

GATESHEAD AND SOUTH TYNESIDE PLACE PARTNERSHIPS EVALUATION AND LEARNING REPORT – October 2025

AUTHOR:

Joe Barton – Research and Insight Manager (Place)

WITH THANKS TO:

Mahida Begum, Paul Biddle, Joanne Porter,
Samantha Hunter, Jade Scott, Michael Walsh,
Ellie Forrester, Jayne Geary, Emma Gibson,
Dawn Harvey, Lynn Littler, Paul Tompkinson.

RISE.

CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	3
Key insights	3
Key challenges	3
Suggested actions.....	3
Overview of progress made.....	4
REFLECTING ON FIRST 12 MONTHS OF DEVELOPMENT AWARD PHASE	5
Key challenges	5
Communicating place-based working.....	12
Supporting community capacity and capabilities	12
Insights from Gateshead	13
Insights from South Tyneside.....	14
Asset mapping in Gateshead and South Tyneside.....	14
Evaluating system maturity in Gateshead and South Tyneside.....	17
CONCLUSION.....	21
APPENDICES.....	22
1. Methods statement	22
2. Participant engagement statement.....	22
3. Summary of Place-Based Working	22
4. Gateshead System Maturity Workshops – Selected Activity Transcripts	23
5. South Tyneside System Maturity Workshops – Activity Transcripts.....	25



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report outlines the progress made between April and October 2025 towards the Sport England Place Expansion Development Award in Gateshead and South Tyneside, which aims to help communities to make lasting positive change in tackling inequalities in physical activity.

This report shares the key insights gained from engaging with local organisations and communities around physical activity and inactivity during this period. The report also reflects on the challenges that have emerged from the first 12 months of the Award phase and suggests several actions to undertake during the remaining six months of the award. A methods statement and participant engagement statement can be found in Appendices 1 and 2.

Key insights

Enablers to physical activity

- Proactive outreach and/or relationship building.
- Empowering communities.
- Joined up working.

Barriers to physical activity

- Antisocial behaviour.
- Processes as barriers.
- Lack/loss of green spaces.

Key challenges

- The pacing of the award phase.
- The tension between reflection and action.
- Communicating what place-based working means and why it is important.

Suggested actions

- Complete the development of an initiative to amplify insight gathering alongside supporting community organisations to increase their capacity and capability.
- Agree upon a proportion of the test and learn budget to be allocated towards this.
- Develop and disseminate an accessible and appropriate explainer on place-based, whole systems working.
- Procure local consultancies to develop distinct brand identities for the place work in Gateshead and South Tyneside.
- Develop theories of change for Gateshead and South Tyneside, incorporating learning from July and October 2025 insight packs and the place maturity capacity building and support project.
- Finalise the test and learn process and begin to pilot programmes.

BACKGROUND

Overview of progress made

The 18-month Development Award phase in Gateshead and South Tyneside began in September 2024 and forms the first part of a two-phase process by which Sport England aims to support local place partnerships to take a whole systems, place-based approach to tackling inequalities around physical activity and inactivity. The purpose of the Development Award phase is to build the foundations required to address physical activity inequalities, namely by strengthening strategic partnerships, developing local relationships, deepening a shared understanding of the local physical activity ecosystem, and developing an evidence-led action plan for intervening in it. A full overview of the work carried out during the first six months of the Development Award in Gateshead and South Tyneside can be found in the April 2025 Learning and Evaluation Submission.

Since April 2025 Rise and its place partners have undertaken the following system activity.

- Holding monthly internal Rise reflection meetings.
- Participation in, and reflecting on, the Leading the Movement Place Based Leadership Programme.
- Developing a South Tyneside Place Partnership Catch-up Group/Gateshead Place Partnership Network from Place Partnership Steering Group members, Leadership Programme participants, and other relevant individuals.
- Analysing and sharing insights gathered from community engagement meetings.
- Sharing and reflecting on the April 2025 Evaluation and Learning Report provided by the National Evaluation and Learning Partnership.
- Evaluating system maturity through a place maturity capacity building and support project, co-designed with, and facilitated by, Urban Foresight.
- Continuing to map physical activity assets in Gateshead and South Tyneside.
- Agreeing to develop a brief for procuring external consultants to create brand identities for this work in Gateshead and South Tyneside.

This report will not provide detailed individual updates on all these activities but rather draw on aspects of them that identify progress made and challenges encountered.

REFLECTING ON FIRST 12 MONTHS OF DEVELOPMENT AWARD PHASE

Key challenges

As this report marks the 12 month point of the 18-month Development Award phase, it is useful to reflect on some of the key challenges that have emerged and the potential actions that can be taken to address them. These challenges have been identified through Rise place team monthly reflection sessions as well as interviews with the Rise Strategic Lead for Place and place partners. As outlined later in this report, discussions at the place maturity capacity building and support project workshops echo some of the issues discussed in this section.

Timing of the Leadership Programme

The Rise Strategic Lead for Place highlighted several challenges relating to the structure and timeframe of the Development Award phase. Firstly, she observes that holding the Leading the Movement Place Based Leadership Programme six months into the Development Award phase (due to facilitator availability and Sport England's recommendation to undertake it before the end of the financial year) may have been premature given that it took place before any of the insight that might drive action had been gathered. Holding the programme later in the Development Award phase may have provided more time to identify a broader range of partners and stakeholders to take part and enabled participants to apply what they had learned to Gateshead and South Tyneside in more concrete ways.

At the time, work was also needed within some organisations to clarify the purpose and structure of the Development Award, and the timing of the programme may also have caused confusion about how and when the award funding could be used. As one place partner explains:

"When people got the invitation to the Leadership Programme and they knew it was linked to Sport England stuff, I think they were expecting to talk about 'right, what should we do with the funding? What ideas have you got?', so I think originally maybe they weren't sure on why they were there."

As community engagement widens and deepens over the remainder of the Development Award phase and into the Full Award phase, the place partnership steering group may wish to consider the merits of allocating funding a further leadership programme to support the development of new partners. This might be adapted to link more directly the learning outcomes to the insights and priority issues identified in Gateshead and South Tyneside.

Despite these concerns, all surveyed participants reported being satisfied with the leadership programme and stated that it had positively impacted their confidence towards understanding local challenges and working together with local partners. When

participants were asked to share what they found most useful about the Leadership Programme, some of their responses included:

- “Meeting other delegates and the examples of the lead speaker”
- “Working on this with the people who will be taking this forward together”
- “Gaining a deeper understanding of systems thinking and whole systems approaches and taking a step back to consider what sectors are having an effect.

Pacing

Another key challenge of working within an 18-month timeframe is making sufficient progress in building understanding and gathering insight to reach test and learn readiness. As the Rise Strategic Lead for Place puts it:

“

The phase to do the insight gathering and then to start doing the test and learn feels really short even in an 18-month period.

”

These challenges are compounded by needing to work at the pace of place partners, which can vary according to workload, point of entry into the project and level of existing familiarity with whole systems working. Some partners report that the pacing of the Development Award has not only been manageable but significantly more generous than other externally funded projects:

“It hasn't felt rushed, but it hasn't felt slow either. I think it's been at a good pace because one of the issues that we find is when it comes to funding, sometimes you've given a week or a month's deadline to apply, gather your evidence, that kind of thing, and you reflect back and you're like, 'oh, I've only I had the time to think of this or include that or speak to that person', so, personally, I think [the Development Award] is quite refreshing.”

For other partners, workload constraints limit the pace at which they can adapt to whole systems, place-based approaches. Reflecting on this, one partner draws on the adaptive leadership concept of ‘moving from the dancefloor to the balcony’¹ which was discussed at the leadership programme:

¹ Shaw, H. (Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust) (2009) Moving from the dancefloor to the balcony. Research in Practice (PSDP Resources).

"Sometimes getting on that balcony can be difficult. You can get caught up in the day job and reflection can be a challenge."

For Rise as lead applicant, the approach to addressing this challenge has been to avoid overloading partners with information about the project while also reiterating the key concepts that underpin place-based working, ideally through in-person meetings and discussions. As the Rise Strategic Lead for Place puts it:

"It's time, it's commitment, it's reiteration and talking about it. That's how people learn about this way of working."

This is an approach that will require monitoring. In Gateshead, for example, some partners reflected that they would like to receive more regular updates from the Active Community Engagement Lead as well as opportunities to share their own insight and learning while, in South Tyneside, Rise's efforts to reduce communications left partners without sufficient updates:

"Then we go, 'oh, okay, so has our communication almost been too late? We need to give you more.' So, we're trying to figure out that balance of not trying to bombard people and overwhelm them. But we hold our hands up, we maybe got it wrong at that point in South Tyneside and not providing enough information."

Reflection versus action

The time required to build sufficient understanding and to gather insight also produces a further tension between reflection and action, which has manifested in several ways over the course of the Development Award thus far. As one partner puts it:

“

It's always been our business to be solutions focused [...] so it's hard to come into that forum and not think you've got some answers or some solutions or some ways of working.

”

For partners used to “making things happen”, the emphasis that the Development Award phase places on developing a rigorous understanding of a place's complexity and maturity before acting to bring about impactful change is challenging, especially when, in their own words, they perceive “lots of low hanging fruit” that could be acted upon and addressed. The same partner explains:

"My worry was that 18 months going through the theoretical bit felt like a long time [...] how far down this exploratory route can we go in terms of the theory before we make an impact?"



Another partner observes:

"I've noticed a bit of impatience around 'we're doing a lot of reflecting, but we need to be doing stuff' and it's coming from a good place, but I think they're wanting to see that we've done this, or we've progressed on this."

This tension between reflection and action also manifests in concerns raised by some partners from the voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector about the allocation of Development Award funding toward ongoing reflective work when it could be invested into initiatives that are meeting immediate community needs around physical activity.

The particular focus of these concerns since April 2025 has been the decision to allocate a portion of the Development Award budget to procuring external consultants Urban Foresight to co-design and deliver a place maturity capacity building and support project over the summer months to help partners to undertake a rigorous evaluation of local maturity and meet the Development Award requirement to submit to the Configurational Comparative Analysis. At the time of writing, the support project is ongoing and it remains to be seen as to whether these partners' concerns will be

addressed and this tension resolved. The working assumption of the overall place partnership however is that investment in this project will establish a strong shared baseline understanding of system maturity in Gateshead and South Tyneside, which constitutes an investment in place rather than a diversion of funding away from it.

These tensions around reflection and action necessitate several responses. Firstly, for Rise as lead applicant, there is the need to better understand individual partner's perspectives on, and priorities regarding, place-based work in Gateshead and South Tyneside and to identify ways to constructively engage partners around them. As the Rise Strategic Lead for Place puts it:

"I think we've probably wrongly assumed that everybody will be fully on board with the place work and everybody is, but we've not asked what their priorities for getting involved in this work are."

Secondly, there is the need to share examples of the outputs and impact of place-based working from other active partnerships to demonstrate the potential of this approach, even if they are the product of local delivery pilots that received higher levels of funding over a longer time. As one partner reflects:

"I think it helps to show a bit more the end game so certainly that [Active] Essex model of 'all right, where we can see where the people are and see where the operational group is and see how it fits into leadership'."

Thirdly, there is the ongoing need to reiterate the potential long-term impact of taking the whole systems approach over conventional ways of working and for Rise and other place partners to assume the role of critical friends, challenging one another to reflect on whether calls for action are being based on shared understanding of place in its complexity or on preexisting assumptions. The place maturity capacity building and support project offer an opportunity to do this. Encouragingly, the project appears to be having a positive impact, as one partner reflects:

"There was a bit that really, really resonated with when [the workshop facilitator] was saying 'it's a really complex problem, so it's going to be a really complex solution' and I get that partially in terms of the some very, very difficult communities and people that we need to unpick."

A specific driver of this tension between reflection and action is the pressure on some partners from senior leadership within their organisation to report concrete outputs from their participation in the place partnership and Development Award phase. As the Rise Strategic Lead for Place puts it:

"If you're getting loads of pressure from up here at strategic level in your organisation of 'what is your social return on investment' and the feedback is 'we're having much better conversations' how does that land?"

Reflecting on this, one partner asks:

"How can we sell [the Development Award phase to an organisation's] leadership group? Some of that will be strategic but we've got to win their hearts and minds as well."

A potential way of addressing this is to develop consistent messaging about the purpose, potential and progress of Development Award phase. As the Rise Strategic Lead for Place puts it:

“

*If we can just get our narrative right for feeding back higher up then that should hopefully ease some of those pressures.
What we need is consistency, whether it's a VCSE sector, whether it's the local authority, whether it's health, whenever anybody comes under pressure around 'why is nothing happening'.*

”

Within this consistent messaging it may be beneficial to be sensitive to how words like 'award' and 'funding' are typically interpreted in these settings and whether alternative language can be used to avoid misunderstanding. One partner asks:

"Do we even take out the word 'funding'? I think language is powerful and I think that can help dictate how people engage or what their expectations are so that just might be something that we consider moving forward [...] even the word 'award' - you think you're being awarded money."



Finally, an additional approach to resolving this tension is to begin to explore the readiness for undertaking test and learn activities alongside the ongoing reflective work of deepening understanding and insight gathering. The outputs of the place maturity capacity building and support project, in terms of rankings and a report, may aid partners to identify priority areas for targeted further research and/or interventions. These discussions will need to reflect the shared understanding of complexity that partners have been working towards together over the last 12 months. As the Rise Strategic Lead for Place puts it:

"There's lots of things that we could jump into that wouldn't necessarily have the long-term sustainability or the system change or potentially could have unintended consequences [...] from the [system maturity work] we've done, we're already starting to hear 'this is the problem' and what we need to listen to is, 'well, it could be solved by doing it in this manner, or working in this way' Not a solution, i.e. an initiative, but in a way of working or a behaviour and that we can start to do that from the start rather than hopefully add to people's frustrations."



Communicating place-based working

In addition to the need to develop a consistent message for place partners around the Development Award phase, Rise's internal reflection sessions identified the need to develop a broader introduction to place-based, whole systems working to share with local individuals and organisations that are new to this approach. This was driven by two reflections of the Active Communities Engagement Leads.

Firstly, it was sometimes difficult to explain place-based and whole systems approaches in face-to-face meetings, with the result that local individuals and organisations could not imagine its relevance.

Secondly, local organisations dedicated to tackling the acute day-to-day manifestations of poverty and inequalities in their communities would appreciate an account of whole systems working that recognises the value of their work and explains how it can be complemented by a long-term focus on sector integration, strengthening capacities and addressing structural issues.

To address this, Rise has developed a short explainer (see Appendix 3), which will be updated to include a range of practical examples of the kinds of interventions generated and facilitated by place-based, whole systems approaches, provided by Sport England Project Support Team. These outputs may not be replicable in a Development/Full Award context due to resource and timescale differences. This highlights the challenge of how to give specific and detailed illustrative examples of place-based, whole systems working while also managing local expectations.

Supporting community capacity and capabilities

One of the nine conditions for addressing physical inactivity is developing capacity and capability across the workforce, volunteers and communities. Since the Rise Active Community Engagement Leads began to meet with leaders and organisations in Gateshead and South Tyneside, this condition has been a recurring topic of reflection at internal Rise meetings, with Rise staff trying to answer the question of how the place partnership might best help to build community capacity and capability during the Development Award phase.

A proposal is for Rise to work with VCSE organisations to offer their communities access to training and development initiatives, to strengthen the workforce and enhance long-term sustainability. This would require Rise to develop a simple brief for VCSE organisations to fulfil, centred around gathering insight at a community level, as well as fixing the proportion of budget to be allocated towards this strand of work. In sharing these ideas with place partners, the Rise team identified the need to liaise more closely with partners in the VCSE sector to ensure this initiative complements existing provision.

An additional strand of work to support community capacity and capability building is that of providing community organisations with the resources to undertake their own insight gathering and research. The Rise Research and Insight Manager (Place) has begun developing a Community Research Toolkit featuring an appreciative enquiry question bank, active listening tips and a guide to key ethical considerations in community research. An initial draft of this document will be shared with place partners to develop it further.

GATHERING INSIGHTS AND DEEPENING UNDERSTANDING

As part of their role, the Rise Active Community Engagement Leads in Gateshead and South Tyneside maintain a log of the conversations they hold with individuals and organisations in their respective places, recording key data including the individual or organisation's target communities (where applicable), the locality, and key topics including barriers to and enablers of physical activity. The Rise Research and Insight Manager (Place) then thematically analyses these logs.

Given that the insights outlined below are drawn from conversations conducted during the first six months of Active Community Engagement Leads' time in post, they should be seen as representing an emerging and fragmented picture of physical activity in Gateshead and South Tyneside. This picture is skewed by the current scope of engagement, which during this period tended towards larger statutory and VSCE organisations, and was more developed in some priority localities than others. The Active Community Engagement Leads have been broadening and deepening their engagement across Gateshead and South Tyneside and this will be reflected in the October 2025 quarterly insights pack.

Insights from Gateshead

Based on an analysis of the 28 conversations that the Active Communities Engagement Lead (Gateshead) held with local organisations and leaders between April and July, five common themes emerged.

THEME	DEFINITION
1. Proactive outreach and/or relationship building.	Organisations/services engaging directly with individuals to support and facilitate their initial interaction with physical activity-related services.
2. Antisocial behaviour.	The perceived impact (or potential negative impact) on physical activity and movement of antisocial behaviour in or around green spaces, play areas and other community spaces.

3. Processes as barriers.	Established organisational processes, policies or other ways of working acting as barriers by unintentionally hindering actions or efforts to increase physical activity.
4. Women and girls.	Women and girls as a key demographic group experiencing and expressing specific needs and barriers regarding physical activity.
5. Lack/loss of green spaces.	The negative impact on opportunities for physical activity and movement from the reduction in or loss of green spaces.

Insights from South Tyneside

Based on an analysis of the 35 conversations that the Active Communities Engagement Lead (South Tyneside) held with local organisations and leaders in South Tyneside between April and July, five common themes emerged.

THEME	DEFINITION
1. Proactive outreach and/or relationship building.	Organisations and services engaging directly with individuals to support and facilitate their initial interaction with physical activity-related services.
2. Antisocial behaviour	The perceived impact (or potential negative impact) on physical activity and movement of antisocial behaviour in or around green spaces, play areas and other community spaces.
3. Empowering communities.	Organisations and services providing local communities with the skills, knowledge, resources and other assets to exercise greater control over the enablers to physical activity.
4. Joined up working.	Organisations and services collaborating and communicating around shared physical activity-related interests and goals.
5. Processes as barriers.	Established organisational processes, policies or other ways of working acting as barriers by unintentionally hindering actions or efforts to increase physical activity.

Asset mapping in Gateshead and South Tyneside

The Rise Active Communities Engagement Lead (Gateshead) has gathered data regarding physical activity assets in Gateshead, with 90 assets mapped. As with the community engagement insights, distribution of assets across the priority areas and beyond (see Figures 1 and 3) reflect the scope of consultation undertaken during this initial stage and is likely to change as engagement widens and deepens. The place-based, whole systems approach is also reflected in the broad definition of physical

activity assets used, with community organisations featuring more prominently in Figures 2 and 4 than conventional physical activity assets such as leisure centres.

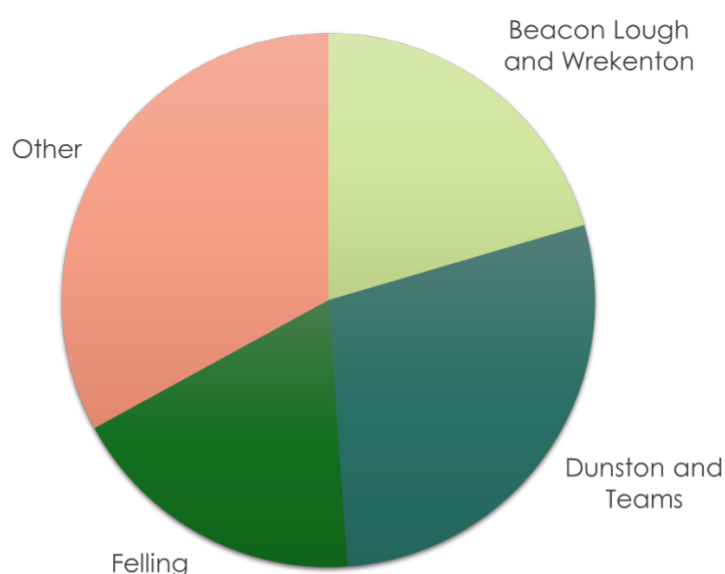


Figure 1. Gateshead assets by locality.

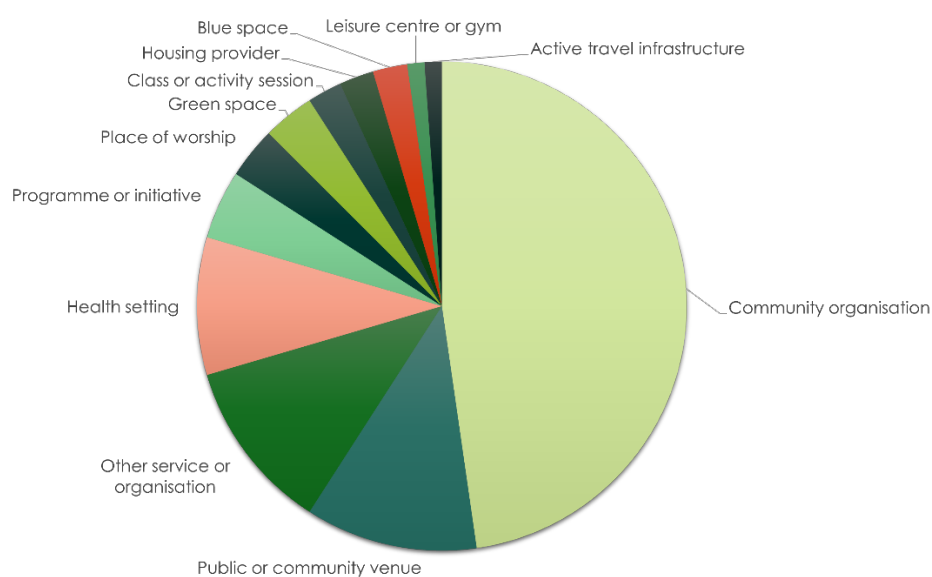


Figure 2. Gateshead assets by type.

The Rise Active Communities Engagement Lead (South Tyneside) has gathered data regarding physical activity assets in South Tyneside, with 137 assets mapped.

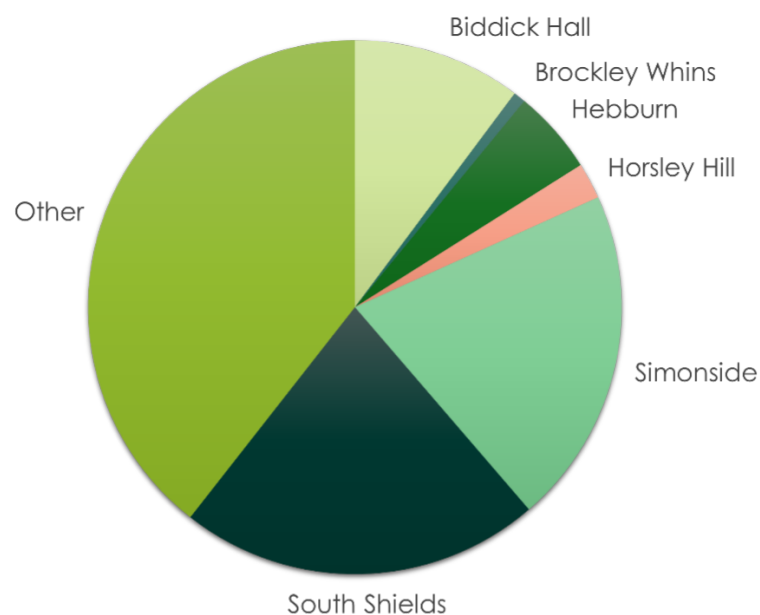


Figure 3. South Tyneside assets by locality.

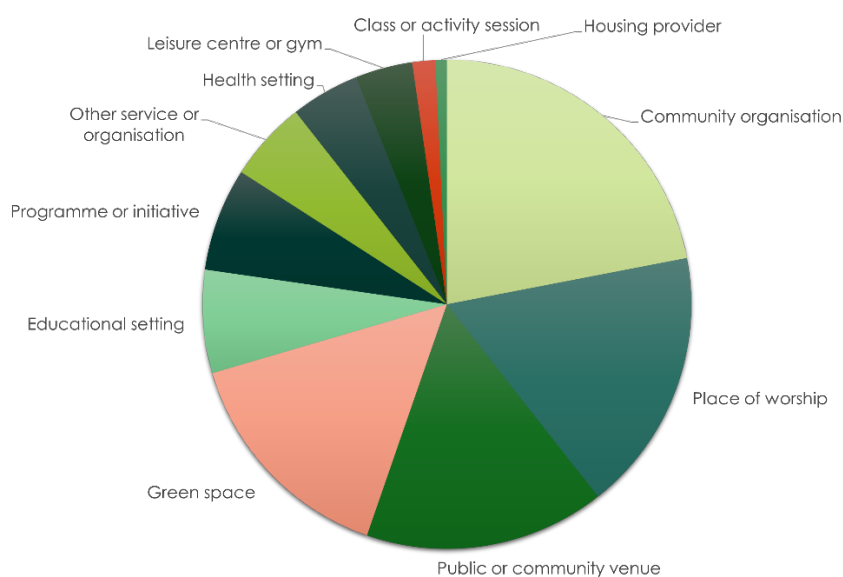


Figure 4. South Tyneside assets by type.

Rise has procured an add-on for the OCSI Local Insights platform that will enable this data to be displayed visually on an interactive map via the Rise website (see Fig. 5 for a preview). The map will enable users to overlay indicator data from a range of areas including access and transport, housing and health. From discussions at place partnership meetings, Rise are aware that some partner organisations maintain their own data portals and/or are undertaking their own mapping exercises and are keen to avoid duplication. As this map is primarily intended as a tool to deepen the shared understanding of physical activity assets in Gateshead and South Tyneside in a broad sense, Rise staff do not expect it to duplicate existing work undertaken by partners.

Nevertheless, Rise will invite partners to feed back on the map upon completion both to enhance its relevance and identify gaps in the map itself.

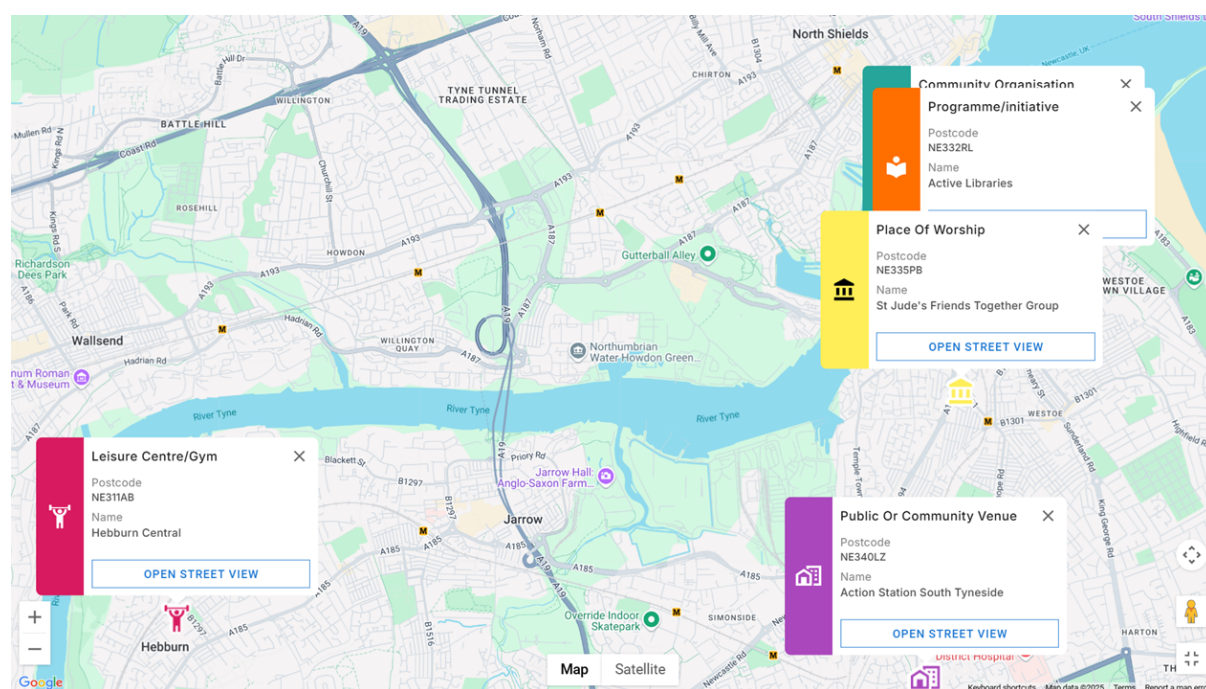
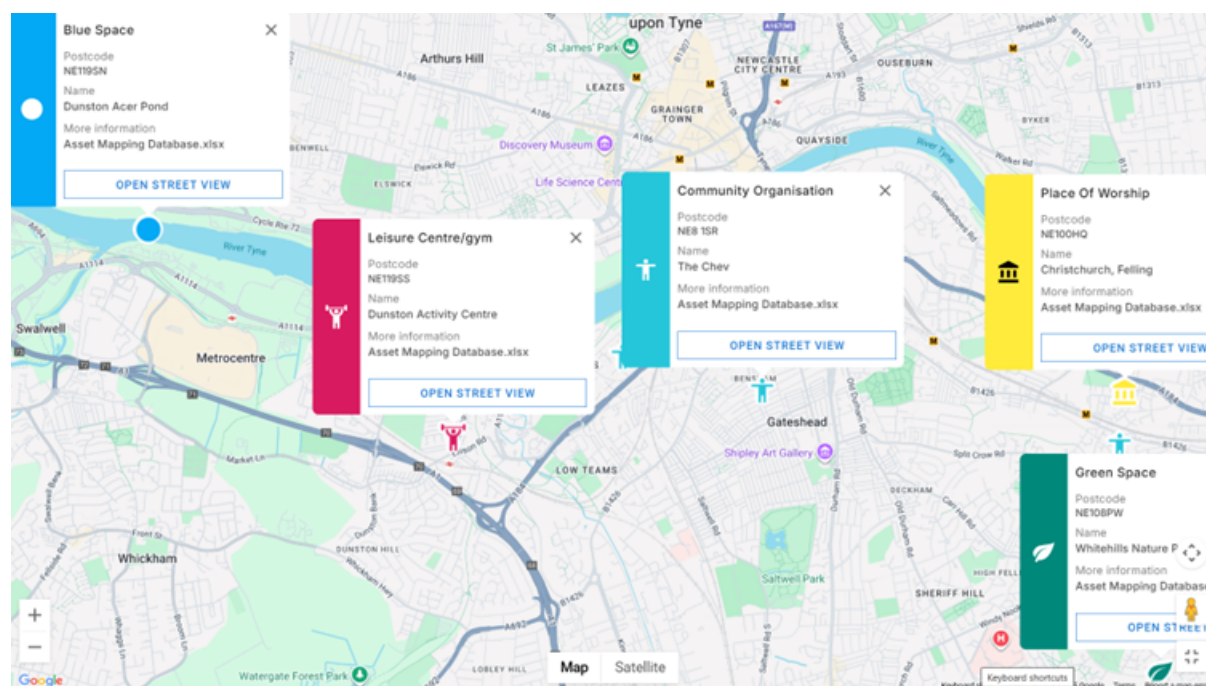


Figure 5. Preview of visual asset maps for Gateshead and South Tyneside.

Evaluating system maturity in Gateshead and South Tyneside

Developed by Sport England's National Evaluation and Learning Partnership (NELP) the system maturity framework and Configurational Comparative Analysis (CCA) survey are tools designed to help place partners evaluate the overall capacity (or "maturity") within their place to affect positive change around physical activity. The system maturity

matrix outlines nine conditions deemed necessary when tackling physical activity inequalities and guides place partners to reflect critically on and rank the extent to which, these conditions are present, established or embedded in their places. CCA, by contrast, is a national research initiative in which NELP analyses system maturity rankings from places across England to identify the combinations of factors that are more likely to lead to expected positive outcomes in addressing physical inactivity.

When looking toward the October deadline for the CCA survey, Rise colleagues identified a potential tension around their support for this part of the evaluation of place-based working. On the one hand, as the organisation leading on monitoring, learning and evaluation, it would be reasonable to expect Rise to facilitate this exercise. On the other hand, Rise is a part of the physical activity ecosystems in Gateshead and South Tyneside and needs to be an active participant, reflecting on their own maturity within the wider system.



To resolve this tension, the Rise Strategic Lead for Place gained approval from the wider place partnership to procure the place-based innovation consultancy Urban Foresight, who had previously facilitated system maturity work linked to the Core Cities programme in Newcastle, to co-design and facilitate a place maturity capacity building and support project. The aim is to help partners establish a rigorous baseline understanding of local maturity which will also inform developing a theory of change and progressing into the Full Award, and that it would establish a model that Rise could adapt for future CCA cycles.

Urban Foresight will also produce an outcomes pack illustrating these rankings in detail which can serve as a guide for ongoing reflection, especially with regards to developing a theory of change, identifying areas for further insight gathering and exploring potential prioritise for action and intervention. The discussion below does not outline how partners ranked specific conditions but rather focuses on the more general themes and tensions that emerged from conversations and activities at the workshops themselves.

Echoing earlier discussions, some partners reported finding the NELP conceptual model overly abstract and theoretical, even when facilitators had made considerable efforts to simplify and provide examples. A related criticism from some partners was that this conceptual model overly complicates what local organisations and practitioners already know and do in their communities and that taking part in the place maturity workshops was a distraction from this work. Ensuring that the purpose and local benefits of the evaluation are clearly communicated and that the conceptual model is presented in as accessible and relevant a manner as possible going forward will thus be a focus for Rise.

The place maturity workshop on collaboration and co-production also highlighted issues of trust, power and authenticity and potential ways to address them.

- A discussion around the need to build trust between the local authority and communities reinforces the importance of developing a distinct brand identity for this work in Gateshead.
- Discussions of the power dynamics inherent in collaboration and co-production, as well as the competing agendas and interests that each participant brings to such projects, reinforces the importance of Rise taking time to understand more clearly the perspectives of individual place partners, and to ensure that institutional agendas are critically explored when developing a theory of change.
- Discussions around the importance of going to communities and asking what they need with regards to collaboration and co-production resonates with the assumptions behind the aforementioned initiatives to support community capacity and capabilities.

Having an external facilitator explore these concepts has helped partners to develop their understanding of whole systems working. As one partner puts it:

"And also, I think [the facilitator] is really good at asking us 'why do you do something the same way?' You don't always get asked that 'why' question or what the impact is or that kind of thing. So yeah, it's just a good opportunity to reflect as well and move forward."

Another partner reflected on how the place maturity workshop focusing on cycles of learning and action encouraged them to think about the variation of maturity within the partnership across different conditions and the implications of this for collaboration going forward:

“

It took me out of my evidence bubble but also it helped me to think if we're coming up with new evidence[...] that could be a barrier that we need to be aware of when we're engaging with new partners because it might be that we're asking people to change their way of working.

”

At the end of each workshop, participants are invited to share at least one thing they have learned. The comments below, taken from the second workshop, reflect the progress, tensions and barriers that emerge from reflecting both on place maturity specifically and the wider place project over the last six months:

"I have learnt that there are a lot of people thirsting for social change but need some support to create it."

"There are vast differences between where council services and VCSE services may fit within matrix."

"We are all on this journey together and not knowing everything straight away is okay."

"Everyone wants to achieve this change. Clear messaging of the work to make it inclusive for all. Leadership is for everyone at every level. Relationships and bringing partners together is key."

"How honest everyone is willing to be on how mature the system is."



CONCLUSION

This report has outlined the insights that have been gathered from engaging with local organisations and communities and the deepening understanding of local system maturity as a result of the place maturity capacity building and support project. The report has also reflected on the challenges that have emerged over the first 12 months, particularly with regards to pacing, reflection versus action and communicating place-based working. Actions that the place partnership can undertake over the final six months of the Development Award phase to build upon this progress and address some of the challenges encountered so far include:

- Complete the development of an initiative to amplify insight gathering alongside supporting community organisations to increase their capacity and capability. Agree upon a proportion of the test and learn budget to be allocated towards this.
- Develop and disseminate an accessible and appropriate explainer on place-based, whole systems working.
- Procure local consultancies to develop distinct brand identities for the place work in Gateshead and South Tyneside.
- Develop theories of change for Gateshead and South Tyneside, incorporating learning from July and October 2025 insight packs and the place maturity capacity building and support project.
- Finalise the test and learn process and begin to pilot programmes.



APPENDICES

1. Methods statement

The data sources for this report are:

- Reflective interviews with place partners
- Regular internal Rise reflection meetings
- Rise Gateshead and South Tyneside Active Community Engagement Leads' engagement logs
- Leading the Movement Place Based Leadership Programme participant activities and surveys
- Discussions at, and outputs of, the system maturity capacity building and support project workshops

Some of these methods are embedded ways of working while others are project specific. No major challenges were encountered when gathering data apart from capacity constraints limiting the availability of place partners to participate in reflective interviews. This report will be shared with place partners and Sport England and will also be available to access via the Rise website.

2. Participant engagement statement

The focus of this report was agreed upon by:

- Rise Strategic Lead for Place.
- Rise Research and Insight Manager (Place).
- Rise Active Community Engagement Leads, Gateshead and South Tyneside.
- Rise Research and Insight Strategic Lead.

Place partners were consulted on the proposed focus of the report at place partnership steering group meetings. The Rise Research and Insight Manager (Place) led on the design of the evaluation and the collection and analysis of data. Place partners were invited to participate in reflection interviews on the themes included within the scope of the report and voices of a wider group of place partners and stakeholders were included through data gathered from the logs of the Gateshead and South Tyneside Active Community Engagement Leads.

3. Summary of Place-Based Working

What is a whole systems approach to addressing physical inactivity?

Physical inactivity is a complex issue. Individuals and communities can be physically inactive due to a wide range of different factors which connect and interact in complicated and unexpected ways.

To tackle physical inactivity in an impactful and lasting way, we firstly need to understand this bigger picture of complex factors. We call this the 'whole systems approach'. It involves using a range of tools, data and insights to understand and explain physical inactivity and to decide when, where and how best to make change.

The whole systems approach also involves trying to find out if the solutions we have put in place have resulted in the changes we expected to see. When change has not happened as expected, a whole systems approach involves finding out why and applying the lessons learned.

What is a place-based approach to addressing physical inactivity?

A place-based approach brings together people who live, work and volunteer in a particular place to understand the unique set of factors influencing physical inactivity in their local area. It draws on a broad range of local perspectives to develop insights into what is already available, what is stopping people being more physically active and what people need to be moving more.

Whole systems and place-based approaches involve learning and acting together, which in turn requires building relationships and developing local leaders. This all takes time, which can be challenging, especially if those involved in the process are normally expected to deliver results within short timeframes or tackle problems as they arise.

4. Gateshead System Maturity Workshops – Selected Activity Transcripts

Assessing to what extent Gateshead facilitates a learning culture.

STATEMENT	LEVEL OF AGREEMENT	WHAT ACTIONS CAN WE TAKE TO EMBED THIS?
Learning is valued	To some extent	Within Council – need more integration, coordination, sharing. Sector/place: need to build network to share learning – address fragmentation. Learning is happening; outcome and action. Lessons not being learned. Lack in feedback loop.
Failures are seen as an opportunity for learning	To some extent	Reframing failure as learning. Addressing internal concerns with Council before deepening relationship with VCSE sector.

		Honesty about evaluation. Feeling safe to be honest; fail. Thinking about evaluation too late.
Psychological safety has been created.	No	Is happening but takes time and embed. Willing to change.
Policies, processes, training and resources to support learning are embedded across the ecosystem.	Blank	Get leaders on board to support embedding of learning. Getting there. Funding dictates evaluation.
Evaluation is valued and prioritised as a programme activity.	Blank	Resources need to be pooled for sharing and learning in order for this to be more prioritised than current. Thinking about learning too late.
Evaluation methods appropriate for place-based work are regularly used e.g. participatory workshops	Blank	External, national MEL requirements can be inflexible and time consuming: how to address this?
Evaluation insights are used to inform practice	To some extent	Build greater connectivity to share feedback across place. Building support within own departments and sectors for this.

Key principles for productive collaboration.

- Trust; honesty; reliability; understanding' close alignment around the why/mission; shared responsibility; knowing what everyone is bringing (strengths) – piece of

jigsaw – not whole picture; action is the oxygen; permission to fail; balance between relational and structural (commitment); transparency; accountability.

- Making environment comfortable; partners each have something to contribute and something to gain; work builds and deepens organically: requires time; awareness of, sensitivity to, history of a place and collaboration that's already taken place.
- Has to be underpinned by support mechanisms – guidance, knowledge of relevant law, processes; bottom up.
- Open from the start re: objectives; communication; integrity; say what you're going to do and do what you say; reflective points through the project; what's working well; trust safe space' leadership within the collaboration – how is this agreed.

Ideas for 'bridging the gap' between place partners' ideas for co-production and how they currently engage with communities.

- Need to influence system/funders wider to change model; how do we feedback findings from system maturity?
- Inform community of information sharing event; how would the event work?
- Look at who we already have in the room.
- Keep talking and supporting.
- Start with conversations, relationship building.
- Relationship building – clear and shared objectives.
- Keep building relationships and talking.
- Have fun.
- Narrow your focus; don't overlook easy wins with scope for growth.
- Keep on keeping on.
- Capture the current projects that place partners are working on, their skills.
- Networking – using existing resources and skills.

5. South Tyneside System Maturity Workshops – Activity Transcripts

Assessing to what extent South Tyneside facilitates a learning culture.

STATEMENT	LEVEL OF AGREEMENT	WHAT ACTIONS CAN WE TAKE TO EMBED THIS?
Learning is valued	To some extent	Improve culture to allow learning and acceptance for 'failure'. Funders to imbed learning, and highlight learning into evaluation "it's okay it didn't work". ACT – lots of learning. Client learning opportunity. Accessible. DWP – learning is valued. Sported – share failures. Individual organisations level valued – not

		necessarily learning across ecosystem shared learning not consistent. Organisational/workforce development – do it collectively? Vehicles for sharing i.e. Teams channels. Organisations being bold and vulnerable.
Failures are seen as an opportunity for learning	No	Too wary to discuss things that aren't going well in large meetings such as Council meetings fear of losing funds. Not consistent - ACT/DWP – learn more by failures – learning to evolve. Culture and PA – learning – feedback and adapt across system. Recognise external pressures/drives that make this difficult shift in perspective – see these as opportunities. Executive leaders need to support and shift culture, push back against regional/national pressures. Relationship building/trust as a precondition of vulnerability.
Psychological safety has been created.	No	Using existing spaces and networks such as alliances to encourage partners to discuss what hasn't worked well. Big system change – political/ICB when in play very good at feeling safe. Partnership element – if relationships are not strong doesn't build psychological safety.
Policies, processes, training and resources to support learning are embedded across the ecosystem.	No	Commissioners/funders messaging not clear, that learning and failure is okay, not embedded. Evaluation – learning built in from start but sometimes individual organisations doesn't work all the time due to different objectives = examples starting to do it.
Evaluation is valued and prioritised as a programme activity.	To some extent	Evaluation present at project level, not at a programme level.

Evaluation methods appropriate for place-based work are regularly used	Blank	REM. Customer survey. Academics supportive of work, stay evolved beyond funding, lots of opportunities to build in evaluation. Quite new ways of working for some. Is academic/university evaluation always necessary? What is the added value? Are these methods organisation-appropriate? I.e. NHS needs quant data.
People with lived experience are regularly engaged to understand what makes a difference locally	To some extent.	Willingness to try. Trying to engage as much as can. Thinking about those who aren't reached. Yes – transport needs assessment, talking to everyone.
Evaluation insights are used to inform practice	Blank	Informal learning and adapting. Reflection shared internally maybe not externally.
Evaluation data is widely shared to highlight best practice and support others' learning.	Blank	Yes through events/networks. Senior conversations in organisation but doesn't necessarily permeate down or up within organisation.

Key principles for productive collaboration.

- Shared vision/outcomes/goals/values; capacity/headspace to do joint work – are we not prioritising partnership work; power dynamic – lead partner – disruption of leadership; framework of strengths; go through hard time together (not fall back to org); relationship development (bottom up not just leadership) buy in from all aspects; leadership saying what they do; trust in constructive criticism; allocation appropriate members e.g. not always leadership – grassroots understanding.
- Trust; honesty; common aim; psychological safety linked to ideas; communication – common language; what is each organisation going to gain from work; personal capacity - understanding different pressures at different

times; organisation engagement rather than individual; building on existing relationships/success; demonstrating/sharing success and lessons learnt/having ability to flex/pivot; regular commitment to time/feedback; thinking differently about evaluation/capturing data; setting principles/ways of working.

- Shared knowledge and understanding; being open to not knowing everything; being comfortable with messiness and learning from failure; investing time to develop a framework/objective; investing time to understand colleagues/collaborators' work to avoid duplication, improve; psychological safety – questioning, challenging, disagreeing well – gendered dimension to this; language used is appropriate and accessible.

Ideas for 'bridging the gap' between place partners' ideas for co-production and how they currently engage with communities.

- Publicity: initial marketing, campaign website (social page), continued celebrate success, showcase events.
- What systems do we already have to help people know what's happening in place. Plinth etc.
- Continuity of resources, build in resilience, don't over promise and under deliver, experts by experience at the centre.
- Protocol/process for the balance between corporate language and real conversation.
- Barriers: learn to ride, young to old, bike maintenance.
- Expand our residents panel (used for microgrants).
- Collaboration: VCSEs, schools, LAs, local communities, cycle agencies, transport available.
- Process/model of how we will 'incentivise' communities – agreed across partners?
- Sustainability: funding, donations, referral routes for bikes, take over events, volunteers.
- Ensure voices of people engaged are representative of community.
- Identify who our different communities are – mechanisms to engage, who are linked/involved already?
- Resources: instructors, bikes, adapted bikes, safety kit, transport to/from storage venue.
- Community: engagement officers, participants, volunteers – maintenance, organisation.
- Think differently about risk.
- Be more human.
- Connecting the dots, passing on insights to the right people even if it doesn't link in with your work.
- Sharing knowledge on to all parts of system, identifying key voices of the community (that community trusts).
- Mechanism to feed community insights back to leads in statutory organisations.

RISE.

📍 Royal Quays Business Centre | Coble Dene | Royal Quays | North Shields | Tyne & Wear | NE29 6DE

🖱️ RiseNorthEast.co.uk

☎️ 07973 786 310

✉️ info@RiseNorthEast.co.uk

in 📺 f RiseCharityNE

Rise North East, registered charity in England and Wales (1135223).
Registered company in England and Wales (07176549).

