represent shared objectives. Whilst Well Doncaster are involved in these discussions across the borough, the nature of their contribution **varies** on a locality basis. The focus of individual meetings depends on the personnel involved, the area and its priorities. The opportunity to influence the agenda to promote GDM's vision therefore differs, with Well Doncaster more able to do this in some localities than others. The structure is still relatively new and evolving from its original remit. It is taking time to get established, find out the best way to share information and take action. The team are considering how the GDM strands of work can connect into the strategic and operational processes of the locality model to ensure they can take advantage of the opportunities available.

It has taken time for Well Doncaster to be embedded as they are 'new' to discussions in contrast with some of the other organisations involved who have collaborated previously. The GDM Team's reflections and experiences indicate that there are **no 'short cuts'** and it takes time to build credibility, confidence and trust. Some of the meetings are attended by Well Doncaster Officers who have on occasion described feeling less **confident to contribute** to the meetings when not directly asked. They perceive their role to be less senior when compared to other attendees which can be off-putting.

There has been good progress through the Strategy Review and refresh, with a commitment from directors to embed GDM in locality working. The GDM Team plan to continue to attend meetings and respond to opportunities as they arise to advance the GDM agenda whilst supporting Officers to confidently speak about their role.

But a conversation doesn't have to start with physical activity

Whilst advancing the GDM vision through locality meetings has proven challenging in some areas, learning to date indicates that a conversation does not always have to start with physical activity. Successful partnership work can come about by engaging organisations about other topics pertinent to them. This has been showcased successfully during the COVID-19 emergency response phase, where support was given by Well Doncaster Officers. Following the development of this relationship, conversations about physical activity can come in time once trust has been built.

Even where physical activity is the subject being discussed, the team have identified that it is important to be flexible about how it is achieved. Identifying a shared purpose is important with flexibility being at the heart of the work – team members cannot dictate what 'success' looks like. This approach does, however, take time and one meeting or conversation is rarely enough.

The Well Doncaster Team have identified this approach as helpful in their work. The important thing to unlocking relationships is to:

— Introduce yourself and what you and your organisation can do.

Doncaster Team also manage the Active Communities Grants, the Community Connectors and the Walking Group programme, ensuring that they are managed by trusted people in communities and can respond quickly and flexibly to needs.

- Understand their perspective and focus, and what they want to gain from the conversation. This involves active listening to ensure rapport and relationships can be built. Identify ways you can work together to support the community, including opportunities to address physical inactivity.
- Supporting them with what they want to achieve first can gain ‘buy in’ and build trust – they are then more likely to work to consider supporting wider objectives.

The Doncaster context is also significant in accounting for the expansion

Whilst targeted engagement has played a significant role, the physical activity network in Doncaster has **evolved organically** in response to the opportunities that they have encountered. Described as a *“system of opportunities”* the GDM Team have skilfully harnessed those that have been presented to expand the network of organisations and individuals involved. These have influenced the strategic direction of the LDP and meant that they have pursued areas of work that we not anticipated at the outset.

The Doncaster context here is significant. The LDP Team are awarded **significant autonomy** in their roles by

leaders within the Council. Directors (including the Director of Public Health who is a staunch advocate of GDM with significant influence within the system) **strongly believe in the vision of GDM** and afford the team freedom in their day-to-day roles to respond flexibly and pragmatically to the needs of the system. This autonomy is passed from the Directorate to the Strategic Lead and then dispersed amongst the team in a supportive way. They are trusted in their roles to advance the priorities of the LDP and *“go where the energy is”* across the partners they work with.

However, this approach requires a high level of **skill, confidence and knowledge** amongst the GDM Team. The team described having to be *“bold and brave and confident”* (especially when seeking to engage non-traditional directorates and departments) whilst at the same time being *“respectful”* of other people’s priorities and workloads. There is an appreciation that physical inactivity is not the main priority for all parts of the system, and they need to move forward at a pace that is appropriate. The skills and capabilities of the GDM Team have **grown significantly throughout the life of the LDP** and they now hold a range of complementary skills. They work together as a close-knit team and draw on each other’s strengths to affect change.

Skilfully harnessing opportunities

The GDM Team have identified how they harnessed opportunities which are presented to them.

When invited to present or contribute to stakeholder meetings the GDM Team outline what they are trying to achieve and why (with specific reference to Doncaster Delivering Together). They then outline how GDM aligns with stakeholders’ work ensuring a shared purpose is established. The Team is then clear and direct about where they think the opportunities for joint working are. Whilst providing examples is important, retaining flexibility is key as stakeholders may want to work together differently. They have to adapt to the opportunities presented during discussions and respond to the priorities of partners.

Embedded posts using LDP funding... going where the energy is

The GDM Team is small and they recognise that they need more capacity to achieve their ambitions. Rather than expand the core team, they have utilised under-spend brought about by the pandemic to embed two posts within existing Council departments. Sustainability is key; embedding these posts will build capacity by upskilling individuals in the GDM way. They will promote the GDM vision at the departmental level and allow connections to be made.

Whilst the full remit of the roles is currently being considered, they will be created in:

- **Active travel:** The Doncaster LDP Investment Plan identified the need for an embedded post to support community engagement. COVID-19 delayed this appointment (due to capacity) creating the opportunity for the GDM Team to reflect on what they need from the post. The role has since expanded and will encompass liaising with elected members and strategic leaders within the Council and community engagement. A broader skillset is required to meet this requirement and recruitment is due to commence. Once in place, the role will increase capacity and allow the GDM Team to better respond to community need.
- **Policy, Insight and Change (PIC):** PIC work across all directorates within the Council and have established relationships with partners. Over the last few years, the GDM Team have engaged regularly with senior leaders in PIC and there is a desire from them and the wider Team Doncaster partners to learn from the GDM approach. However, there is limited capacity amongst the GDM Team for this role and previous attempts to influence the work of departments in the council have had limited success. Embedding a team member in PIC provides an opportunity to test a new way of working that has the potential to be mutually beneficial. It will be flexible and responsive and start by identifying opportunities (or 'leverage points') to influence policy and practice across the Council. For example, working with the Adult Services to understand where changes can be made to enable more people to be active. The role is intended to forge links with other like-minded parts of the system to ensure a coordinated, joined-up approach. It will ensure that GDM is automatically at the forefront of policy development – *"our voice when we aren't in the room"*.

But they need to challenge themselves to be less risk averse

The GDM Team acknowledge that they can be risk averse because of their nature and the conditions in which they have previously worked. They need to continue to push themselves to trial different approaches to tackling physical inactivity in accordance with their commitment to 'test and learn'. An evidence-based approach is integral to their work and is one of the principles they wish to embed further across the Council as part of the legacy of their LDP funding. This will continue to push a *"more experimental"* approach and the learning that emerges from the investment, and is deemed especially important for the parks and open space work. There is a real opportunity to do something *"big"* because of the significant budget allocated to improve and activate spaces for community use. Described as a potential *"defibrillator"*, the GDM Team need to identify interventions that will increase the use of parks and green spaces for physical activity among target communities. One suggestion includes outreach activity to target the Sikh temple that neighbours one of the parks where large numbers convene on a daily basis. The team acknowledge

that they need to move away from small “bitty” pots of funding to larger scale investment that will facilitate change.

COVID-19 has both facilitated and impeded the work of the LDP

COVID-19 has undoubtedly impeded the progress of GDM, especially within the localities, as conversations instrumental in expanding the network were forced online. However, it is important to acknowledge that the pandemic has also **expedited the progress of the LDP**. Previous process learning reports¹⁰ described how the GDM Team (both at the borough and local level) harnessed the opportunities presented through the wider responsibilities they assumed in response to the pandemic to both strengthen existing and develop new partnerships. COVID-19 response funding from central government has been instrumental in allowing the Well Doncaster Team to build on this in the last six months. It has opened doors with partners and levered relationships which in turn have strengthened the GDM connection and trust.

The Strategy Review will support GDM to tell their story and create a collective vision

First developed five years ago (and prior to the award of LDP funding), it is timely to review the GDM Strategy to ensure it takes account of:

- The LDP investment and strands of activity
- COVID-19 and the requirement to respond to the current environment
- The new 10-year Borough Strategy *Doncaster Delivering Together*
- The new 10-year Sport England Strategy *Uniting the Movement*
- Significant learning from the LDP and ways of working

Led by Yorkshire Sport Foundation, on behalf of the GDM Advisory Board, the Strategy Review provides an **independent** view of what has been achieved so far. The GDM Team acknowledge that the work of the LDP does not always neatly align with the Strategy which contributes to difficulties in them telling the story of their journey. The Strategy refresh will help to address this by providing a framework against which they can evidence progress and change, including how and why they make the decisions they do. This will enable them to make the work of GDM more visible, ensure stakeholders understand what they are trying to achieve and encourage others to join the network.

Initially intended as a ‘refresh’, the Strategy Review has evolved into a **more substantial process** than initially envisaged. The GDM Team are committed to their principles and wish to ensure that the Strategy reflects a **collective vision**. The process itself has also been highly valuable and opened doors, especially within the Council. The GDM Team have skilfully used the opportunities presented through the refresh to engage directors in discussion not only about the future direction of their work but also about the work GDM have been doing to gain buy-in to future joint working.

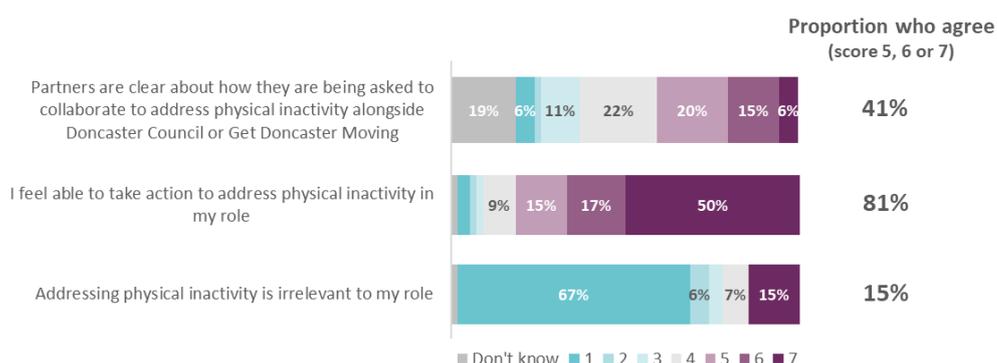
¹⁰ See CFE Research (2021). *Changing the physical activity system in Doncaster: Key lessons from the last six months*.

Embracing opportunities from the Strategy Review

Engagement with the directors during a joint meeting enabled GDM to gain collective buy-in to the importance of physical activity in the locality model of working which is now seen as a key 'pillar' of their work in communities. During this meeting, all directors committed to working with the GDM Team, with a series of individual meetings scheduled as part of the Strategy Review to identify how they could support GDM within the theme areas of their directorate. Specific opportunities were identified through these one-to-one meetings with directors, including work on a park play strategy, engaging in a strategic investment workshop to examine capital investment across Doncaster, and a project to take a regenerative approach to Edlington. Still in their infancy, the outcome of these opportunities is unknown but they present a significant opportunity to ensure that physical activity is considered in all.

Collective impact requires distributed leadership with strong backbone support

The GDM Team, with the Advisory Board, have started to consider their role in supporting the system to come together and create 'collective impact'. CFE's Impact Summary Report¹¹ indicates that whilst



the network has expanded, organisations are not always clear what their role is or how to address physical inactivity through their work. For many it is not core to their organisation or role, and the extent to which they support or promote it varies. Time constraints and a lack of clarity about how to incorporate it within their work are the main factors that account for this.

Creating the conditions for distributive leadership is a primary objective of the LDP – the importance of which has been highlighted in previous process learning reports¹². However, within the last six months, the GDM Team have reconceptualised what this means in practice. The GDM Team's thinking has evolved with the **emergence of a newly defined 'backbone support'** function for them. Whilst they have always aimed to fulfil this role, they now consider it a valid and legitimate activity that is necessary to enable them to progress the strategic ambitions of the LDP. This marks a **shift in emphasis** as the GDM Team initially aspired to gradually transfer leadership to other parts of the system. Learning has indicated that distributed leadership is not always enough

¹¹ CFE Research (2021). *Impact Summary Report for the National Evaluation and Learning Partner*.

¹² See CFE Research (2021). *Changing the physical activity system in Doncaster: Key lessons from the last six months*.

to create action – a finding reinforced by the five key conditions for collective impact which have directly influenced the GDM Team’s thinking: a common agenda, shared measurement systems, mutually reinforcing activities, continuous communication, and backbone support organizations¹³.

Crucially, there is **strong support** from those engaged in a recent network meeting for the Council adopting this role. They frequently refer to the GDM Team’s overarching (helicopter) view of the system and their ability to connect the dots. This means that they are better placed to coordinate the activities of partners and bring different organisations together to collaborate. The network wish for GDM to lead the system by setting an example, being passionate about the vision and sharing learning, improving infrastructure and influencing policy¹⁴.

What does backbone support involve?

The emergence of the backbone support function is **new** and the GDM Team are **yet to formalise it** with both the Advisory Board and the physical activity network. Discussions will take place both internally and externally to explore **what this will look like in practice** as they seek to provide clarity to the system. They now recognise that a backbone function is critical to the advancement of the system and that they with the resource that the LDP brings are the right team to play this role.

Next steps

The GDM Team, with the GDM Advisory Board, will **determine what role they will play** in delivering backbone support. Previously the team stepped in to help or lead activity when organisations came forward with an idea or request for support, but this is not sustainable. Instead, they are now seeking to **facilitate** connections to enable partners to support each other with the challenges they are experiencing. Within this there is an acknowledgement that this role may **vary for different parts of the physical activity system**, with an acceptance that not all parts warrant the same level of intervention. Leadership will also still be required in aspects of their role, and moving forwards the GDM Team need to determine where to lead and where to let go.

“Where do we just [say] ‘You guys crack on and we’ll support you’ or ‘We’ve got all this research and evidence, here it is and we are the best people to lead this work and you can help us’”.

The resident voice in the system

Appreciative Inquiry ensures work is community-driven and asset-based

A key strand of work is focused on engaging residents in the localities to lead improvements in their communities, including opportunities for physical activity. The GDM Team, through Well Doncaster, are working to empower residents to make changes in their communities and become part of the physical activity network, and provide insight to shape the future direction of provision. Doncaster takes an Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) approach to health and wellbeing. **This approach empowers local people** and trusts communities to shape their future by utilising the assets, strengths, knowledge, skills and human connections within it.

¹³ https://ssir.org/articles/entry/collective_impact

¹⁴ As indicated during a recent network meeting and depth interviews with stakeholders as part of the evaluation.

AI was undertaken to focus on the strengths in local areas and co-produce action plans for future change. AI has four stages: *Discovery* to identify positive insight and the strengths and successes of an area (utilising Community Explorers); *Dream* to reflect on this insight and consider 'what might be'; *Design* to create co-produced action plans; and *Deliver* to turn these plans into reality by residents leading their implementation. Crucially, AI is not just about gaining insight but actively empowering communities to drive forward change to enhance outcomes in their localities. AI was undertaken across 20 communities in Doncaster starting in July 2021 (more detail is available in the Quarter 3 Well Doncaster Report). This will be repeated annually.

AI 'dreams' and actions

AI covers a wide range of topics in an area but examples which relate to physical activity include:

- Active and accessible travel: The Balby Positive Action Group (a resident group) will support the co-production of local maps for walking and cycling.
- Ensuring awareness of community assets: The Stainforth Positive Action Group will establish a 'Friends of Peacock Park' to ensure there is awareness of the facilities and improve their use.
- Improve assets that respond to community need: The Askern Positive Action Group will help stimulate interest in the use and development of the local lake.

Throughout the AI process Well Doncaster used this as an **opportunity to strengthen their relationships with partners** (local and Borough wide) and the GDM Team with representatives trained to become Community Explorers and attending the Dream workshops.

There were some key lessons which were learnt about the AI process:

- Doing AI takes time – working through the four stages in each area and giving enough time for residents to be aware of and engage with the process requires time. Undertaking this in multiple locations simultaneously can be challenging for a single Well Doncaster Officer.
- Engagement with residents was more successful when targeted through existing groups and community organisations. This was problematic in areas with few existing groups set up. This also caused challenges in recruiting Community Explorers to undertake community engagement.
- Once residents are engaged, they need to be empowered to understand that they are part of the system in Doncaster and can be a mechanism for change. **It can be difficult to encourage residents to focus on assets**, with conversations dominated by discussions about what has been lost from communities. The ABCD approach focuses on building on existing strengths, to encourage citizens and communities to see themselves as the co-producers of health and wellbeing rather than the recipients of services. Supporting residents to adopt this perspective can be challenging if their starting point is that they feel they have lost assets.

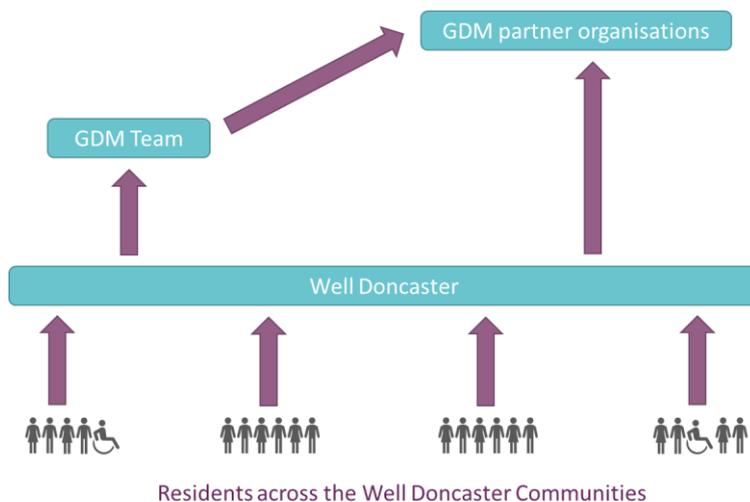
Keeping residents informed of progress and managing expectations to prevent them from disengaging is important. The GDM Team collectively agree that further consideration about this aspect is required as the **feedback loop** is not always fully considered. Well Doncaster have engaged a copywriter to support the messaging in localities to ensure it resonates with residents fully. This will be critical as Officers go back into their areas this year to complete a new round of AI as it may prevent residents engaging a second time.

Insight from local communities can also influence the wider work

Whilst the primary purpose of the AI is to create change in that specific locality, it has a second purpose of **providing insight directly from communities to the GDM Team and to partners**. This should ensure that the resident voice is considered in all work. Whilst the AI is a formal mechanism for collecting insight, Well Doncaster Officers also regularly engage with the community through other mechanisms such as their work with community organisations, the Active Communities Grant, Positive Action Groups and Community Connectors.

Officers sharing insight with the GDM team and wider partners has worked well with the active travel and park strands of work, where findings have directly influenced plans. However, there are more opportunities to do this consistently and influence wider work.

The sharing process is highly reliant on individuals and there is agreement that a more formalised process needs to be developed to ensure it is consistently shared. The GDM Team will be examining how to improve and streamline this process and potentially coordinate it centrally.



Park engagement

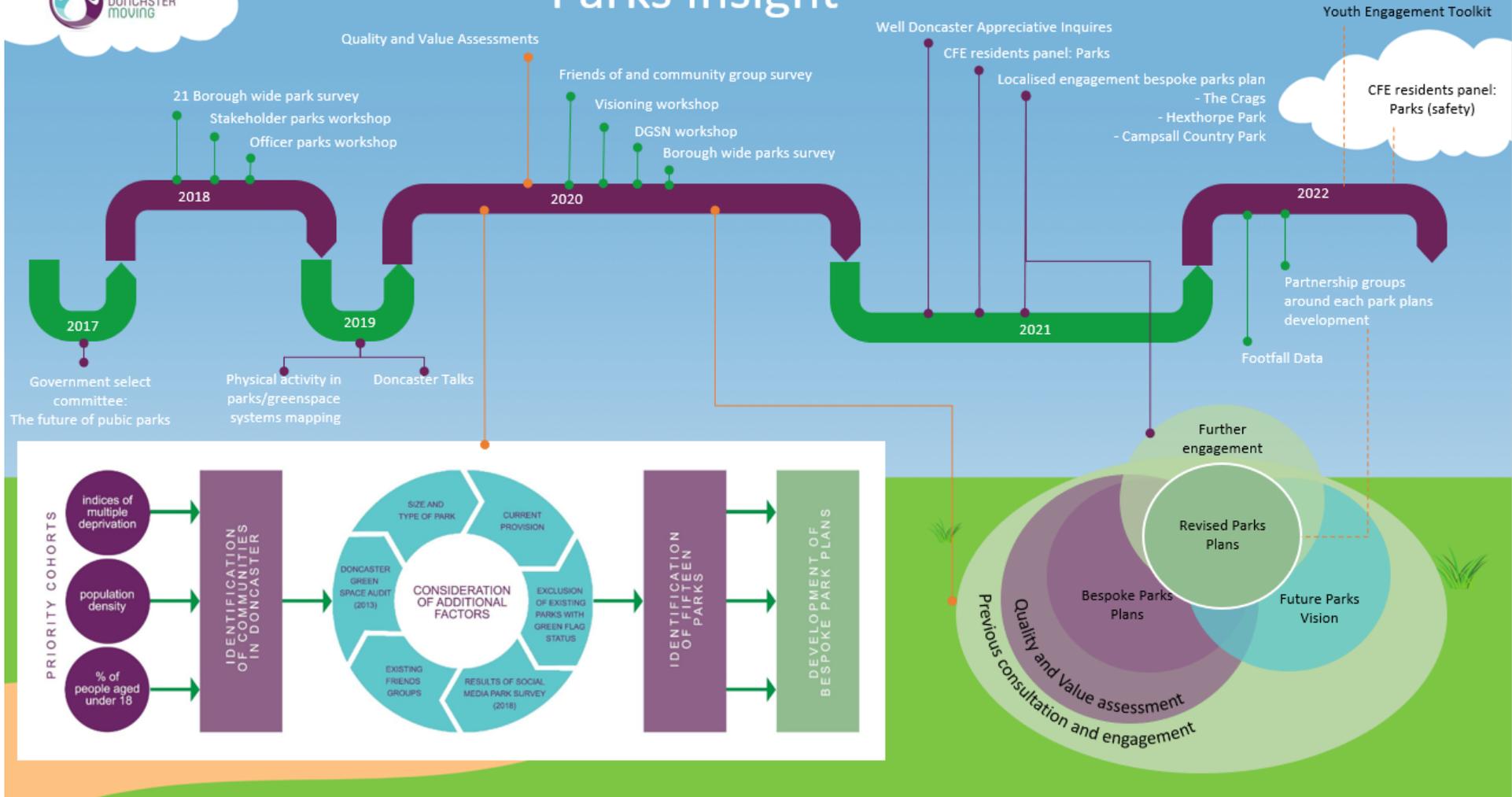
The Future Parks strand of activity has been heavily influenced by resident engagement throughout the process (see the next page for a summary of the wide range of activities). A range of surveys and workshops have been undertaken over the last few years, all of which have played their part in influencing the plans. Most recently the AI undertaken by Well Doncaster Officers fed into the consultation process alongside a park survey through the Doncaster Residents' Panel (part of the LDP evaluation). The Future Parks Team are undertaking **local engagement** including short surveys with residents and engagement days specific to each park being improved. So far, traditional engagement methods have not elicited feedback in a way which empowers residents and yielded similar **responses** linked to safety or a lack of equipment. The team are **trying a new approach** (utilising the Youth Engagement Toolkit) to try and encourage residents to think about 'what' they want to do in a park to influence the wider Future Parks objectives and gain their buy-in to being part of the solution. The Youth Engagement Toolkit will also allow the GDM Team to gain a better understanding of the park environment from a young person's perspective.

However, it is not just residents who have shaped this work. As seen overleaf, a wide range of stakeholders have been engaged and additional evidence has been considered. This has created an extensive evidence-base on which decisions have been made. It has included national evidence from the Government select committee on parks; extensive local stakeholder engagement including 'Friends of Groups' (community organisations who support their parks to improve) and wider partners in the Doncaster Green Space Network; secondary data (such as index of multiple deprivation and distance from a park); and quality and value assessments carried out by the Land Use Consultants based on the Green Flag scheme. This evidence has been utilised to not only

determine which 15 parks to focus on but also how Future Parks will be implemented across Doncaster and within each park. The GDM Team will continue to collect insight to inform the ongoing development of Future Parks.



Parks Insight



Method note

This report summarises the key process learning emerging from the implementation of the LDP over the period September 2021 to March 2022. It is informed by reflective learning activity led by CFE Research with the GDM Team (including representatives of Sport England).

The findings from this report include analysis of: previous evaluation evidence including proformas completed by the GDM Team, depth interviews with Well Doncaster Officers and reflective learning sessions with a range of GDM Team members; learning collected by the Well Doncaster Team; notes from the most recent stakeholder meeting; findings from the Strategy Review and two additional reflective learning sessions with GDM Team members undertaken in March 2022.

