

Understanding the success factors in Sport Action Zones

Final report



Contents

02 Foreword**03 Summary recommendations****04 Introduction**

Background
Methodology

08 Description of the SAZ areas

Barrow
Liverpool

10 Barriers**13 Building partnerships****18 Participation successes**

Liverpool & Barrow

23 Facilities

Liverpool

25 The people factor

Barrow
The Liverpool SAZ team
Community volunteers

28 The SAZ identity

Barrow
Liverpool

29 Sustainability**31 Final comments****34 Appendices**

Foreword

“Sport England is committed to increasing participation rates in sport and to widening opportunities for all sections of society. The Sport Action Zone initiative implemented in 2001 in 12 of the most disadvantaged communities in England incorporated the best principles of ‘front line’ sports development learnt over many years of experience.”

The litmus test of success five years on is whether the SAZ principles actually worked in practice to deliver the hoped for positive changes in peoples’ lives and in the communities in which they live. To establish the impact of the SAZ programme, in 2001 we selected four of the 12 SAZs for intensive research. The Zones were selected to provide a range of different locations and approaches – and in many ways represented some of the greatest challenges we faced rather than where success was most easily and likely to be achieved.

I welcome this report, which outlines the results of independent research carried out by Ipsos MORI to evaluate the impact of Sport Action Zones (SAZ). It provides evidence of a kind not gathered previously – demonstrating a robust and clear measure of participation change over time. Significant increases in participation occurred in two of the four Zones – in the Liverpool and the West Cumbria and Barrow SAZs – two areas experiencing severe social and economic deprivation. Even more rewarding is the increases we have seen amongst the most disadvantaged groups living in these areas.

However two other Zones did not see the levels of increase across the whole population evident in Liverpool and Barrow – although we do know of examples of projects in these Zones that have been very successful in achieving their own specific objectives. We will be examining the factors that led to these variations in performance across the four Zones to refine further our understanding of ‘what works’ where and why and to better understand how approaches can be tailored to optimise their effectiveness in different community settings.

Arguably the most remarkable thing about the “critical success factors” that have emerged in the SAZ and outlined in this report, is the fact that there is nothing actually very remarkable about them. In effect there are no real surprises. They all represent good community sports development principles and practices. However, what is highly significant is: firstly how these factors have been strategically applied together in a concerted and focused way over a five year period with the aim of raising levels of participation in some of our most deprived communities; and secondly that because of our focused and continued research effort we can state with confidence that this “way of working” has led to real participation increases amongst some of our most hard to reach priority groups.

The findings of the SAZ research present Sport England and its partners with some exciting and challenging policy implications in terms of how the SAZ ‘model’ of local area community engagement can be replicated within the ‘Delivery System for Sport’. I believe this report is essential reading for all those involved in developing community sport and has particular relevance to policy and practice within the emerging Community Sport Networks and for neighbourhood level working. Sport England now looks forward to taking these findings forward with our partners and stakeholders in and beyond sport to replicate the learning and good practice in order to drive up participation and narrow the inequalities gap.

Lord Carter of Coles
Chair of Sport England

Summary recommendations

The main aim of this qualitative research was to establish the success factors connected with the improvement of sport and physical activity participation rates in Liverpool and Barrow Sport Action Zones. There are different lessons to be learnt from each SAZ, and provided below is an outline of what the research has established to be the ideal ingredients, when worked in combination, for driving up sport and physical activity participation at a local level:

- Appoint a highly motivated charismatic leader who can quickly establish local credibility and respect;
- Establish clear strategic direction supported by a systematic needs assessment;
- Create a focussed team to deliver the strategic vision on the ground. Driving up participation rates requires engagement with local communities, this is most effectively delivered by paid full and part-time officers;
- Build strong partnerships – to include sport and non sport – the more partnerships and the more diverse the partnerships the better – have ‘a foot in both camps’ by working closely with people from a number of different organisations;
- Empower local people through a bottom up approach. Listen to what local people want, use outreach to cascade training and help people help themselves;
- Create local capacity – promote and support volunteering by residents but expect turnover of volunteers and plan and manage for this;
- Invest in facilities to provide the opportunities for participation but focus on people as the keys to success. Take a whole environment approach to include parks and informal open spaces;
- Provide small grants, as part of a strategic vision, which helps build goodwill with local communities and stakeholders, and generates a climate of trust;
- Ensure marketing and communications are tailored to target groups – many will immediately switch-off with references to sport;
- Run low cost taster sessions to see what works – expect some initiatives to fail but ensure progression routes to sustain participation for those that succeed;
- Offer a wide diversity of sport and recreational activities tailored to what works for different groups of people;
- Make the sense of ‘local identity’ and ‘community’ work for you – be part of ‘us’ and not part of ‘them’;
- Make it last – build a culture of sustainability and self help.

Introduction

This document presents the findings from seven depth interviews with individuals involved with the Sport Action Zones (SAZ) in Barrow-in-Furness¹ and Liverpool. The interviews were conducted by Ipsos MORI on behalf of Sport England on 31st May and 1st June 2006. This research follows on from quantitative research that compared activity levels in the SAZs between 2001/2 and 2005/6.

Background

The Sport Action Zone initiative was set up to help combat low levels of participation in sport in communities that suffer the effects of poverty and deprivation. The aim was to help local communities to help themselves by getting local people to play a role in identifying what was needed in each zone and then involving them in the planning and delivery process. The 12 zones were located throughout England, ranging in size from just a couple of wards to whole counties, and represented some of the most deprived parts of the country. The SAZs were located in the following areas:

- Birmingham
- Bradford
- Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly
- East Manchester
- Leicester
- Liverpool
- London South Central
- Luton
- North Derbyshire & North Nottinghamshire Coalfields Area
- South Yorkshire Coalfields Area
- Wear Valley
- West Cumbria - the Districts of Barrow, Copeland and Allerdale

Quantitative Research

In order to evaluate the success of the initiative, Sport England commissioned Ipsos MORI to conduct robust quantitative research in four SAZs. In summary, the research comprised:

- Research in Barrow-in-Furness, Liverpool, Bradford and Luton SAZ areas;
- Two waves of around 1,000 interviews in each zone, the first conducted in the early days of the initiative across the winter months of 2001/2, and the second across the same months in 2005/6.

The results from the two waves of research in each area were then compared to identify changes in sports participation rates across the four year period. Sport England was particularly interested in changes in the overall participation levels, and also those for specific target groups which traditionally participate in less sport and physical activity than average, namely – women, older people, lower social class groups, ethnic minorities and people with disabilities.

¹ Please note that the West Cumbria and Barrow Sport Action Zone covered three districts (Allerdale, Copeland and Barrow). The research focussed on Barrow only, so where this document refers to the 'Barrow SAZ', this constitutes part of the West Cumbria and Barrow SAZ.

Introduction

Continued

Participation Results from the 2001/2 and 2005/6 SAZ Quantitative Study²

Overall, there were positive results in all of the areas surveyed, but particularly so in Barrow and Liverpool, where significant increases in participation levels were recorded across many of the target groups (C2DE's, women, older people) between the 2001/2 and 2005/6 results. Provided in the following tables are the results for these two areas, with the statistically significant changes across the four year period highlighted in bold.

Bases	Percentage of the population participating in at least one sport (including walking) in the previous 12 months			
	Barrow-in-Furness		Liverpool	
	2001/02 (1,016) %	2005/06 (1,175) %	2001/02 (1,016) %	2005/06 (1,168) %
All	80	85	73	83
Age				
16-35	93	96	87	93
36-49	86	90	77	85
50+	67	74	51	66
Gender				
Men	85	87	76	87
Women	76	82	71	79
Ethnicity				
White	80	85	74	83
Non-white	n/a*	n/a*	73	80
Disability/ illness				
Long term ill/Disabled	55	61	44	59
Social Class				
ABs	90	92	89	91
C2DEs	75	81	60	73
DEs	70	78	56	72

n/a* small base size. Percentages in bold represent significant changes at the 95% confidence interval

² Detailed results from the SAZ quantitative research in 2001/2 and 2005/6 are available from Sport England

Introduction

Continued

Participation Results from the 2001/2 and 2005/6 SAZ Quantitative Study² (Continued)

Bases	Percentage of the population participating in sport/ physical activity at least 4 times in an average 4 week period (including walking)			
	Barrow-in-Furness		Liverpool	
	2001/02 (1,016) %	2005/06 (1,175) %	2001/02 (1,016) %	2005/06 (1,168) %
All	66	72	60	65
Age				
16-35	82	87	76	78
36-49	71	73	60	64
50+	53	60	36	48
Gender				
Men	72	75	66	72
Women	61	69	54	59
Ethnicity				
White	66	72	60	66
Non-white	n/a*	n/a*	56	59
Disability/illness				
Long term ill/Disabled	42	45	33	38
Social Class				
ABC1s	73	78	77	76
C2s	66	74	52	60
C2DEs	61	67	43	53
DEs	57	61	40	51
Young men (aged 16-25)	95	90	85	83

n/a* small base size. Percentages in bold represent significant changes at the 95% confidence interval

Introduction

Continued

In light of the increases in participation highlighted in the quantitative research, Sport England undertook a further phase of study, in the form of in-depth qualitative research among people involved with the SAZ in Liverpool and Barrow. The main aim of this research was to understand more about the key success factors, while at the same time investigating the extent to which the increases in participation rates were recorded in the priority groups that the SAZ focussed on – in an attempt to establish a link between activities and results.

Methodology

Interviews were conducted face-to-face by executives working on the project. Each interview lasted for around an hour and was digitally recorded for later analysis. In total, seven people took part in the research.

When reviewing the impact of the SAZ areas it is important to note that much of their work involved promotion of sport and physical activity among children. As our quantitative research focussed on adults it is not possible to establish whether either SAZ has been successful in improving participation rates among under 16 year olds, we have therefore excluded activities that concentrated purely on this group from this evaluation.

Barrow	Liverpool
Carol Renshaw Former SAZ Manager for Barrow	Gary White SAZ Manager
Chris Athersmith Sports Development Manager	Rhiannon Brown SAZ/Nacro Youth Sport Co-ordinator
Su Sear Community Public Health Development Specialist	Julie Curren SAZ/PCT Physical Activity Development Officer
Katherine Swann Young Women & Girls Project Worker	

Description of the SAZ Areas

Barrow

Barrow-in-Furness is one of the most economically deprived parts of the country, suffering particularly from the decline in the ship building industry which used to be by far the biggest employer for the town.

There is a feeling of self-help among local people because the area feels that it has not been as well supported by government than many other parts of the country. This feeling is exacerbated by its proximity to The Lake District National Park which is seen more as an affluent playground for southern tourists, rather than an area for local people to enjoy. (Cumbria is often described as a doughnut, with the National Park in the middle, surrounded by deprived areas – particularly along the coast).

Unlike Liverpool it is not an ethnically diverse town, with less than 1% of the local population from ethnic minority communities. Among other things, this is a reflection of the lack of appeal of the town for immigrants of all kinds, which, combined with the fact that many younger people are deciding to move out of the area, means that it has an increasingly ageing population.

Sports facilities are small scale with the Park Leisure Centre being the main leisure centre in the town. Barrow was also only one part of the SAZ area, with the districts of Copeland and Allerdale completing the West Cumbria and Barrow SAZ. The three districts did not have a history of working together.

Liverpool

Recently Liverpool was named European Capital of Culture 2008. The tagline used in association with the advertising campaign around this event is “A World in One City”. Given the diverse population of Liverpool, residents often say that really it is a world in one postcode, L8. (The local ethnic profile is 87% white, 3% black, 2% Asian and 7% from other ethnicities.) The BME population comprises both British born groups and large numbers of refugees from war zones throughout the world, such as Kosovo, Somalia and the Sudan. Over the five years the SAZ has been in operation, different waves of immigrants have arrived in the city, bringing with them their unique cultures and experiences. As one member of the SAZ team puts it, “the faces change, but the problems remain the same”. Integrating the new arrivals with established ethnic communities and with the local white, primarily working class, population is a challenge throughout Liverpool, and one which the SAZ has sought to overcome through the provision of a wide range of culturally appropriate programmes, such as the Somali sports project.

In addition to cultural challenges, the SAZ team were working in one of the most economically deprived areas of the country. Associated factors such as lack of transportation due to low levels of car ownership and the poor provision of sporting facilities locally meant that for many in the SAZ area, access to appropriate facilities was a major barrier to participation.

Description of the SAZ Areas Continued

Liverpool – Continued

When the SAZ started in 2000, there were three sports centres in the area, operated by the local authority. Two of these were so old that they included Victorian era swimming baths, while the third was more than twenty years old and had not been maintained adequately. Within two years of the SAZ being established the pool and other indoor facilities at Picton Sports Centre had closed and have yet to be replaced. As this was the largest community facility in the SAZ its loss would be expected to have a negative impact on participation in the area, particularly within the Wavertree and Smithdown neighbourhoods. There was also a distinct lack of suitable grass/turf facilities, with many of the local parks being perceived as “no go” areas due to safety concerns. The planned Kensington Community Sports Centre was still in its infancy when the SAZ was set up, and was yet to be built.

Of the few sports clubs operating in the area, all were single sport clubs, with football, basketball, boxing and martial arts being the main sports available. As most of these clubs did not own their premises, the provision of multiple sports at any one club was not a viable option. Several of the clubs were operating well, especially with regards to youth inclusion, but overall the sporting infrastructure in the area was poor and access to external funding was low. There were few opportunities for local people to get involved with sport and physical activity, and those sports clubs which did exist struggled for volunteers, with minimal training opportunities being available.

Overall, when the Liverpool SAZ was set up the area was in desperate need of leadership and guidance in the area of sport and physical activity provision.

Barriers

Lesson 1 – building trust: Funding and staff resources must be available from the start to ensure the community can see change happening, rather than just talking about what will happen in the future. It is also important to engage with local partners, where they exist, as quickly as possible in order to leverage what is currently working in the area and to avoid alienating those already on the ground. Another technique used in Liverpool was to access and start distributing small amounts of funding to clubs and community organisations as early as possible in the programme – this helped to build up good will among local people.

Lesson 2 – recreation not sport³: Non-sports participants are non-participants for a reason, and aside from lethargy, many of the other reasons for not taking part in sports will relate to a lack of interest, a lack of confidence and fear of injury, i.e. the barrier to participation in sport is the fact that it is sport! Partners have got round this by providing a far wider range of activities that almost anyone can get involved in (walking being the obvious example) with little or no reference to “sport”.

Both the Barrow and Liverpool SAZs faced very similar barriers when they were first set-up. They were both successful in gradually breaking these down, but there is no doubt that the Liverpool SAZ was quicker to react and was subsequently more effective in this area.

Barrow

There is a feeling that Sport England unrealistically raised expectations by announcing that the initiative was backed by £7.5m of funding. Unsurprisingly, local politicians and others were excited by this and were subsequently annoyed to find that all they would be getting (at least in the early days) was one full-time employee who would not be bringing an immediate injection of funding into the area. This has been reported in previous monitoring reports produced from other research studies, so there is little point dwelling on the detail. However, it does indicate how tough the early stages of these types of initiatives can be – Liverpool faced similar challenges (see below). In Barrow’s case, the SAZ Manager gradually won people round, particularly when she was able to start accessing funding. She also produced a quarterly newsletter which was distributed among a wider range of key influencers including local councillors. However, when Sport England’s SAZ funding stream – Magnet funding – dried up (this had provided £625,333 to the local area, but was withdrawn in January 2003) the initiative again came in for criticism.

Aside from this, a key barrier was apathy and convincing local people to get involved. The fact is that while engaging with the local community is fairly straight-forward in theory, it takes dedicated and enthusiastic workers to get the right sort of response out of the general public. It is tough getting people involved and this means that not all initiatives have worked. Those involved in these types of schemes have to be prepared for failures, but as has been proven in Barrow, these are outweighed by the successes. Those working in the area believe this has largely been achieved by finding out what local people want – they used various techniques for this (including visiting a local pub during the daytime to speak to men about what might encourage them to become more active) with the most successful being leaflet drops in target areas where people were asked to answer a few short questions about what they would like to participate in locally. They were then provided with easy ways of responding, with return boxes in local shops being particularly effective.

³ Because this point is relevant to other chapters it is discussed elsewhere, but clearly merits being listed as a barrier.

Barriers Continued

Liverpool

Similar to Barrow, the main challenge faced by the SAZ team in Liverpool was the issue of trust. Liverpool has been the focus of a wide range of government initiatives over the past ten years, and the community had built up a high degree of cynicism towards programmes similar to the SAZ. Previously, residents had been subject to a lot of consultation with little discernable outcome. The SAZ team worked hard to overcome this reticence by being friendly, approachable and focusing on finding out what the community wanted, rather than by telling them what they were going to achieve.

“The biggest challenge was to develop a relationship with local people and gain their trust, which obviously takes a bit of time. This area has been consulted to death, I think a lot of local people get a bit disheartened because they feel they’ve been consulted but nothing happens... it’s about working with people, gaining their trust and showing them that you’re genuinely interested and really want to help.”

The team also realised that they needed to do something practical, quickly, to convince residents that the SAZ initiative was genuinely focused on the needs of the local community, and to establish good will. This was particularly challenging during the early stages of operation, as there was less funding available and fewer staff on board to deliver outcomes to the local community.

The SAZ Community Grants programme was one of the ways in which they overcame the challenge of ‘proving’ themselves to the local community. This programme provides small amounts (c.£500) of money to community groups to fund one off items such as football kits, grounds-keeping improvements, coaching courses etc. In this way a large number of groups benefited from contact with the SAZ, and engaged with the organisation in a positive way. Over the course of the SAZ initiative, approximately £60,000 has been given to the community through this programme. (The equivalent programme in Barrow is the local “Community Chest” (£73,500 over 3 years), with funds allocated by the local Sports Council, although the grants have often been slightly larger, often around £1,000.)

A further challenge was the new way of working which the SAZ was advocating through its partnership approach. This caused some friction with existing sports and physical activity providers, such as the local council. However, through the work of the SAZ Manager this challenge was overcome, and there is now a very good relationship between the SAZ and the local council and other similar bodies.

Barriers Continued

Despite the generally poor level of sports provision in this area of Liverpool at the time the SAZ was set up, there were a few existing sports clubs which were successfully operating, e.g. Kingsley United Football Club and Toxteth Tigers Basketball Club. These were able to be used as a model for other sports clubs which the SAZ helped to establish. Ultimately, the L8 Sports Forum and Dingle Sports Forum were formed to bring together a number of different groups working in sports provision. These groups meet every two to three months and have been running for four of the five years that the SAZ has been operational. Funded by Sport England, Home Office, Football Foundation, Neighbourhood Renewal Fund and Lawn Tennis Association, the L8 Sports Forum has its own offices and employs four staff members. It has a close relationship with the SAZ, and provides an opportunity for those involved in sports provision locally to learn from and support each other.

The diverse ethnic community also provided an early opportunity to engage with local people, through organised groups such as the three Somali community organisations operating in Liverpool.

Building partnerships

Lesson 3 – links outside sport: Sport has to work closely not only with other sport bodies, but also with non-sports organisations. The most important factor in driving up participation in sport and active recreation is being able to consult and then connect with non-participants in the general population – the more partners you have, the more access you have to local residents, and the more opportunities there are to access sources of funding.

Lesson 4 – cross-boundary difficulties: Although this report has only focussed on the Barrow section of the West Cumbria SAZ, this should not hide the fact that the SAZ Manager had to coordinate activities across three districts that had no history of working together, and little desire for this to change. This challenge will have caused a lot of wasted energy and hindered the Manager’s ability to make the SAZ a greater success.

Lesson 5 – a strategic vision: Despite approaching the partnerships differently, with Liverpool SAZ taking more of a leading role, both SAZ Managers have been able to see the bigger picture, to help identify opportunities for partnerships and create a structure to the initiatives in each area. This is an important element of the successes in each SAZ – particularly in Liverpool where it has enabled them to build up a real team spirit, with people working for a wide range of organisations, but all working towards the same goal.

Both Liverpool and Barrow SAZs were successful in engaging sport into different areas of people’s lives through partnerships with bodies like Age Concern, PCTs, Sure Start, Connexions, regeneration trusts and schools. These relationships have then been used to engage with local communities to find out what types of sports and active recreation they want to participate in, and then going about providing the opportunities.

“The biggest thing when I came into the area was that virtually no other agenda delivered on sport, and the role I took, instead of developing a programme myself, it was about developing a programme with partners for them to lead on... (e.g.) in Barrow a programme with Chris (the Sports Development Manager) with Regeneration, and the PCT and Age Concern – the PCT took the lead role which ensured that sport was embedded in their policy to continue. So I always worked that way.... help attract funding, pull in the programme, put it together with them, be on the steering group, gradually ease out of that steering group and let them be self sufficient.”

At this point, it is important to note that among non-sports participants (i.e. exactly the people Sport England and others want to engage with) the term “sport” in itself can immediately create a barrier to increasing physical activity participation levels – many people find the idea of participating in sports unappealing or intimidating. By aligning itself to a broader range of physical activities (e.g. walking and dance) sports administrators have started to engage with many more people than in the past. In this respect, the fact that the main participation target for local authorities (in the DCMS Public Service Agreement (PSA) targets) refers to “participating in sport and active recreation on at least three days a week for 30 minutes duration and for at least moderate levels of intensity” means that there is a broader remit for those involved in driving up “sports” participation levels. It also provides far more of an incentive to work with other types of organisations, such as PCTs or Age Concern, that are interested in the broader benefits of physical activity, regardless of what form it takes. The achievements in Barrow and Liverpool indicate how successful building partnerships can be. So, how has this worked in practice? The approaches used in each area are provided below.

Building partnerships Continued

Barrow

The two key partnerships that have been developed in Barrow are Active Living for All (ALFA) and the Barrow Borough Sports Council.

Active Living for All (ALFA)

ALFA was established in January 2002 and is a partnership between Barrow Community Regeneration Company (CRC), Age Concern and Morecambe Bay PCT – Public Health Development. Significantly, this partnership has focussed on many of the areas which have seen the greatest improvements in terms of participation in the district – suggesting that it has had a direct impact. Participation in sport and active recreation has been recorded as increasing in Barrow among C2DEs, women and older people. It is therefore encouraging to note that ALFA is focussed on the six most deprived wards in Barrow (thereby targeting C2DEs) and comprises a team of three; a Women and Girls worker (based in the PCT), an Older Adults worker (Age Concern) and a Young Men and Boys worker (Barrow CRC). As the quantitative research did not cover children it is not possible to assess the impact on boys and girls – but it is encouraging to see such a close fit between the specific areas where there has been improvement and ALFA's target groups.

“The amazing thing is that we are three totally different organisations and we work so well together. It sounds a small thing but because we are statutory, and the others are a voluntary and an NGO, and that has given a really good depth to it, because we have each got our specialities.”

A summary of the partnership's achievements during the life of the SAZ include:

- Attracting funding (2002-2005) of £45,000 (Cumbria CC), £90,000 (Neighbourhood Renewal Fund), £30,000 (Sure Start), £36,000 (Countryside Agency) and £99,313 (grants from SAZ);
- Engaging more than 5,800 people from the local community in activities;
- More than 70 new activities supported and developed;
- Obtaining a Walking for Health grant and appointment of co-ordinator to develop walks in the Borough (more than 700 walkers took part in the first year).

A key feature of ALFA is that while the three key workers are linked to different parent organisations located in different parts of the town, they work very well as a team meeting weekly to exchange ideas and discuss progress.

Building partnerships Continued

Barrow Borough Sports Council

The local sports council has become a central element of Barrow's sport delivery mechanism. It currently includes representatives from local sports clubs, the county council, a sports college, Sure Start and Connexions.

The first point to make is obviously that the balance of this group is orientated towards young people. The core aims of the Sports Council are to promote involvement in sport in the community, assisting with the development and implementation of the Borough sports strategy and creating partnerships "to ensure that sport plays an integral role in promoting public health, social inclusion, and social and economic regeneration".

The main achievements of the council have been:

- Helping local clubs and organisations to access funding;
- Assisting local sports clubs to produce sports development plans – this is a condition of them receiving a grant from the Barrow Sports Council;
- Working in partnership with local community organisations.

Overall, these partnerships have worked well in Barrow. Although it is unclear whether these partnership would have formed without the area being designated as a SAZ, there is no doubt that the SAZ Manager played an important role in helping to pull the partners together and that her ability to do this was helped by her broader experience in non-sports regeneration projects.

Building partnerships Continued

Liverpool

In many ways the Liverpool SAZ illustrates similar successes to those found in Barrow, just on a broader and larger scale. The range of partner agencies the SAZ has worked with is truly impressive, as is the long term nature of the relationships they have built:

“We’ve had good partnerships with local agencies, particularly regeneration, health and community safety, all the key sectors we were looking to work with. We were able to establish good, strong partnerships with them early on, and we’ve been able to maintain those partnerships, so that’s made a big difference to us... also our geographical match with the school sports partnership shouldn’t be underestimated.”

More details of the types of relationships developed are provided below.

Regeneration Partnerships

There are strong relationships between the SAZ and regeneration organisations such as the Dingle Community Regeneration Trust, INclude Neighbourhood Regeneration and Kensington Regeneration. A large amount of investment has been poured into Liverpool over the past

decade, particularly into the SAZ area. The SAZ team has worked hard to establish relationships with and secure funds from non-traditional sources. Almost half of the £3,482,638 revenue funding secured for the delivery of the SAZ Plan has come from non-sporting sources such as the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund, New Deal for Communities, Sure Start, Church Urban Fund and the Primary Care Trust.

Health Partnerships

Aside from the SAZ Manager, the staff who work out of the SAZ office are actually employed by other organisations, such as the Central Liverpool Primary Care Trust and Nacro. By having staff with ‘a foot in both camps’, multiple agencies are therefore involved with the SAZ on a day to day basis and the SAZ is not seen as a wholly separate agency.

School Partnerships

Schools have also been key partners for the SAZ. There are five secondary schools and 30 primary schools in the area covered by the SAZ. As well as developing a strong relationship with the South Central School Sports Partnership, the SAZ team has also been involved in initiatives such as the delivery of the TOP Tots and TOP Start activity programmes in local pre-schools, in conjunction with the Sure Start projects in Kensington, Granby and Picton.

Building partnerships Continued

Community Partnerships

In addition to the more formal relationships outlined above, from the very early days of the Liverpool SAZ, the Manager sought to engage with groups representing different ethnic communities within Liverpool. While ethnic communities can be difficult to reach, the existing structure of the community organisations was leveraged to find out what their members wanted, how best to work with them, and to establish the SAZ as a positive force for the community. While the Somali case is unusual, in that there are three separate organisations claiming to represent Liverpool's Somali population, most ethnic groups are represented by one community organisation. Examples include the Yemeni Community Association and the Kurdish/Turkish Community Organisation. Over time, the relationship between the SAZ and the community groups has developed to such a point that more unusual sporting initiatives are able to be tried, such as football and horse riding for local Somali women.

The work the Liverpool SAZ team has put in to building and maintaining relationships with a wide range of bodies from the local police and ethnic community groups, to health and regeneration organisations, has reaped rewards both in terms of accessing funding, but also in establishing the SAZ initiative as a vital part of the Liverpool community. The partnership approach they have adopted has ensured that agencies working in the SAZ area are truly working together to deliver outcomes for the local community – sport is stronger for being part of a wider goal.

Potential Partnerships - Barrow

The main regret of the Barrow SAZ Manager was that she was unable to start building bridges between sports governing bodies and bodies dealing with wider social issues. As she had a background outside sport, dealing with wider regeneration issues, she was ideally placed to facilitate this, and was disappointed not to have made more progress. This would have involved;

“Hand holding them [NGBs] into the social scene, health care, community safety – “this is their strategy, this is their terminology” – virtually being a linguist; “this is what the youth work lingo means, this is how we can tap into it, this is what Connexions does, this is how we can work together” it was bridging that gap between sport and community social agendas. But it never got done...the Magnet fund got pulled.”

Participation successes

Lesson 6 - sports participation: In many ways it is not relevant to refer to key participation successes because it could be misleading. The sports and other forms of active recreation which have been most successful have been successful because they have been requested by local people. Although interesting, providing examples of what types of activities have worked best may not be that useful - the most important thing is the way that the SAZs have gone about selecting these activities.

Lesson 7 - hitting the right targets: The strategic approach, utilising action plans, ensured that the SAZs were able to increase participation rates among their target groups - rather than a more random approach. In Barrow for example, all of the adult groups who were targeted in the SAZ recorded increases in participation levels.

Lesson 8 - it is not all about sport: As the main participation target for Sport England encompasses “active recreation” there is a clear incentive to work even more closely with different types of partners to provide a highly diverse range of activities.

While it has been established that Liverpool has had greater success in improving participation levels than Barrow, it is interesting to note that many of the same techniques have been adopted – Liverpool has simply taken it one stage further (due in part to the massive injection of capital funding). Covered in the first section are the similar activities undertaken in both areas.

“I was not prepared to do short-term quick wins. It was not about that, it was about sustainability.... it is more about programmes, it is more about influencing at a strategic level and not about a few football matches for kids to get in the press.”

Liverpool & Barrow

One of the keys to the success of both initiatives is the focus on physical activity, rather than sport. While games like football will always be popular, especially in a football mad region like Liverpool with two Premiership clubs on its doorstep, groups such as women/girls, BMEs and the over 50s are less likely to see sport of this type as a viable recreational option. Both areas have endeavoured to offer a range of non-threatening activities as well, in order to encourage these groups to participate in physical activity.

“It is about opening people’s mindsets.... from “sport is sport, it’s competitive, it’s winning, it’s NGBs” to “it can be play, it can be fun, it can be informal and it can deliver all these economic and social benefits” ... breakdown perceptions of sport and then sell what it can do.”

Walking is one of the key activities that both SAZs have focused on. Particularly with the older population, trying to engage them in ‘sport’ meets with a range of barriers, while lower impact activities such as walking are more readily embraced. In Liverpool, when the SAZ was in its early stages, members of the SAZ team and colleagues from the PCT pushed for a permanent walking officer in the area, to build on the success of the projects they have run. This post was eventually funded by the PCT, and organised walks are now firmly established in the Liverpool SAZ. Barrow had similar success through the national Walking for Health programme (operated by the British Heart Foundation and Countryside Agency) which was linked to the ALFA project. The funding provided by the scheme enabled the recruitment of a co-ordinator who subsequently trained up 11 volunteers and attracted around 700 walkers in the first year of the initiative.

Participation successes

Continued

As well as walking, an example of a more unusual activity conducted in Liverpool has been gathering groups of residents together to spend a day working on an allotment. By offering this type of event, the SAZs have been able to engage with people who might otherwise do little or no physical activity but who see something like gardening as a non-threatening way to participate. A successful programme of chair based exercise has also been established with the older communities in both SAZ areas – in Liverpool for example, these are timed to coincide with an existing programme of lunch and bingo sessions at a community location. These types of non-threatening programmes have had great success in encouraging participation in physical activity among the older population of both SAZs.

In addition to walking, a range of other low impact activities have been offered in both SAZ areas. Taster sessions have been run in everything from cheerleading to yoga. Short taster sessions are trialled, introducing the community to new activities such as tai chi or pilates, and the most popular of these is then offered on a regular basis. In both zones, a nominal charge, such as 50p or £1, is made to cover instructor fees and to ensure the attendees place a value on the activity they are undertaking.

“I’ve tended to favour charging something for the activities run, because I’m a firm believer that nothing in this life is free, there’s always a cost somewhere, someone’s picking up the bill for it. I want taking part to be a healthy choice - ‘I’d rather spend a pound on that class than buy a bag of sweets’.”

By offering a wide range of activities at low cost, both SAZs have been able to see what works in the community and what doesn’t. The ongoing programmes become self-sustaining due to their proven popularity with local residents. Both SAZs have adopted this approach, and although Liverpool has probably been more successful, this is likely to only have been because they were able to put in place greater staff resources.

Participation successes

Continued

At the other end of the age spectrum, both SAZs have people working with children and young people – the Youth Sports Co-ordinator in the case of Liverpool and the Women and Girls and Young Men and Boys workers in Barrow. In Liverpool the co-ordinator works with young people between the ages of 7 and 16 years to encourage them to participate in sport and physical activity. Those who participate are often referred by social workers, schools or parents in a bid to arrest their anti-social behaviour. As girls are harder to engage with sport and physical activity, innovative activities have to be offered to keep their interest. A particularly popular initiative has been street dance sessions, where the girls work either among themselves or with a choreographer to develop a routine set to chart music, and then put on performances. Another popular activity is gymnastics, although this is more difficult to provide due to the scarcity of instructors. By providing activities the girls are interested in, the Youth Sports Co-ordinator has been able to retain many girls who would otherwise not take part in physical activity of any sort. In Barrow, a successful football programme, targeted at girls in the Borough, has also been established, with weekly football sessions now running with the help of Salterbeck United.

Encouraging women of any age to participate in physical activity has also been a focus in both SAZ areas. In Liverpool, the provision of women only gentle exercise and gym sessions at the Toxteth Sports Centre Liverpool has been particularly successful. These sessions are available several times a week, and encourage women/girls to participate in physical activity in a non-threatening atmosphere. Again, Barrow has adopted a similar approach with a range of taster sessions being run for women. These sessions were very successful, attracting over 80 women. Crèche facilities were provided, to overcome the barrier of childcare concerns.

Participation successes

Continued

Liverpool — working with minority ethnic groups

There have also been particular successes with the BME population. The Somali community has been encouraged to participate in sport and physical activity through the Somali Sports Project, which has targeted women and girls from the Somali community. This group generally has poor levels of participation, and the SAZ has worked with the Somali community to provide activities which are culturally appropriate and of interest to this sector of the community. Initially, activities like keep fit classes, dance and swimming were offered but as the relationship between the SAZ and the community has grown, more 'unusual' activities such as horse riding and football have been added to those targeted at this community. The success of these activities is testament to the strong bond of trust which has built up between the Somali community and the SAZ, and the sensitivity the SAZ has shown to cultural issues.

“We’ve had quite a lot of success working through community groups, setting up new sports programmes actually targeting specific BME communities, particularly women in the communities. For example, the Somali Sports Project has been running for over three years... and most recently we’ve established a Somali women’s football team... that’s a major breakthrough that probably traditional sports organisations wouldn’t be able to make.”

The types of activities now available could not have been offered in the early stages of the relationship, it was only once the Somali community could see that the SAZ was taking their cultural needs into consideration that the range of activities could be extended into new areas.

Participation successes

Continued

Another success with a hard to reach group has been the work the SAZ has done with the Liverpool Yemeni Arabic Club. The club initially contacted the SAZ as they wanted to arrange swimming sessions for the Yemeni community. Despite issues around cost, transport and the provision of female lifeguards, the SAZ was able to liaise with other community groups such as those involved in the Somali Sports Project to make this initiative happen. A further initiative was the provision of the female only gym classes for Yemeni/Arabic women at the Toxteth Sports Centre. With the aid of a Community Chest Grant from the Liverpool PCT, a female worker was employed to reach out to Yemeni women about this initiative, and at the first gym session over 30 women attended.

Recently, the SAZ has run events involving both the BME and the over 50s by focusing on the West African Elders group, based in Kensington. This group has been encouraged to participate in walking programmes, yoga and other forms of gentle exercise. The West African Elders group encompasses both BMEs, the over 50s and women (around a third to a half of its members are women) and provides a good example of engaging with a community and working with them to offer activities which are of interest to them. While the West African Elders group has been particularly targeted, the activities offered are open to all and allow local facilities such as parks and open spaces to be showcased to residents.

Barrow & Liverpool - additional groups to target

In both Barrow and Liverpool, those involved with the SAZs would like to have been able to focus more on increasing participation amongst disabled residents. One of the barriers to doing this is cost, as facilities and programmes for the disabled generally cost more to run than those for the able bodied population. While there has been a significant increase in the levels of participation in sport and physical activity among this group in Liverpool, and to a lesser extent in Barrow, both areas see opportunities for more work with this section of the community. In Barrow specifically, they are very keen for a disability worker to become part of the ALFA team – although ALFA is a member of the Barrow and District Disability Sport and Leisure Forum, having a disability worker on the team would enable them to engage closely with the existing workers and target this group more effectively.

Facilities

Lesson 9 - it is not all about buildings: Participation rates have increased in both Barrow and Liverpool, while only Liverpool enjoyed significant capital investment. However, there is no denying that while participation levels can be increased without massive capital investment, the increase is more marked where serious investment has been made in the facilities and open spaces available to the community.

This is the area in which the Barrow and Liverpool SAZ areas differ most markedly. While there has been little capital investment in facilities in Barrow, Liverpool SAZ has benefited from its ability to attract a significant injection of funding from a wide variety of sources as the community undergoes a major period of regeneration.

This difference is reflected in the impacts recorded in each of the SAZs. While Barrow has been successful in improving participation levels, this success has been based around non-formal recreational activities such as walking, or those that do not require specific leisure facilities (e.g. exercise to music, yoga and aerobics). In contrast the multi-million pound capital investment in Liverpool has enabled the larger team of partners to increase participation levels across a wider range of sport and recreational activities.

Liverpool

When the SAZ started, facilities in the area were limited and those which were available were far from state of the art. Since the SAZ has been in existence, the staff have worked hard to improve the facilities available to local residents, and to develop new ones with the help of funding from various bodies. Examples of this are provided below.

The Kensington Community Sports Centre, which was in its infancy when the SAZ started, opened in May 2004. The Centre offers a sports hall, fitness suite, activity room, bowling green, grass football pitches and floodlit synthetic grass pitches and was developed at a cost of over £2.5 million. The SAZ worked hard to secure funding for the Centre and to help them develop their aims and programme offerings.

The Toxteth Sport Centre is another local facility which the SAZ has engaged with to offer an expanded range of programme to the local community. The Centre comprises a four court sports hall, weights room, three seven-a-side synthetic outdoor pitches and two glass backed squash courts.

Facilities

Continued

Admiral Park, a new sports ground offering outdoor facilities for football, athletics, rugby, netball, basketball and tennis, was the result of a partnership between the Liverpool SAZ and a wide range of community partners. This facility is shared between eight local primary schools, with community groups also able to make use of the facilities on offer. A further multi-use games area was developed on the former site of Birchfield Primary School, providing additional outdoor space for local children.

Capital projects currently underway in the area include the development of the Belvedere Community Activity Centre, Princes Park Community Tennis Club, Park Road Sports Centre extension, Shorefields Recreation Ground and the building of a major new swimming complex and sports centre at the former site of Picton Sports Centre.

In addition to the projects outlined above, which are by no means the only capital works which have gone on in the area, the SAZ has sought to improve the parks and schools in the area. This has been achieved through providing marked out games areas and landscaping initiatives which seek to make the areas safer and more welcoming to residents. Facility improvement generally has been very successful in the SAZ, helped by the funding available to the Liverpool area under a range of government initiatives.

The people factor

Lesson 10 - people are key: The SAZs were designed to be about “people not buildings” and this approach has been fully justified. In terms of facilities, virtually nothing has changed in Barrow, yet there has still been an increase in participation levels. Although facilities have improved in Liverpool, the success of the SAZ has been far more to do with the way the different partners have worked with local people. Of course, access to and quality of sports facilities are important, but increasing participation levels in the SAZ has largely been about convincing those who currently do nothing to be more active – this could not be achieved by merely building a new sports hall or swimming pool.

The people factor encompasses two elements of the SAZ programme - those that are responsible for running it, and the local residents they engage with. In these respects, there are strong similarities between the two areas which appear to have played a major part in their success:

- Staff retention in key positions. Vitaly, both SAZ Managers stayed in post for the full life of the SAZs, while other senior positions have remained unchanged during the period (e.g. Chris Athersmith - the Sport Development Manager in Barrow);
- Community intervention. The success of both Zones is due in no small part to building a strategic framework of Development Officers who speak to local people about what they want, and then work with them to deliver the sports and physical activity opportunities;
- Big personalities. In Liverpool, the SAZ Manager is very high profile and well regarded within the community. His efforts to build a strong presence for the SAZ in the local arena and to develop a strong SAZ team have played a large part in the success of the initiative in Liverpool;
- Local cultures. Although often from diverse backgrounds, the people of Liverpool have a strong culture and identity which may have helped build a sense of purpose and togetherness around some aspects of the SAZ initiative. The strong influence of football on the local community should also not be underestimated. In Barrow, to a large extent residents believe that anything they achieve has

to be done without much assistance from government, a feeling which is strengthened by the region’s isolation from much of the rest of the country. However, there was a feeling that this attitude has not had a particularly strong influence on the way they have reacted to the SAZ.

“Raising sport and physical activity participation rates is not about putting more activities on for those who are already engaged in it, it is about going out there, like ALFA do, to consult with those people that are not doing it, find out what their needs are and then addressing these needs.... That’s not easy, and you do need workers to find the time to go out, find out what groups exist at a local level, like tenants and residents associations, community groups, local partnerships, engaging with them, getting sports and physical activity on their agenda, and asking questions at a local level – “what do you need?”

The people factor Continued

Barrow

As has been highlighted already, one of the main differences between the two SAZs was that while Liverpool developed a strong team, with many people reporting directly to the SAZ Manager, Barrow remained as a looser alliance of partnerships. In many ways this was not a hindrance because the Manager had the strategic vision to see how the different partnerships fitted together and provided an overview of the whole area which was lacking before. For example, once the SAZ was established, much of her focus was on communications, including providing updates that would enable people to see the wider impact of the SAZ.

Despite this, it is worth stressing the challenge that faced the Barrow SAZ Manager in trying to create a combined sense of purpose around three very separate districts. There is no doubt that the effort required to communicate across the three areas was a barrier to making a greater success of the SAZ. Essentially, the composition of the SAZ meant that Barrow had one-third of a SAZ Manager – any success in the area should be seen in this context. The difference between Barrow and the other two areas was that it had a well established Sports Development Officer (SDO) who was able to provide strong support and run with many of the SAZ related initiatives. In contrast, the SAZ Manager ended up having to fulfil this role herself in the other two Districts, where there was nothing like as much support.

The Liverpool SAZ Team

The Liverpool SAZ is managed by Gary White, who is supported by a core team of six office based staff. These team members are in most instances, employed by other organisations such as the Central Liverpool PCT or NACRO (formerly known as the National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders). While the staff may be employed by organisations other than the SAZ, on a day to day basis they report to Gary and see themselves as working for the Liverpool SAZ. While each team member is focused on a different area, there is good communication within the team. This prevents duplication of effort and ensures that all team members know what the others are working on and can identify programmes of mutual interest.

Communication is maintained through regular, although not frequent, team meetings and occasional team days out of the office. As most of the staff divide their time between the office and the community, they may or may not see each other on a weekly basis. However, each week a team planner is circulated so that everyone is aware of where the other members of the team are and what they are working on.

The people factor Continued

The Liverpool SAZ Team – Continued

In addition to the core team members there are approximately 15 to 20 others working off-site as sports coordinators, facilities managers etc. in particular communities. Many of these people are drawn from within the SAZ area itself, however it is not seen as vital that those working for the SAZ come from the local area – it is more important that they have the right skills for the job, rather than being a SAZ resident. The core team are not all local people either, but this is not seen as a particular barrier. While it is felt that having local knowledge is important, this can be developed quite quickly and is therefore not a hindrance to performance in the SAZ. A mix of local people and those from outside the area has worked well in Liverpool, and is likely to elsewhere as well.

Having a full time SAZ Manager is seen as vital to the success of the SAZ initiative – he is the main driving force behind the SAZ. The role encompasses forging strong relationships with the community, providing a strategic overview of the SAZ initiative, engaging with other agencies working in similar fields and providing funding advice. In Liverpool, the same SAZ Manager has been in place since the start of the initiative and this continuity has provided stability to the team and the wider community. It is definitely seen as a full time position, and the charismatic leadership Gary has provided is one of the keys to the success of the SAZ initiative in Liverpool, and he is well regarded by his colleagues.

Community Volunteers

Volunteers play a key role in sustainability, as eventually external funding will reduce or cease, and many of the activities now available in the SAZ will only be able to be sustained with the support of local people. Therefore the SAZ team tries not to get too heavily involved with the clubs and groups they support, so that they do not become too dependent on the SAZ for their success. Getting members of the local community involved in sport and physical activity provision in a voluntary capacity has been achieved by tapping into the enthusiasm of local people to make their area a better place to live. There is always a need for more volunteers, and finding people who are willing to help deliver activity programmes is always challenging, but the SAZ team has worked hard to develop volunteers.

This is done by encouraging ‘regulars’ at activities to volunteer through the provision of training courses in areas such as coaching, first aid and child protection. From each of these courses, a handful of people will volunteer, although turnover is quite fast as other things take priority in people’s lives. Developing a formal qualification in volunteering is seen as one possible way to extend the appeal of being a volunteer, and has been identified as a potential area for development.

While there is more work to be done in the voluntary sector, the existing system is working well. People are taking the skills they learn on the course and applying them to the sport and recreational activities that motivated them to volunteer in the first place.

The SAZ identity

Lesson 11 - a strong SAZ identity is not required: The success of the Barrow and Liverpool SAZs has occurred without a strong identity for the initiative in the local areas.⁴ The key has been building partnerships and engaging with communities.

Interestingly, neither SAZ has placed much emphasis on building up the profile of the SAZ initiative in the local area. This is perhaps a result of the range of physical activities that they have promoted and that linking these to a SAZ may have created a barrier to participation – particularly among some of the target groups.

Barrow

The Sport Action Zone had little identity in Barrow. As has been mentioned elsewhere in this report, the SAZ Manager acted more as a partner, among other things, helping to provide strategic insight and helping to access funding. In this respect the initial outward face of the SAZ was one person, and as a result it would be unlikely for it to have built up a strong identity in the local area. During the course of its lifespan the SAZ built up a more positive profile among local stakeholders (although this was not helped by Magnet funding being withdrawn in 2003), with the quarterly newsletter being particularly useful in helping to convince local politicians that the initiative was benefiting the local area.

Liverpool

In contrast, word of mouth is far more positive around the work of the Liverpool SAZ and it is still seen as a credible organisation. However, as in Barrow, there is a feeling that local residents may or may not be aware of the SAZ. As there is such a strong focus on partnership working in the Liverpool SAZ, many activities are co-sponsored by other organisations or the SAZ works behind the scenes to secure funding for local groups. While it is felt that residents may be aware of the SAZ logo, and would respond positively to it, brand recognition is not thought to be particularly strong.

⁴ From the quantitative study carried out with c. 1,000 residents in each area, we know that only around one in ten (10% in Barrow, 11% in Liverpool) residents are aware that they live in a Sport Action Zone.

Sustainability

Lesson 12 - help the community to help themselves: It is important to ensure that the community is empowered to carry on with the initiatives started by the SAZ, and that they do not become too dependent on outside organisations doing things for them. As long as funding remains available to grass roots community initiatives - and that it is not limited just to 'sport' but includes physical activity in a more general sense - the progress made in these areas can be maintained.

Sustainability is another example of similarities between the two areas, but because the Liverpool SAZ has become more established, with greater resources, it has been able to secure a more sustainable future. This aside, both areas have approached the issue of sustainability in the same way; i.e. to obtain funding for workers who can set up programmes, providing taster sessions, producing marketing and most importantly providing training for people in the community to run their own activities in the future.

“At the end of the day, we’re not going to be here forever... hopefully the work that we do now, to encourage sustainability and to encourage community members to get involved, will continue... that’s what I hope I’m trying to achieve, that’s what I’d like to be able to say I’ve done.”

Barrow

Now the funding provided by the Barrow SAZ has dried up, its main legacy has been to help increase the profile of sport and physical recreation in the local area and to build a structure for sports development in the area. As has been mentioned elsewhere, the SAZ Manager’s previous experience of working in regeneration projects outside of sport provided a valuable insight into partnership building with non-sports partner agencies. It could be argued that some of the ideas for the partnerships which exist in the Borough either existed before or could have come out of its Sports Development Action Plan, but the practical experience of the SAZ Manager undoubtedly helped.

The ALFA scheme has funding to last until 2008, when it will be looking for a further extension.

“It is fine now but we are all short term funding, so come 2008 we could go from having the four of us trying to increase participation to just Chris.”

In addition, the Barrow Sports Council has developed into a strong local body which has ensured that sports organisations in the area are increasingly well networked. So long as it is able to continue to attract funding for small scale grants, this organisation will continue to contribute to the development of sport and physical recreation in the region.

Sustainability

Continued

Overall, the Barrow SAZ has been proactive in trying to train up local residents and to work with them as partners, but again, partly due to greater levels of manpower, Liverpool has been able to empower a wider range of local people.

“If you don’t have the input from a paid worker the interest drops the groups start to fold... the public model would be that we set it up, the community takes it over and we never go back in again, but the truth is that you do need to parachute in occasionally.”

Liverpool

It is strongly felt by those at the Liverpool SAZ that the initiatives and programmes they have helped develop will be self sustaining. In fact, this is one of the achievements of which they are most proud – that the area will continue to reap the benefits of what they have achieved long after their roles have come to an end. One of the main goals of the SAZ was to empower local groups to develop and assist them with accessing funding to secure their futures. As one member of the SAZ team notes, every single project the SAZ becomes involved with has to be thought of in terms of sustainability. The way the SAZ has operated has ensured that when the initiative comes to an end the changes they have wrought in the community will not end with it. As one staff member puts it, the emphasis within the SAZ has been on doing things with people, not to people, and so the staff have enjoyed helping local

community groups set up their own programmes, access funding and training and then stepping back and providing support from a distance.

“We’ve set people going in the right direction, then local people have taken it on themselves.”

This approach has ensured that the groups they have helped are not overly dependent on the SAZ in the long term. In fact, the community empowerment model employed by the Liverpool SAZ and the strong partnerships they have forged with other local agencies has been so successful that the approach is now being extended across Liverpool as a whole, providing a testament to the overall success of the SAZ and the efforts of the staff involved.

Final comments

The core lessons from these successful SAZ initiatives have been presented at the start of each chapter throughout this report. This chapter pulls some of these themes together and summarises our overall thoughts. We should stress however, that none of these comments should be regarded as criticisms for either SAZ.

The reason why they have been selected for this further research is because of their achievements and the need for Sport England to learn about how these could be transferred. As Liverpool has been more successful than Barrow in improving participation levels there are bound to be areas where it has been more effective and these are discussed below – but again we should stress that these differences should not be seen to diminish Barrow's achievements, which have been considerable.

Although the results from these two Sport Action Zones both indicate some significant successes in terms of improving participation levels, the approaches taken by each SAZ Manager were very different. Above all, the Manager in Barrow adopted more of a strategic role in the development of the SAZ, whereas the Manager in Liverpool appears to have been more hands-on. It appears that the structure of the West Cumbria and Barrow SAZ will not have helped the Manager, because it meant she had to divide her time between three areas – thereby reducing the direct impact she could have in any one part of the SAZ. Perhaps a good indication of their differences is illustrated in recent printed material produced by the Zones. The West Cumbria and Barrow End of Programme Report provides a particularly good account of the 5 years of the Zone, combining interesting anecdotes, explaining the initiatives undertaken in the Zone and providing detailed financial information. It is a fairly lengthy but very worthwhile read for someone looking to develop a similar partnership programme in the future. In contrast, the Liverpool SAZ appears more adept at the shorter attention grabbing fliers such as “Ambitions, Actions & Achievements” which neatly summarises the aims and successes of the Zone and is more effective in this capacity than “Regenerating Cumbria Through Sport & Physical Activity” produced by the Barrow SAZ.

Final comments

Continued

Ultimately, the larger impact and stronger legacy has been in Liverpool. The considerable improvements in participation levels in this SAZ area are due in a large part to the drive and commitment of the Manager, who has built an ever expanding team around him.

Barrow's participation levels have also improved significantly since the start of the new millennium, and this is in part due to the SAZ Manager's ability to access funding and provide strategic input. The extent to which these achievements might still have happened without the creation of a SAZ is not clear (e.g. through the implementation of the local Sports Development Strategy). However, the creation of a SAZ helped raise sport up the local political agenda, while at the same time the SAZ Manager definitely helped access funding and build partnerships with non-sports organisations. Although the funding has now dried up, the increase in the importance of sport and active recreation to the local area put it in a stronger position to access the current funding. Overall however, the fact that the SAZ Manager did not have a team that directly reported to her will have limited her

influence, and this is probably one of the reasons why the Barrow SAZ has been slightly less successful than the Liverpool SAZ.

In both areas one of the major factors in the success of the SAZ initiative has been the extent to which solid relationships were formed with other non-sporting agencies working in the local areas. This includes those involved in regeneration, health, education and crime prevention. Reaching out directly to the community, for example through ethnic community organisations in Liverpool, has also paid dividends and has established a sustainable programme of activities.

Another key to the success of the SAZ initiative has been its focus on physical activity rather than just 'sport' in the more traditional sense. By adopting a softer approach to participation, groups with traditionally low levels of participation in physical activity – for example, women/girls, older people and those from BME backgrounds – have been encouraged to try new things and make physical activity part of their everyday lives. By encouraging people to participate in activities such as walking, dance and gardening, as well as low impact exercise such as yoga, physical activity is opened up to a wider audience than would be the case if the focus were always on team sports such as football and basketball, which are of limited appeal to significant proportions of the population. Working with the community to find out what they would like to do, rather than telling them what they should be doing, has been a hallmark of success in both the Barrow and Liverpool SAZ areas, and is a key learning from this initiative.

Final comments

Continued

This focus on working with the community, rather than doing everything for them, is another key building block to the success of the SAZ initiative in these areas. By harnessing the enthusiasm of local residents the Liverpool SAZ in particular has created a sustainable legacy for the future. The key here has been to help local clubs and community groups to help themselves (e.g. by empowering local people by going through funding applications or ensuring that those provided with grants have club development plans).

The SAZ teams themselves have benefited from a high degree of continuity and stable funding arrangements. This has allowed them to take a long term view of developments in their areas, and to build strong networks across the regions. While it is not felt that being a local resident is vital to the success of the SAZ, it is important that the SAZ team develop strong local knowledge and are seen to be working for the benefit of the local community - if there were a high staff turnover in key positions in the SAZ, the Zones would not have been anything like as successful.

It has been suggested that the successes of the SAZ initiative have not been showcased as well as they might have been. There were 12 SAZ areas, and the project ran for five years, and yet no conference or event has been organised to bring those working in the SAZ areas together to discuss what was working, what wasn't and any new initiatives which were being put in place. Perhaps a retrospective conference may be worth considering, to get input from a wider range of those involved in the SAZ initiative and to build on the success of each SAZ.

Sport England Policy and Research
September 2006

Appendix

Barrow and Liverpool SAZ – An overview

Although covering very different parts of England, the Barrow and Liverpool SAZ have experienced many of the same challenges. Provided in the table below is a summary of many of the issues discussed in the main body of this report.

Differences	Barrow-in-Furness	Liverpool
Location	Urban/sub-urban	Urban
Structure	3 local authority areas*	Several wards within Liverpool
Ethnicity	Homogenous population (>99% white)	Diverse population, both British born and immigrant groups
SAZ Manager Background	Regeneration	Sport
SAZ Manager Approach	Provide strategic input to a network of partner bodies – no direct staff	Creation of a large SAZ team
Sports Facilities	No significant change during the lifetime of the SAZ	>£8m secured for new and improved facilities
Similarities	Two of the most economically deprived parts of England	
	Initial resistance to the SAZ initiative from local stakeholders	
	Building strong partnerships with non-sporting bodies	
	SAZ Managers adept at attracting funding direct (from Sport England) and indirect (from non-sporting sources)	
	Consulting with local communities to discover what they want	
	Retaining key personnel throughout the life of the SAZ	
	Focus on recreational as well as sporting activities	
	Little focus on building an identity for the SAZ	

* Please note that while the SAZ was the West Cumbria and Barrow SAZ, which also included the districts of Copeland and Allerdale, this research concentrated solely on the Borough of Barrow-in-Furness.