

South Tyneside Place Based Expansion

Quarterly insights pack (June 2026)

What is in this pack?

- This pack outlines the insights we have gathered as part of the Sport England Place Based Expansion Development Award between February and June 2026.
- This project aims to take a 'place-based' approach to tackle inequalities and make healthier living and an active life in South Tyneside more accessible. A place-based approach is community focused and led by the insights of the people who live and work in South Tyneside.
- By working with key place partners (such as South Tyneside Council, the NHS, and the voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise (VCFSE) sector) we aim to develop a shared understanding of what helps local people in South Tyneside move more as well as the barriers they face to being more physically active.

What is in this pack?



The **key findings from discussions with partners and residents** about physical activity in relation to active travel, the built and natural environment, mental health and neurodiversity, and falls and frailty.

A summary of **insights gathered by trusted local organisations** about the experiences of their service users and community members.

A summary of **our learning about the wider physical activity 'ecosystem'** in South Tyneside and steps to develop it.

How have we gathered these insights?



Through facilitating themed roundtable sessions with key stakeholders and residents from across South Tyneside and capturing and analysing the in-depth discussions that take place.



Through commissioning and supporting trusted local organisations to gather and interpret insight from their community members and service users.



Through reflecting critically on how the overall physical activity ecosystem in South Tyneside functions.

Key findings from roundtable sessions

February – May 2026

Active travel and the built and natural environment.



Approximately 30 representatives of local government, statutory organisations, transport providers, and VCFSE organisations.



Organisations represented included: Churches Together South Tyneside, Cycling UK, DWP, Gateway Wheelers, Groundwork South & North Tyneside, Go North East, Inspire South Tyneside, Key Community, North East Combined Authority, North East Museums, Northumbria Police, Sense Ability Matters, Stagecoach, South Tyneside Council, Tyneside Outdoors, Women's Health in South Tyneside.



Discussions focused on active travel barriers and enablers and how communities experience the built and natural environment.

What enables active travel in South Tyneside?



Employers supporting active travel.

Cycling to work and cycle-friendly employer schemes.

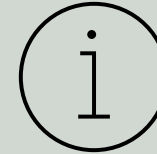
Bicycle parking racks and shower facilities at workplaces.



Collaboration around improving accessibility

Sense Ability Matters worked with South Tyneside Council and Centre for Ageing Better to audit public spaces in South Tyneside.

Their age-friendly quick guide includes key considerations for bus stops ([full report](#)).

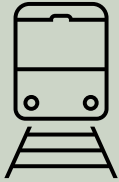


Skills and knowledge.

Your Voice Counts provide a free travel training qualification for adults with a learning disability and/or autism in South Tyneside.

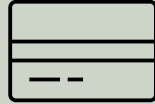
Promotion of Park and Stride.

What prevents active travel in South Tyneside?



Insufficient connectivity between active travel routes and public transport.

Lack of secure and convenient bicycle parking racks, e.g. at Metro stations and Hebburn Central.



Costs and negative perceptions of public transport.

Costs of fares.

Perceptions that the Metro is unreliable (delays, screens not working at stations) deter use as part of commutes and school runs.

Real and perceived antisocial behaviour at stations and transport hubs.

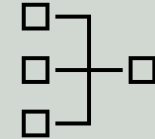


Lack of accessibility

Lack of toilet facilities at most Metro stations.

Loss of Nexus Travel Buddy scheme.

Cycling and public transport infrastructure is not accessible for disabled cyclists: cycle lanes and bicycle racks are not wide enough and there is not enough space on buses for cycles.



Systemic factors.

Car culture and stigma around cycling.

Active travel and public transport an afterthought in housing developments.

Fragmentation of local public transport system: multiple providers and apps.

Gaps in active travel infrastructure within and across boroughs.

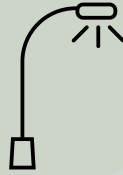
How do communities experience the built and natural environment?



Spaces can help and hinder belonging.

Holding summer events in parks activates these spaces, engages residents with them, and contributes to a sense of belonging.

Decline of shopping districts, public spaces and roads contributes to lack of pride in place and trust in local authority.



Spaces do not always feel safe.

Both younger and older people want to visit parks in the evening but do not always feel safe to do so.

Fear of irresponsible dog owners deters some residents from visiting parks and green spaces.

Perception that police do not patrol parks and green spaces.



Spaces can feel out of communities' control.

Less affluent neighbourhoods lack neighbourhood plans.

Community Area Forums do not support collaboration around managing and developing the built and natural environment.



Spaces are not accessible for everyone.

Fenced-off courts and pitches restrict access and prevent unstructured play.

Play equipment is not always accessible for disabled children.

Gates for some parks and play areas require wheelchair and mobility scooters to reverse in order to enter.

Mental health, neurodiversity and inclusion.



Approximately 20 representatives of local government, health, and VCFSE organisations.

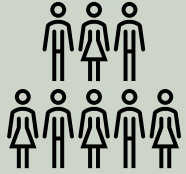


Organisations represented included: Age Concern Tyneside South, Bilton Hall, Conscience Coaching and Consulting, Duke of Edinburgh's Award, Fortitude Family, Key Community, Our 1 Community, SenseAbility Matters, South Tyneside Council, South Tyneside Life Cycle Primary Care Mental Health Service, South Tyneside and Sunderland NHS Foundation Trust, Sported, Stormbreak, The Cultural Spring, Tyneside Outdoors, Your Voice Counts.



Discussions focused on enablers and barriers for neurodivergent people and people experiencing mental health difficulties.

Neurodiversity.



Organisations supporting neurodiverse people.

North East Autism Society.

AutismAble.

Bilton Hall Community Trust, Jarrow.

Autism in Mind (AIM) South Tyneside.

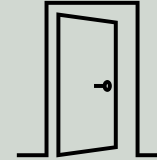
Our 1 Community 'Don't Diss My Ability' initiative.



Barriers to physical activity faced by neurodiverse people.

Traditional gym environment (harsh lighting, loud music, clanging weights) can be overwhelming for some neurodiverse people.

Lack of signage directing to, and within, green spaces (i.e. signs indicating exits, toilets).



Active travel and transport.

Removal of autism and Asperger's syndrome from eligibility criteria of South Tyneside disabled bus pass.

Some neurodiverse people find the lighting and seating layout of new Metro fleet uncomfortable.

Virtual walkthroughs of active travel routes can help with planning journeys and reducing anxiety.



Borough-wide considerations.

Need for greater awareness of South Tyneside SEND Local Offer directory.

Some people with Specific Learning Difficulties struggle to process online information about local activities and opportunities.

Neurodiverse people want local organisations and institutions to have more faith in them.

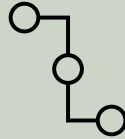
Dementia and mental health.



Framing of activities and opportunities for people with dementia.

Emphasising the physical exercise aspect of activities can deter some, whereas emphasising the social aspect (music, dance) could increase engagement.

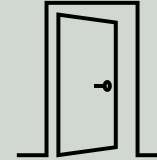
Labelling services as being for 'dementia' can exclude those without a diagnosis or with a late diagnosis. Alternative labelling such as 'forgetful' might be more inclusive.



Awareness, promotion and support for dementia organisations.

There are pockets of provision and resources (such as Age Concern's dementia gym) but these are not linked together or widely promoted.

Some organisations supporting people with dementia do not feel prepared to offer physical activity opportunities for fear they will do it improperly or unsafely.



How to make opportunities more inclusive for people experiencing mental ill health.

Anxiety around engaging with physical activity opportunities can be greater among those experiencing mental ill health.

Framing opportunities in terms of 'movement' rather than 'mental health' can reduce stigma or anxiety.



Wider determinants of mental ill health and physical inactivity.

Addictive behaviours associated with digital devices among young people in particular.

Social isolation and loneliness across age groups.

Postnatal depression.

Falls and frailty.



Approximately 20 representatives of local government, health, and VCFSE organisations.



Organisations represented included: Age Concern Tyneside South, North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board, SenseAbility Matters, South Tyneside and Sunderland NHS Foundation Trust, South Tyneside Council, South Tyneside Health Collaboration.



Discussions focused on what helps people living with frailty to stay safe and active, the gaps and barriers that make prevention and recovery more difficult, and potential system changes that could impact positively on falls prevention and support.

What is helping?

- South Tyneside Health and Care Partnership.
- Membership of national and European communities of practice for frailty.
- Enhanced Health Care in Homes team.
- Healthy Lives agendas for long-term health conditions.
- ESCAPE-pain programme.
- Delivering strength and balance work prevention work as close as possible to community.
- Hydro 4 U, Hebburn.
- Active Libraries.
- ACTS falls risk assessments.
- SenseAbility Matters assessments for sight and hearing loss, and aids and adaptations.

What gets in the way?

- Disconnected services: frailty teams within hospitals and community with different funding sources and management.
- NHS crisis management context leads to services being reactive.
- Gaps between strategic decision making for clinical services/processes and the local insight about how the system works in practice.
- Impact of short-term funding and funding siloes.
- Conflicting health service priorities due to funding pressures.
- Gaps between health sector and VCFSE sector: VCFSE organisations offer a service (i.e. Age UK prostate cancer support) but by the time clinical services are aware and signpost to it, service has ended.

What gets in the way?

- Individuals wait until they are in crisis.
- Stigma around frailty.
- Lack of education and knowledge around strength and balance.
- Unhelpful terminology, e.g. 'frailty'.
- Belief that frailty and falls are 'inevitable' part of ageing.
- Older people from BME communities less like to engage with services.
- Difficulties getting to appointments on to time (especially if patient has multiple appointments in one day at different sites)

What can we do?

- Set up a steering group for falls (NHS, fire and rescue, leisure sector, etc).
- Pool data (LA, NHS, pharmacies, optometrists) for first falls to understand predictive risk factors.
- Look at priorities across primary and secondary care.
- Upskill frontline staff.
- Support older people to be advocates for falls prevention.
- Joint, long-term funding.
- Funding newly created roles to meet specific aims rather than adding to workload of existing roles.
- Allow service reform time to settle before evaluating and/or changing.
- Make falls and frailty care part of care home staff induction.
- Explore what else can be done to support housebound people.

If we could change one thing...

- Information sharing with residents about local activities that encourage participation, improve physical and emotional wellbeing, and reduce isolation.
- Area mapping of fall pendant usage to identify priority locations for preventative work.
- Promoting movement, strength and balance early in the frailty journey.
- Changing language (i.e. 'frailty') so that more people engage.
- Use data on access to health and other services (i.e. leisure) to target local focus.
- Map falls over a 6-month period to compare two areas – one where we have promoted prevention/strength and balance support and one where we have not.
- Increase size of NHS practitioner teams working around falls prevention to include dieticians and occupational therapists with capacity to educate rehab teams and care home staff.

Community voice session.



Reflection session, co-organised with Inspire South Tyneside, with approximately 40 residents from key communities: low-income households, older people, ethnically diverse communities, disabled and neurodiverse people.



Participants were engaged through: Apna Ghar; AutismAble; Churches Together South Tyneside; Happy at Home; Sense Ability Matters; Northern Rights; Route2Work College, Stopping Unsafe Relationships Together; Women's Health in South Tyneside.



Discussions focused on the following questions: what is great about where you live? What makes it hard for you to get active? What would help you to move more?

What is great about where you live?

1. Green and blue spaces.

- Jarrow Park, Temple Park, North and South Marine Parks, Readhead Park.
- Seafront and beaches.

2. Community organisations.

- Provide opportunities for connection and movement, especially for over 50s.
- Churches, Active Station, Apna Ghar, Hebburn AutismAble FC.

3. Leisure facilities.

- Haven Point.
- Soft play areas.

4. Sense of identity.

- Friendly neighbours.
- Diverse communities.

5. Transport and active travel.

- Availability of buses and Metro.
- Shops within walking distance in South Shields.

What makes it hard for you to get active?

1. Financial barriers.

- Costs of gyms and activities; public transport; parking; childcare.

2. Safety concerns.

- Public transport (including at Interchange); antisocial behaviour in public (especially at night); uneven pavements; experiences of racism.

3. Lack of awareness.

- Digital exclusion; lack of knowledge about where to find relevant information.

4. Accessibility.

- Limited seating in South Shields town centre; some neurodiverse people find new Metro lighting and layout uncomfortable; wheelchair access.

What would help you to move more?

1. Affordable provision.

- Discounted/free activities and gym memberships; lower public transport fares, especially for families and young people; cheaper/free parking.

2. Tailored provision.

- Women only gym/swim sessions; seated exercise activities; activities for young people.

3. Information.

- Printed 'What's On' to complement online directories; community notice boards.

4. Enhancing existing assets.

- Lighting in parks; maintaining and expanding outdoor exercise equipment; investing in community centres.

5. Supporting inclusion.

- Increasing awareness of neurodiversity across leisure sector; promoting and supporting peer support networks; improving transport and access to beaches.

**Insights gathered by
trusted local
organisations**

Apna Ghar Minority Ethnic Women's Centre.

Approach to gathering insight.

- Engaged with approximately 15 women through three facilitated group sessions.
- These women were from diverse cultural backgrounds including South Asian, Eastern European, and Latin American communities.
- Participants varied in age, life stage, and length of time living in the UK.
- As sessions progressed and trust developed, participants became significantly more engaged. The women-only environment enabled honest discussion.



Apna Ghar Minority Ethnic Women's Centre.

Enablers.

- Trusted local organisations/community spaces, sense of community, peer support.
- Enjoyment and social connection are key motivators.

Barriers.

- Practical (costs, lack of information/awareness, transport issues)
- Cultural (lack of confidence, language barriers, discomfort with mixed-gender spaces)
- Health-related (pain, joint issues, post-pregnancy recovery, pelvic health, menopause-related fatigue)
- Social factors (isolation when arriving in UK, digital exclusion).

Apna Ghar Minority Ethnic Women's Centre.

Key findings.

- Physical activity is strongly linked to mental wellbeing, confidence, and social integration.
- Participants described exercise sessions as safe, supportive environments where they could reduce isolation, build friendships, improve confidence, and support their mental health.
- The sessions also highlighted the importance of culturally appropriate provision, particularly women-only spaces, which are essential for enabling participation among some groups.

Age Concern Tyneside South.

Approach to gathering insight.

- Staff-facilitated discussions with approximately 100 service users across the NE31, NE32, NE33, NE34, NE35, NE36 postcodes.
- Discussions created space for attendees to share lived experience, anecdotal examples and knowledge available support.
- Participants enjoyed sharing their experiences and understood why they were being asked to participate.



Age Concern Tyneside South.

Key findings – seeking support.

- Where support was available, telecare enabled people to call for help quickly, and services such as A&E, the ambulance service, physiotherapy, occupational therapy, and Falls Clinic referrals supported recovery and rehabilitation with home from hospital team support.
- However, experiences varied, with some delays in emergency response and limits to what adaptations could be provided in the home.
- Participants consistently reported finding it difficult to identify what support is available locally. Many felt that hospitals and GP practices should have up-to-date information so they can signpost or refer people to local strength- and balance-building opportunities, particularly following physiotherapy.

Age Concern Tyneside South.

Key findings – strength and balance activities.

- Participants were aware of a range of strength and balance activities (including seated exercise and falls prevention support) but said they are more likely to attend when sessions are easy to access and close to home.
- They emphasised the value of offering groups within existing community venues or sheltered accommodation, and of being able to attend with familiar people, as confidence and travel can be significant barriers.

Age Concern Tyneside South.

Key findings – falls-prevention support.

- Participants feel safer and more confident with practical falls-prevention support at home (e.g., telecare, grab rails/handrails, stairlifts, key safes, and appropriate mobility aids).
- Outdoors, they highlighted the need for safer streets and public spaces with better pavements, ramps/handrails, more seating/rest points, safer crossings, and improved awareness/controls around fast, quiet bikes/scooters and traffic.

Age Concern Tyneside South.

Key findings.

- Overall, there was a strong call for greater access to affordable or preferably free, local seated exercise and strength-building classes.
- Finally, participants highlighted that understanding bus routes and navigating public transport can be a barrier to accessing appointments and community-based support, particularly for those with reduced mobility or confidence.

Churches Together – Happy at Home.

Approach to gathering insight.

- Engaged 35 people over 60 years of age via the Churches Together South Tyneside Happy at Home project.
- Gathered insight by conducting short surveys with residents attending a lunch group in the Monkton area.



Churches Together – Happy at Home.

What has helped prevent/recover from falls?

- Falls clinic,
- ESCAPE-pain programme.
- Cora Health physio.
- Chair exercises at Jarrow Focus.

Barriers.

- Health and mobility issues: balance, eyesight, brittle bones, malnutrition.
- Lack of confidence and social isolation resulting from falls and hospitalisation.

Groundworks – Marsden Road Community Centre.

Approach to gathering insight.

- Volunteers worked through questionnaires with service users.

Enablers and key local assets.

- Beaches/the coast.
- Amenities within walking distance.
- Large parks in South Shields.
- Swimming baths.
- Trusted local organisations.
- Public transport connections.



Groundworks – Marsden Road Community Centre.

Barriers.

- Affordability (often linked to cost of indoor activities when weather is unsuitable for outdoor activity).
- Time and childcare commitments.
- Antisocial behaviour from young people in evenings near community centre/park.
- Not enough sessions for children, families and ability levels.
- No play parks nearby.
- Health and mobility issues.
- Social isolation.

All Saints Community Association.

Approach to gathering insight.

- Questionnaire was completed 173 individuals – either regular community centre users or local parents of children and young people who attended family fun day event.



All Saints Community Association.

What is great about where you live?

- Friends and local community.
- Open spaces.
- Proximity to beaches/sea.
- Parks and places to walk.

All Saints Community Association.

Barriers.

- Affordability.
- Time.
- Weather.
- Public transport (cost and safety concerns).
- Supporting family members with health issues.
- Physical, mental, and emotional challenges.
- Antisocial behaviour.

All Saints Community Association.

Enablers.

- Free outdoor activities like walking.
- Motivation from family, friends, and self.
- School engaging children and parents in activities.
- Coaches and professional staff.
- Fun, safe activities.

What would help you to move more?

- Improved awareness of opportunities on offer locally.
- More fitness classes in the community centre.
- More provision for parents and children.
- Listening and responding more to the needs of children and young people.

All Saints Community Association.

How could we work together to make the community more active?

- Greater local investment to support communities to feel safe and enable local organisations to offer more.
- Making activities and opportunities more inclusive and accessible for all, including families, older people, and disabled people.

Recurring themes.

- Impact of cost of living on individuals' ability to be more active.
- Regular users of the community centre were more likely to report feeling more active, whereas attendees at the family fun day event were more likely to report feeling less active and that there was less available/affordable opportunities for them in their local area.

Learning about the wider physical activity ecosystem

Reflecting on the place expansion work so far.

- As a partnership, we are not yet confident that our work will address the deeper structural inequalities that impact on physical activity levels in South Tyneside.
- This reflects our shared understanding of the challenge of affecting change at this level. It also reflects the need to embed visible leadership and collaboration more compensatively across the system.
- Specific steps following from this awareness include engaging more deeply with South Tyneside Council's transport, housing, and planning teams, as well as holding conversations with relevant partners around linking the place expansion work to existing programmes aimed at tackling health-related economic inactivity.

Summary of June insights

Valued local assets.

- When asked what they most value about living in South Tyneside, the local people we engaged during this phase of insight gathering consistently cite the borough's green spaces, beaches, and trusted local VCFSE organisations.
- Local people also cite a sense of belonging in as a key strength in South Tyneside, although this is expressed in different ways (e.g. friendly neighbourhoods, local identity, and diversity).
- These positive expressions, however, are also accompanied by a recognition that the visible decline of shared spaces like high streets and parks has a negative impact on local belonging, and that more needs to be done to support a shared sense of pride.

Common barriers to moving more.

- Attitudes towards the South Tyneside's public transport network are mixed. Some residents see it as a key strength while others see it as a barrier to moving more, citing concerns around cost, safety, reliability, and accessibility.
- A range of groups (i.e. young people, families, and older people) cite not feeling safe as a barrier to being more active outdoors. Antisocial behaviour (particularly in parks and transport hubs) is the most often cited cause of feeling unsafe.
- Financial pressures, time constraints, and caring responsibilities are also cited as common barriers to moving more. Commonly cited costs include those of activity sessions, gym memberships, equipment and clothing, travel, parking, and childcare costs.

System-wide themes.

- A recurring observation at roundtable discussions was the sense that there is a widespread lack of awareness about existing physical activity opportunities in South Tyneside and uncertainty about how and where to access relevant information.
- This was attributed in part to the fact that some local people, especially older people, lack the knowledge or confidence to access information digitally.
- Roundtable discussions also highlighted that, while good practice and relevant provision currently exists in pockets across the borough, these are not sufficiently connected, coordinated, supported, or promoted.

Contacts

If you have any questions about the content of this pack, or would like to work with us to gather insight and deepen our shared understanding of physical inactivity in South Tyneside, please contact:

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