LEARNING FOCUS:
ACTIVE ENVIRONMENTS



SPORT ENGLAND

Hackney

Transforming Daubeney Fields: Reimagining a Community Space for Active Living

Case study: Active environments

Active environments

The challenge

In 2018 Daubeney Fields was an under-used green space nestled between two large estates in King's Park ward in Hackney (a Local Delivery Pilot).

This is an area where residents face many barriers to engaging in physical activity due to structural inequalities, including living on a low income and long-term health conditions. Outreach in the community revealed that many local people felt that the space wasn't "for people like me".

They told us that the park didn't feel safe: entrances were dark and narrow and a lack of pathways meant there were no clear walking routes. Many people told us that they couldn't afford gym memberships and would love an outdoor gym. Children wanted more spaces to play.

People hoped that Daubeney could connect the community. It was clear the park had massive potential to get people more active.





Before



After



The solution

The Local Delivery Pilot team worked in partnership with other council teams, the voluntary and community sector, and the local community to make Daubeney Fields a welcoming, inclusive and accessible space for people to be physically active.

We used multiple engagement methods to hear from residents, including direct outreach, community fun days and engaging local community groups and schools.

Their insights informed our decisions around investment, which led to the installation of an outdoor gym, improved pathways and entrances, more benches and improvements to the skate park and the adventure playground.

We adopted a place-based way of working which drew on local knowledge, as well as a whole-system approach that included thinking about the structural inequalities which act as barriers to physical activity.

This meant we ensured the changes made to the park made it more accessible and inclusive (better pathways for people with wheelchairs or mobility challenges, more benches for people to rest and connect and activation sessions where community leaders run activities in the park).

Before



After



Before



After



The solution (continued)

Before





After





This project was a collaboration between three council teams (two of whom had not previously worked together): the council's leisure and parks project management team; the adventure playground team (run by the council's youth service) and the KPMT team (based in the council's policy and strategy service).

The teams had different relationships to the park but all shared a vision of increasing its use by local residents. Together the teams worked with local voluntary and community sector organisations, schools, residents, the park user group, health partners and ward councillors to understand barriers to using the park and consider potential solutions. We worked closely with Sport England, to shape the project and learn from other investments.

Working across the system enabled us to develop a deeper understanding of the local area and the potential role of the park to better meet the needs of the local community.

By working with councillors, schools and health partners we were able to understand how health inequalities impacted the lives of local people and how the park and physical activity could address some of those challenges.

The impact

"Who is using the park now? Everybody is using it. There are huge sections of people using the gym – there are classes there, groups of friends who meet and work out there, the Swing Boxes are used, children are roller skating on the pathways, people have buggies and wheelchairs... even in winter older people are sitting on the benches, this is new."

Former ward councillor

"The new ball court's made a huge impact! We tend to lose children once they become teenagers but this has bought them back in!"

Adventure playground lead

Observations from councillors, Hackney Council staff and community feedback suggest the park is much better used by a range of residents and is a site of physical activity.

Data from the Swing Boxes (a box of dumbbells based in the outdoor gym) confirms this, with almost 300 local residents having registered, clocking up nearly 4,000 sessions.

Over 90% of users live in the bottom 30% of households by income, with the majority based within walking distance of the park.

The adventure playground is also improved and the changes made mean outdoor play can happen year round. The park was awarded a Green Flag 2025 and won a London Sport Active Environment award in 2026.



The learning

We identified four key elements that we think enabled us to make Daubeney Fields a place where local people can enjoy being physically active:

1. The **collaboration** across council teams enabled us to pool resources and draw on different skills.
2. We **maintained a focus on physical activity** throughout the improvement project. This was crucial since we could have made excellent changes to the park but they may not have made it a place that encourages physical activity.
3. We did **extensive community engagement** and used different methods to ensure we heard from different communities. This included direct outreach as well as working with local councillors and schools.
4. We took a **whole-system approach** to this project, which enabled us to think more broadly about structural inequalities that prevented people from using the park and being physically active.

In terms of doing things differently, we brought in community members from very early on in the process when we didn't have a clear timeline for delivery. Next time we would be clear about realistic timelines for large-scale improvement projects so that people have a better sense of what to expect.

Advice to others

1. Work in a place-based way that enables you to understand the local area, including co-designing spaces with the community.
2. Use multiple modes of engagement to enable you to hear from a range of local people.
3. Collaborate so that you can pool skills, resources and expertise and maintain a focus on enabling physical activity.

The future

We are convening partners to deliver a collaborative, place-based approach to activating multi-use games areas (MUGAs), building on the Hackney MUGA Charter and Daubeney Fields learning.

Community insight and specialist expertise will inform capital improvements and approaches to activation, creating welcoming spaces that tackle entrenched health inequalities.

The learning from this project will help us further develop our approach to activating underused spaces in Hackney.

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