



Hartlepool Sport Toolkit – Grow your Club

Expanding what works — without losing your soul — in Hartlepool

Growth sounds exciting.

More sessions.

More members.

More funding.

More visibility.

But here's the hard truth:

Most community clubs don't break because they're too small.

They break because they grow too fast.

Growth should feel **steady and boring**, not stressful and chaotic.

This guide helps you scale **carefully, sustainably, and locally** — so your club is still here in 5–10 years.

1. First question: Should you grow at all?

Not every club needs to be bigger.

Sometimes the best club is:

- full
- stable
- well loved
- low stress

That's success.

Only grow if at least 2 of these are true:

- ☐ Waiting list exists
- ☐ Volunteers available
- ☐ Extra venue time secured
- ☐ Finances stable
- ☐ Lead organiser has spare energy

If not → **strengthen first, don't expand**



2. Strengthen Before You Scale

Growth magnifies weaknesses.

If something is messy now, it becomes chaos later.

Check your foundations

- sessions run consistently
- helpers can cover absences
- money covers costs comfortably
- safeguarding sorted
- communication clear
- you can miss a week without collapse

If any of these wobble → fix them first.

Think:

👉 *"stability before scale"*

3. Grow Sideways, Not Upwards

Big leaps create risk.

Small additions create resilience.

Safer ways to grow

- add a second weekly session
- split into two smaller groups
- add another age band
- start holiday activities
- train young leaders
- share delivery with another club
- use a second venue nearby

Riskier ways to grow

- taking on a large building
- employing staff too early
- chasing big grants without capacity



- doubling numbers overnight
- adding 5 new programmes at once

Slow growth sticks.

Fast growth breaks.

4. Build Leaders (not dependency)

This is the difference between:

A club that survives

vs

A club that collapses when one person leaves

Always be developing 2–3 people who could replace you

Look for:

- older young people
- parents
- assistant coaches
- volunteers with confidence

Give them:

- small responsibilities first
- shadowing
- simple training
- real ownership

Examples:

- lead warm-up
- manage register
- run a station
- organise a trip

Leadership is built by doing, not courses.

5. Keep the Culture Small (even if you grow)

Large doesn't have to feel impersonal.



You can grow numbers **without losing the neighbourhood feel**.

Protect:

- knowing names
- informal chats
- welcoming vibe
- low cost
- open access
- fun over perfection

Warning signs of “corporate creep”

- heavy policies
- formal tone
- complicated sign-up systems
- lots of rules
- people feeling like customers not members

If families stop chatting and start “dropping off and leaving” — culture is slipping.

Belonging matters more than professionalism.

6. Money Should Follow Demand (not lead it)

A common trap:

Big grant → pressure to deliver big numbers → burnout → collapse

Instead:

Demand → steady attendance → small surplus → then funding

Healthy growth order

1. Pilot something small
2. Fill it consistently
3. Prove it works
4. THEN look for funding

Funding should scale something that already works — not create something from scratch.



7. Partnerships = Smart Growth

You don't need to do everything yourself.

Growth often means **working with others**, not expanding alone.

Consider:

- sharing space with another club
- joint holiday camps
- school partnerships
- youth groups referring young people
- local businesses sponsoring kit
- linking with health or community groups

In Hartlepool especially, relationships beat formal structures.

Collaboration grows reach without growing stress.

8. Add Value Before Adding Numbers

Sometimes “growth” isn't more people — it's deeper impact.

Alternative growth

- better equipment
- youth leadership programme
- parent socials
- trips or competitions
- qualifications for young people
- volunteering pathways
- community events

These often strengthen loyalty more than bigger sessions ever will.

Quality growth > quantity growth.

9. Watch for Burnout Signals

Be honest with yourself.

Red flags



- you dread sessions
- constant firefighting
- volunteers dropping out
- money worries
- families complaining
- admin taking over your life

If this happens:

Pause expansion.

Consolidate.

Shrink if needed.

Shrinking is sometimes the healthiest move.

Sustainability beats pride.

10. The Hartlepool Sport Way

Growth here should feel:

- local
- relational
- visible
- grounded
- community-owned

Not:

- flashy
- corporate
- dependent on one big funder

Think:

“Does this still feel like something my neighbours built?”

If yes → you’re growing well

If not → slow down

Simple Growth Pathway (example)

**Year 1**

1 session, 15–20 kids

Year 2

2 sessions, helpers trained

Year 3

youth leaders, holiday activity, small funding

Year 4

partnerships, stable surplus, shared delivery

Year 5+

community anchor, multiple leaders, low stress

Slow is normal.

Slow is healthy.

Growth Readiness Checklist

Before adding anything new:

- ☐ Sessions stable
- ☐ Spare volunteers
- ☐ Money buffer
- ☐ Venue secured
- ☐ Lead has energy
- ☐ Culture still welcoming

If any are “no” → wait.

One-line philosophy

Don't chase size.

Grow what sticks.

Develop people.

Protect culture.

Move slower than you think you should.