

**LEARNING
FOCUS:**

**ACTIVE
ENVIRONMENTS**



Active Neighbourhood Scans

**Case study:
Active Environments**

Active Environments

The challenge

Oxfordshire experiences significant levels of inequality, which are preventing residents from being active. Ten wards in Oxfordshire are among the 20% most deprived in England.

The gap in health and opportunity between these wards and the rest of the county is vast: a child born in Blackbird Leys, East Oxford can expect to live 13 years less than a child born in the most affluent parts of Oxfordshire. In these priority areas, levels of inactivity and health inequality are particularly high.

Active Oxfordshire has worked in partnership with the VCS, Public Health, schools and local authorities for years to increase rates of physical activity in priority neighbourhoods – but it was clear that many residents were still facing significant barriers.

We introduced Active Neighbourhood Scans as a way to understand more about hyperlocal assets and barriers, so that we could all work together to create healthier, more active neighbourhoods.

The solution

Active Neighbourhood Scans are a way of understanding how easy it is for residents in priority areas to walk, cycle or wheel and to play and be active in the parks and green spaces within their community. They give an understanding of what is going well, what gets in the way and what needs to be changed to make it easier for residents to be active where they live.

Sport England system partner investment has enabled us to build trust and strong relationships with communities in highest priority neighbourhoods, which has enabled the scans to be genuinely co-designed from the outset.



How Active Neighbourhood Scans work:

- The scans are designed for residents, community groups and schools, with support and guidance from local authorities, planning and Public Health. Local residents complete a scanning tool focused on three areas of activity: walking, wheeling and cycling.
- The participants walk, wheel or cycle the route in small groups. They note down any barriers to walking or wheeling and accessing green spaces and also record any ideas on how their local active environment could be improved. These ideas are then brought to life with our community-driven Ideas Fund.

Stakeholders involved

Across the whole of the Active Neighbourhood Scan work, we have partnered with a vast number of different organisations and groups.

For example, in Blackbird Leys, we engaged local community organisations, schools, Public Health, charities, the city council and the local Integrated Care Board. Our job was to then share the insight gained from local residents and community groups with decision-makers to help effect change.

One of the main successes of our Active Neighbourhood Scan approach has been engagement from the local community, which is based on trust built up over a number of years.



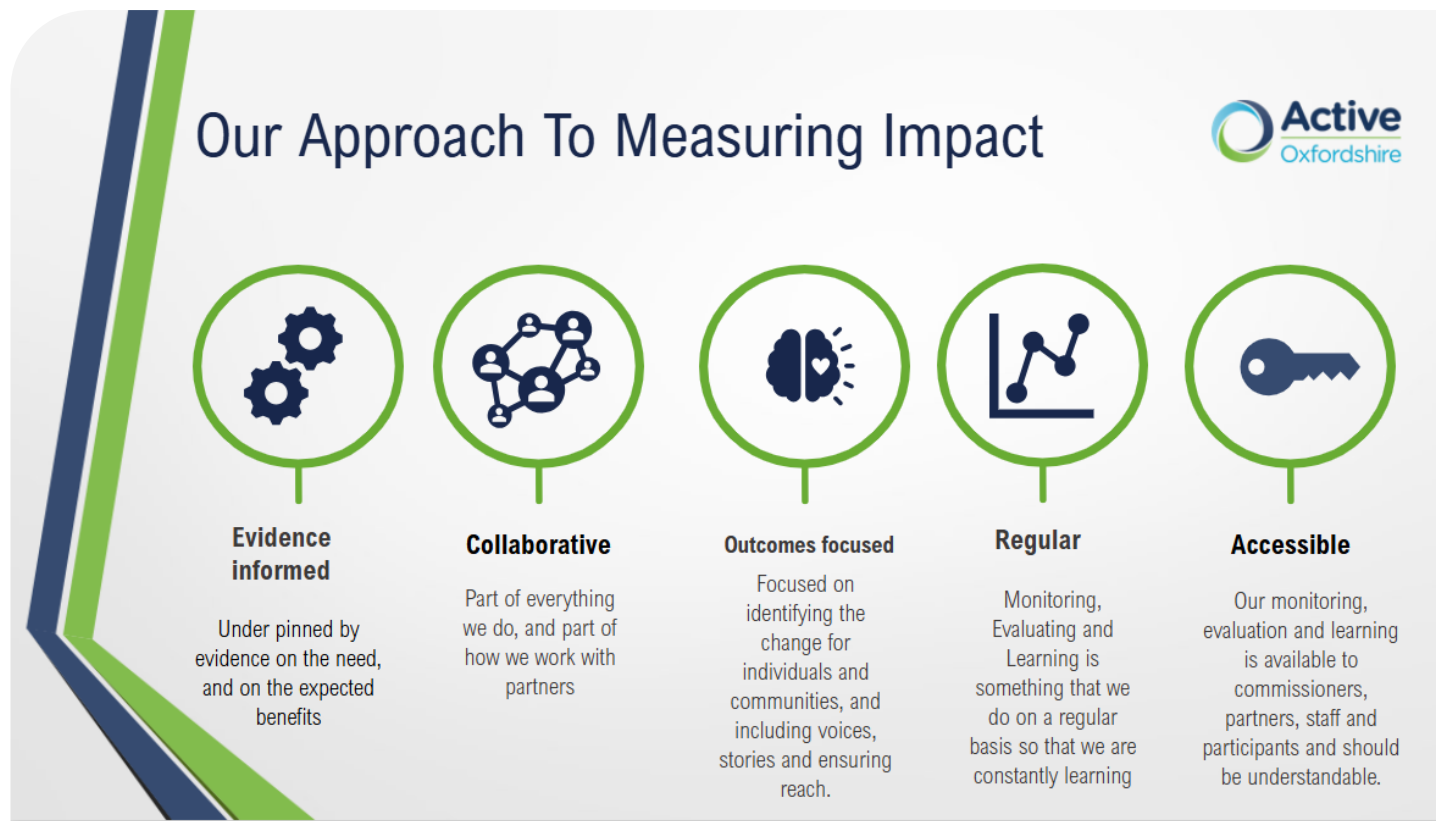
Impacts and benefits as a result of these interventions and new ways of working

Community insight gathered during Active Neighbourhood Scans has been invaluable. We have shared this insight with colleagues in Public Health and local authorities, so that residents' experiences can help to make improvements to existing active environments and shape future designs.

We have also launched an 'Ideas Fund' after each scan, which is in direct response to insight and ideas gathered during the scan. This ensures that communities are leading the way in recommending changes and feel confident that their opinion and experiences are being heard.

In Blackbird Leys, local residents applied for funding for projects that would make it easier to be active in their neighbourhoods.

So far, through the Ideas Fund we have supported 17 local projects, working with 17 different community organisations. Projects range from community gardens, improved signage, walking groups, litter picking groups, bike racks and many more.



The learning

We have learned that:

- Building genuine, trusted relationships takes time – and can't be rushed. What's worked well is offering consistent, tailored support to local organisations: from site visits and regular phone calls to WhatsApp chats. This personal approach has helped strengthen trust, solve problems together, and led to projects successfully achieving their goals.
- Linking projects into broader work such as our countywide activity programmes YouMove and Move Together is powerful. These ripple effects support stronger place-based working, especially as Oxfordshire becomes a Marmot Place.
- Local communities often want different things than professionals assume. Listening – and responding – really matters.
- Simplifying application processes, offering 1:1 support, and streamlining evaluation has boosted confidence and made funding more accessible. For example, we supported Oxford Community Action through their application, which helped them get a successful grant for their amazing project.

What hasn't worked?

- A one-size-fits-all approach. Every group is different. We've had to adapt – flexing our style, simplifying systems, and keeping communication open.
- If we could go back, we'd start with even more lived experience at the centre.
- That's our focus now: listening, adapting, and sharing power to reach the communities who need it most.

What's next?

Sport England's Place Universal Offer funding gives us a fantastic opportunity to build on our work so far on Active Neighbourhood Scans.

We will partner with Community Anchor Organisations in highest priority areas of Oxford and Banbury to further develop Ideas Fund projects and use the insight gathered through the scans to communicate both assets and barriers to activity with key partners across Public Health and local authorities.

A major part of Place Universal Offer work will focus on devolving power to communities and ensuring that leaders from the community play a key role in creating more active communities going forward.

We have had a vast amount of interest in the scans from other system partners across England, which has led us to launch a 'how to' guide so that other Active Partnerships, community organisations, schools or local authorities can run their own scans:

[Active Neighbourhood Scans - 'How to' Guide | Active Oxfordshire](#)

This resource is free to use and has been designed as a template for organisations to replicate the approach in their own communities.

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