

# Active Design



CREATING ACTIVE ENVIRONMENTS  
THROUGH PLANNING AND DESIGN

## CASE STUDY

Aspire@ThePark, Pontefract  
community and sport facility

Supported by



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## Fact File

Name: **Aspire@ThePark**

Location (town, county):  
**Pontefract, West Yorkshire**

Local planning authority:  
**Wakefield Council**

Date of planning consent/  
construction/completion:  
**Opened 2021**

Case study type: **Sports and  
community centre within a  
public park**

Aspire@ThePark is a community and sports facility which is located within Pontefract Park, to the north-west of Pontefract, Yorkshire. The Park also houses Pontefract Racecourse, with Aspire@ThePark built upon land which previously accommodated a number of tennis courts that had fallen into disrepair to the south of the racecourse.

Aspire@ThePark was opened in 2021 and part-funded by Sport England, and it provides a valuable local community sports facility at the heart of an existing open space. Facilities on site include:

- two swimming pools, one 10-lane 25m pool, one 'studio pool' with adjustable depth to accommodate a wide range of aqua-activities;
- fully equipped gym, overlooking Pontefract Park;
- fitness studios, including spaces which are bookable by local health partnerships, and a spin cycling studio;
- Climbing area fitted with auto-belay and bouldering wall;
- An artificial grass football pitch;
- Four tennis courts;
- Café, open to the public seven days a week, located in the reception area of the building which is accessible to the public even if they are not participating in activities on site;
- Public toilets, including an accessible toilet on the outside of the building; and
- Pedestrian and cycle links to the wider park and local communities.

The combination of these facilities, their use and the role the facility plays within the local community make it an excellent example of the Active Design principles in practice.



## ACTIVE DESIGN PRINCIPLES IN ACTION:



### How it happened

- The responsibility for leisure was brought into the Health Improvement Team of the council, allowing the creation and implementation of a wider strategy from Wakefield District Council to unite physical activity and health, including social prescribing and other health interventions. This enabled opportunities to explore a more holistic offer within the facilities.
- Understanding of the local context and facilities available in the area allowed decisions to be made on what to accommodate on site, and where to rely on other provision elsewhere to meet local needs. This led to the focus at the facility on the provision of multiple studio spaces rather than a single large sports hall, and influenced the swimming pool provision (See Principle 1 text, below).

### Why is it successful?

- It caters for a wide range of activities, with the flexibility of the spaces offered (eg. studio space and adjustable depth pool) enabling a vast range of activities to be accommodated.
- It has helped to regenerate the park, creating a destination and bringing people into a space which was previously less used. The provision of the public toilets and café have further added to this, combining opportunities for both formal and informal activity.

### Lessons Learned

- Long term vision and political buy-in was essential to delivering a large scale investment in physical activity interventions, particularly at this scale.
- Dialogue with local community groups, neighbouring uses and local business was essential in managing conflicts where they occur and maximising effectiveness of facilities and physical activity interventions.





## Applying the principles



### **Principle 1: Activity for all**

As demonstrated by the range of facilities present, Aspire@ThePark caters for a wide range of activities and users. The flexibility and effective management of these facilities enable the needs of a range of groups to be accommodated, avoiding conflicts. An example of this is the size of the pool (10-lanes) which enables public swimming to occur alongside school swimming lessons, with space for circulation and without conflict.

Injury rehabilitation sessions are also accommodated within the 'studio pool', and programmes such as cardiovascular rehabilitation sessions operate within the studio spaces. Once discharged or recovered, participants of these sessions often meet at the café within the facility, meeting with friends made and continuing bonds established through the sessions, and undertaking activity at the site.



### **Principle 4: Mixing uses and co-locating facilities**

Whilst on the edge of Pontefract, Aspire@ThePark is located close to Pontefract town centre. This, combined with the facility acting as a 'destination' space for multiple different activities, creates the opportunity for linked trips by active travel.

The Aspire@ThePark facility is located in Pontefract Park, and is close to Pontefract Racecourse and the New College, which offers specialist sports and leisure courses. The facility has brought new users to the park, and in turn increases vitality of the space, and has helped its viability. The Racecourse is a popular local running route (also hosting a parkrun) and users of Aspire@ThePark often combine running the loop with activity within the facility, or use of the café. Aspire@ThePark also offers rental of equipment to use within the park, including running buggies to encourage activity in its surroundings.

Aspire@ThePark also provides facilities for the trust which manages the park, with a small meeting room accessible from the side of the building, separate from the main entrance. This allows the trust to use the room anytime, even when the facility is closed. The trust also encourages park users to utilise the facilities within the building, with a local 'storytelling' route encouraging children to explore the park incorporating the entrance area to Aspire@ThePark.

**Below:** The 10-lane swimming pool allows public swimming to take place alongside school swimming lessons





### **Principle 8: Active buildings inside and out**

Aspire@ThePark takes a prominent location within the park, at the entrance closest to Pontefract town centre. Cycle parking is located right at the entrance to the building, with lockable secure cycle spaces to the side. There is also a children's play space at the front of the building, to entertain children when waiting for onward transport following swimming lessons at the facility. Parking is located at the rear of the building, and is not obvious on approach. Pedestrian linkages have been established on clear desire lines within the park, as well as linking to the college, drawing people to the entrance of the building. Much of the building's frontage is glass, both providing visibility to the activities going on inside but also providing active surveillance of the park.

Within the internal layout of the building, care has been taken to ensure that there are many appropriate opportunities to glimpse the activity taking place, such as views from the café into the pool area. The layout has been designed to ensure that where circulation areas are present, stairs are clearly located and are often in locations more prominent than lifts.

**Below:** Climbing wall space



### **Principle 9: Maintaining High Quality Flexible Spaces**

A key aspect of the design of Aspire@ThePark is the creation of flexible spaces which can be used for a great number of different activities. This not only provides for lots of different users (See Activity for All above) but also allows the spaces to adapt over time, providing for new activities which were not necessarily envisaged within a space at the outset. An example of this is the tennis courts are used weekly by a local cycle training scheme, who undertake cycle lessons and proficiency testing on the tennis court area.

Further, the artificial grass pitch is not just available for formal group or sport bookings, but is also available as an informal 'kickaround' space in school holidays, with only a small fee charged for use.



### **Principle 10: Activating Spaces**

The operator of Aspire@ThePark employs both service staff for the building and 'Activators' who are responsible for activating the spaces within it. These people work closely with the staff managing the building to ensure that the activities organised are fit for purpose and can easily be accommodated. These activators also work with local health practitioners and commissioning services with social prescribing programmes, including healthy weight programmes.

Aspire@ThePark also works with New College, providing training courses and employment opportunities, as well as support for sport and leisure courses offered by the college. This further entrenches the role of the facility within the local community.

