

Hartlepool Sport: Breaking Barriers Through Inclusive Community Play

Place Expansion Insight – August 2025

MOVEMENT IS ALREADY HAPPENING

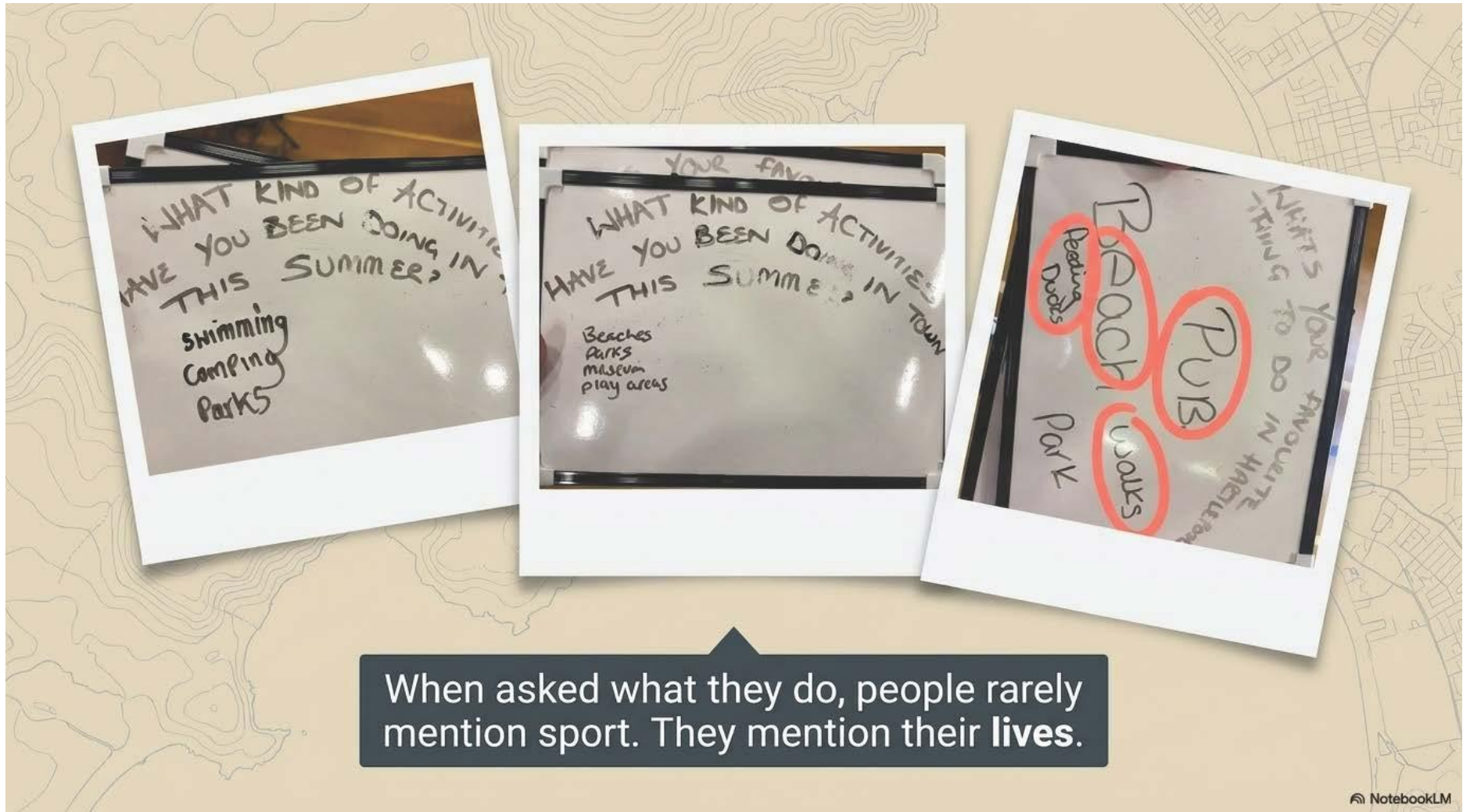
Redefining physical activity and
place expansion in Hartlepool.

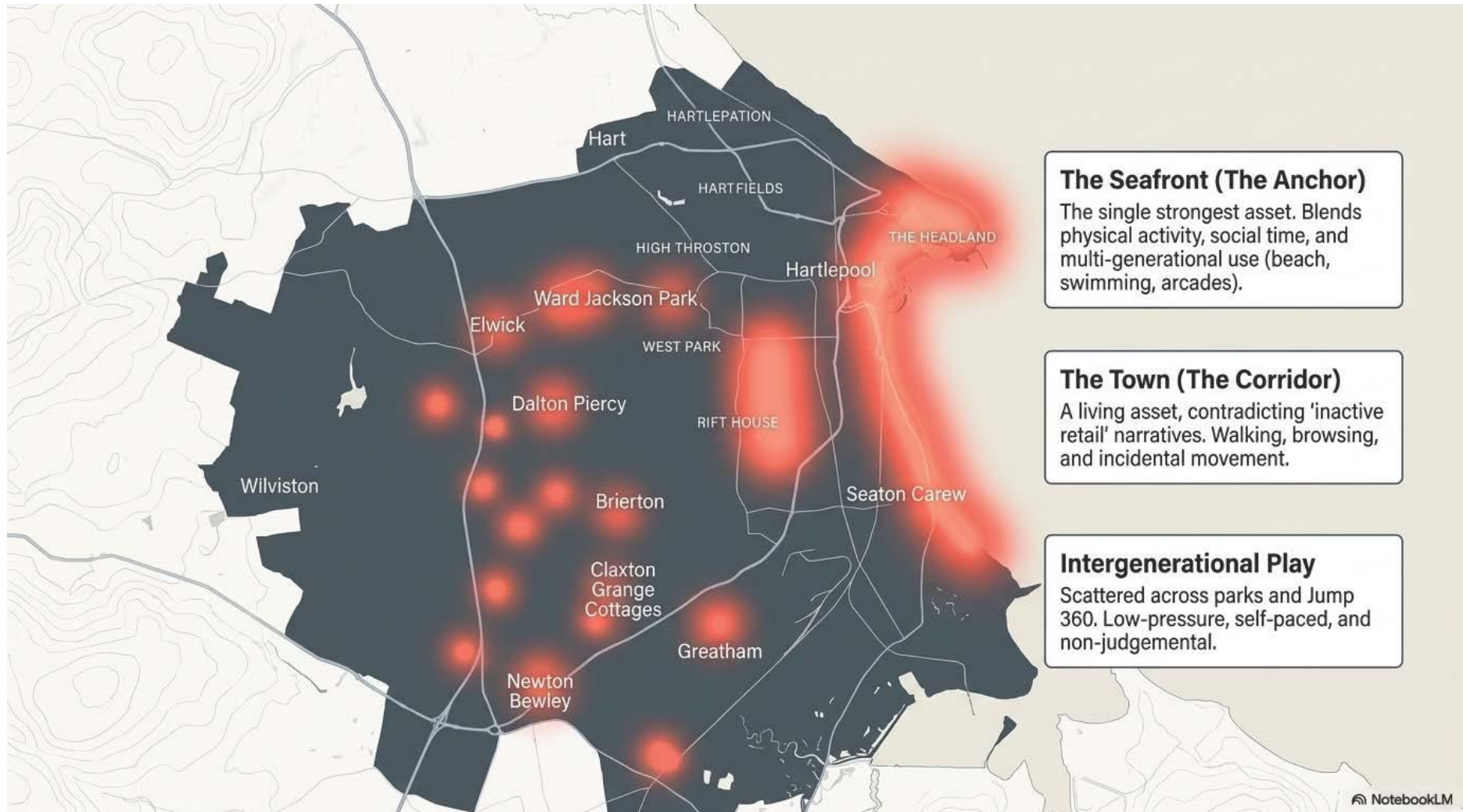


Assumption: If people aren't in formal clubs, sessions, or sport-shaped offers, they are inactive.



Reality: Activity is everyday, informal, social, and deeply place-based. The movement exists; system just doesn't recognize it.

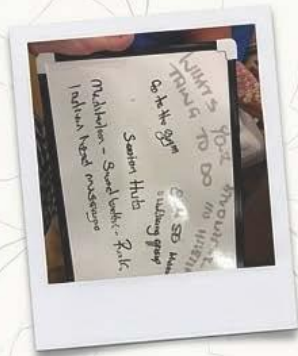




The Seafront (The Anchor)
 The single strongest asset. Blends physical activity, social time, and multi-generational use (beach, swimming, arcades).

The Town (The Corridor)
 A living asset, contradicting 'inactive retail' narratives. Walking, browsing, and incidental movement.

Intergenerational Play
 Scattered across parks and Jump 360. Low-pressure, self-paced, and non-judgemental.



**SOCIAL &
WELLBEING
LANGUAGE
OUTPERFORMS
LANGUAGE
OUTPERFORMS
FITNESS
LANGUAGE.**

People are motivated by belonging, mental wellbeing, routine, and enjoyment—not performance. Formal sport exists, but only as **one option among many**, often outnumbered by lifestyle activities like decorating, DIY, or Indian head massage.

Household Profile

Mum (Rachel, 39)

Part-time retail worker, Universal Credit, social rented 2-bedroom flat. Constant budgeting, relying on meal plans and reduced items.

Eldest Daughter (16)

Enjoys dance, Sea Cadets, values social activity.

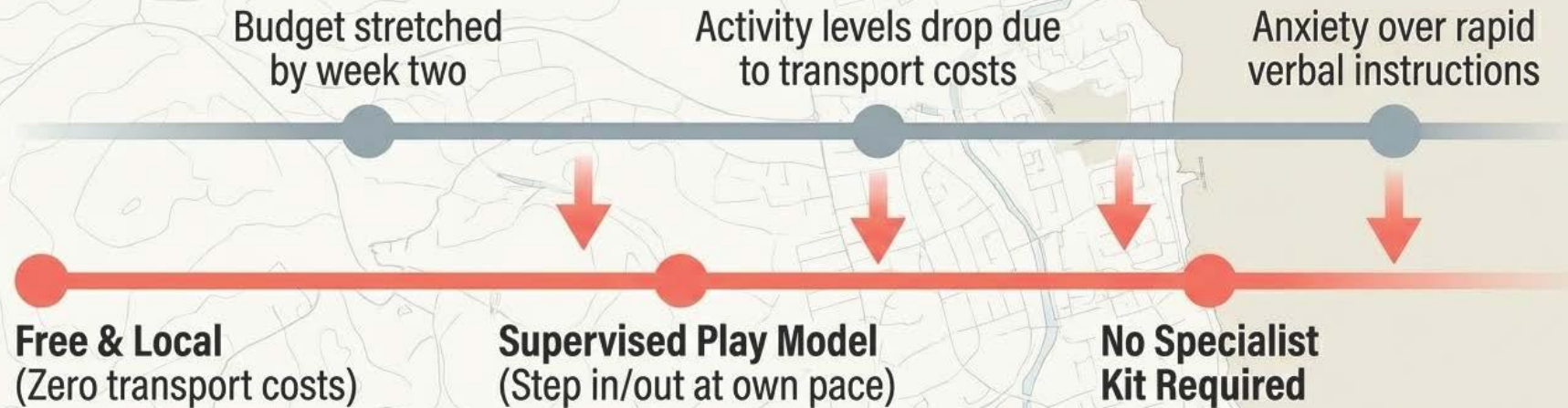
Youngest Daughter (13)

Partially deaf. Enjoys Karate/PE but struggles with noisy environments and fast-paced verbal instruction.

The Squeeze (Systemic Barriers)

- Fluctuating retail shifts
- Cumulative costs of sessions/kit
- Transport barriers
- Coordinating different ages
- Lack of genuinely inclusive spaces.

The Summer Holidays



Inclusive by design. Removing the financial and structural friction allowed a highly motivated family to establish regular attendance for the first time.

Youngest Daughter

Stepping Up. Began volunteering at sessions. Built communication skills, challenged assumptions about disability, and found a strong sense of pride.

Rachel

Community Connection. Volunteered to fit flexibly around retail shifts. Shifted from feeling dependent to actively contributing, gaining visible confidence in her community.

Eldest Daughter


Regional Leadership. Guided by Hartlepool Sport teams to become a volunteer youth representative at the regional level, building advocacy skills and future education pathways.

Urban Play

A topographic map with contour lines and a street grid, serving as a background for the text.

**(Existing Community Assets
+ Low-Barrier Pathways) -
Formal Gatekeepers =
Layered Community Impact**

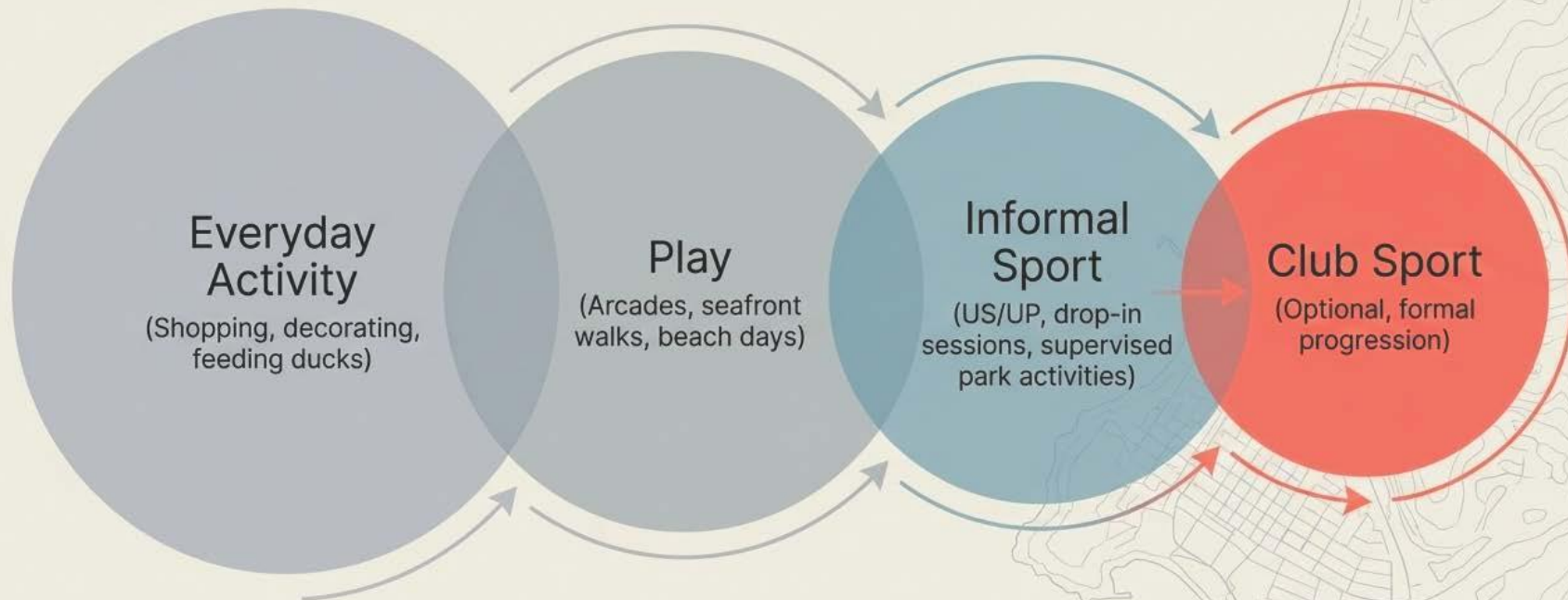
- Immediate cost-of-living relief
- Genuine inclusion for disabled participants
- Clear progression pathways for young people



	Traditional Sports Model	<u>Place Expansion Model</u>
Primary Venue	Clubs & Timetables	Beaches, Parks, Town Corridors
Format	Instructed / Coach-led	Self-paced / Supervised / Drop-in
Audience	Individual Participants	Intergenerational / Family Units
Primary Goal	Performance & Retention	Social Connection & Wellbeing

Place Expansion doesn't replace clubs;
it legitimizes the spaces where life already happens.

The Porous Boundaries Framework



Growth opportunity lies in making the edges intentional, supported, and visible—not forcing conversion directly into clubs.

Design for the Accompanying Adult.

Treat them as participants, not spectators.

Inactive Orbit: Parents, carers, grandparents standing and waiting.

Active Orbit

Walk-and-talk circuits

Active Kids

Social + movement blends

Light informal drop-in activity alongside the main session.



The System Invitation

Timetables
Memberships
Trials
Performance

The Place Invitation

Beach
Town
Parks
Seafront
Playgrounds

Partner with Urban Sport & Urban Play (US/UP). Clubs should support delivery in community spaces without trying to own it. Act as pathways, not gatekeepers.




NOTICE
SUPPORT
CONNECT
LEGITIMISE

See the town trips and beach walks as valid physical activity.

Design for the edges—accompanying adults and family units.

Create low-**barrier** pathways between **everyday** play and informal sport.

Recognize that Hartlepool is already active. Our job is to validate and resource what is already happening.



“Hartlepool Sport’s Urban Play did more than keep families active—it created the conditions for confidence, contribution, and opportunity.
Movement is just the beginning.”

Hartlepool Sport: Place Expansion and Inclusive Participation Briefing (Aug 2025)

Executive Summary

This briefing document synthesizes key insights from recent case studies, strategic interpretations, and community feedback regarding physical activity and "Place Expansion" in Hartlepool. The core finding is that physical activity in Hartlepool is primarily **everyday, informal, social, and place-based**. Residents do not necessarily organize their lives around formal sport; rather, movement is an incidental but meaningful part of family routines, social interactions, and utilization of local assets like the seafront and town centre.

Critical Takeaways:

- **Activity is Everyday:** Most residents view walking, shopping, and playing with children as their primary forms of movement.
- **The "Place Expansion" Opportunity:** Success lies in connecting existing assets (beaches, parks, town centres) to light-touch pathways rather than forcing direct conversion into formal sports clubs.
- **Inclusivity by Design:** Informal, "supervised play" models—such as Hartlepool Sport's Urban Sport & Urban Play (US/UP)—effectively remove barriers for low-income families and individuals with disabilities.
- **Layered Impact:** Programs that lower financial and psychological barriers facilitate a "whole-family" impact, moving participants from passive engagement to active volunteering and leadership roles.

Beyond the Club: Reimagining Activity Through Place Expansion in Hartlepool

Breaking Down Barriers to Participation

Inclusive by Design
Removing formal coaching allows participants to engage at their own pace without verbal pressure.

Zero Cost, Maximum Impact
Local, free sessions eliminate financial strain and transport costs for low-income families.

From Participant to Role Model
Informal entry points create 'porous boundaries' that lead naturally to community volunteering roles.

The Place Expansion Strategy

Activity is Everyday, Not Exceptional
Validating 'normal life' movements like shopping, gardening, and walking as legitimate physical activity.

Place as the Invitation
Leveraging trusted local assets like the seafront and parks rather than relying on timetables.

Supporting the 'Active Adjacent'
Designing activities for accompanying adults who are already present but currently non-participating.

TRADITIONAL SPORT MODEL	vs.	PLACE EXPANSION (URBAN PLAY)
Primary Setting: Specialized Clubs/Gyms		Primary Setting: Beach, Town Center, & Parks
Barrier Level: High (Cost, Kit, Trials)		Barrier Level: Low (Free, Local, Informal)
Core Motivation: Performance & Fitness		Core Motivation: Belonging, Socializing, & Routine

NotebookLM

Core Trends in Community Activity

Analysis of participant feedback and strategic data reveals that movement in Hartlepool is driven by routine and social belonging rather than performance or fitness goals.

1. "Normal Life" Movement

The majority of residents reference everyday activities as their primary way of staying active. These include:

- **Incidental Walking:** Trips to town, shopping, and "charity shopping."
- **Outdoor Leisure:** Beach visits, seafront walks, and feeding ducks in parks.
- **Household Maintenance:** Gardening, decorating, and DIY.
- **Play:** Playing with children or grandchildren in playgrounds and soft play areas.

Strategic Implication: Systems should reinforce and legitimize these activities as valid forms of exercise rather than attempting to replace them with structured sessions.

2. High-Trust Assets: The Seafront and Town Centre

- **The Seafront:** Identified as Hartlepool's most trusted active environment. It naturally blends physical activity, social time, and multi-generational use.
- **The Town Centre:** Contrary to narratives of inactivity, the town centre serves as a "living asset" and an everyday movement corridor for walking, browsing, and meeting friends.

3. Motivations: Social Wellbeing vs. Performance

Participant data highlights a preference for social and wellbeing-focused language. Frequent mentions of the "Pub," "meeting friends," "Bingo," and "wellness groups" (e.g., meditation, sound baths, Reiki) suggest that the primary drivers for participation are **belonging, routine, and mental wellbeing**.

Case Study: Inclusive Provision on a Budget

The experience of "Rachel," a single mother of two teenagers (aged 13 and 16) in Hartlepool, illustrates the practical impact of place-based, inclusive programming.

Barriers to Participation

Before engaging with Hartlepool Sport's Urban Sport & Urban Play (US/UP) programme, the family faced significant hurdles:

- **Financial Strain:** Part-time retail work and Universal Credit provided little headroom for session fees, uniforms, or equipment.
- **Logistics:** Fluctuating retail shifts made routine drop-offs difficult; transport costs limited activities to the immediate neighborhood.
- **Inclusion Needs:** The youngest daughter is partially deaf, making noisy, fast-paced, coach-led environments stressful and difficult to navigate.

The Urban Sport & Urban Play (US/UP) Model

The US/UP programme removed these barriers through a "supervised sport and play" model:

- **Informal Delivery:** Activities were available to join at one’s own pace rather than being strictly coach-led. This allowed the youngest daughter to observe before joining, reducing the stress of verbal instructions.
- **Zero Cost:** Sessions were free and within walking distance, providing immediate cost-of-living relief.
- **Flexibility:** The informal nature suited Rachel’s unpredictable work schedule.

Layered Outcomes and Progression

The programme facilitated a transition from participation to contribution:

- **Volunteering:** Both Rachel and her youngest daughter became volunteers. For the daughter, this built confidence and challenged assumptions about disability and leadership.
- **Strategic Progression:** The eldest daughter was identified for a **regional youth representative role**, developing advocacy and communication skills that established pathways into future education and employment.

Strategic Framework for Place Expansion

"Place Expansion" focuses on the "edges" of sport—activities that happen before sessions, while waiting, or as part of another purpose.

Implications for Sports Clubs

To align with this narrative without diluting the quality of formal sport, clubs are encouraged to:

1. **Design for the "Accompanying Adult":** Parents and grandparents are already present at sessions. Clubs can offer "walk-and-talk" circuits or light movement options while they wait.
2. **Act as Pathways, Not Gatekeepers:** Partner with informal programs like US/UP to create "porous boundaries" between everyday activity and club sport.
3. **Use Place as the Invitation:** Residents respond more effectively to "The Beach" or "The Park" than to membership timetables and trials.

Summary of Strategic Shift

From: Traditional Model	To: Place Expansion Model
Focus on "activating" people	Noticing and legitimizing existing movement
Rigid club structures	Informal, playful, place-based delivery
Performance and fitness goals	Social belonging and mental wellbeing
Sports-centered marketing	Place-centered invitations (Seafront, Parks)

Community Activity Data (Participant Feedback)

Raw data from community sessions lists a wide variety of summer activities that reflect the informal and place-based nature of Hartlepool's active life:

Category	Activities Mentioned
Outdoor/Place-Based	Beach, Seafront, Headland, Marina, Parks, Feeding ducks, Camping, Tweedle Farm, Heugh Battery, Preston Park.
Everyday Movement	Walking, Cycling, Bikes, Scooters, Trampoline, Horse riding, Swimming, Decorating the house.
Social/Commercial	Cinema, Fayre, Arcades, Bowling, Shopping (Charity/Mall), Pub, Pizza Hut, McDonald's, Barbers, Bingo, Cafe visits.
Structured/Wellness	Karate, Jiu Jitsu (@ Rare Beasts Gym), Volleyball, Basketball, Football, Table Tennis, Gym, SOS Women's Wellbeing, Meditation, Reiki.
Family/Community	"Being with family," Community fun days, Carnival, Art classes, Lego.

This data reinforces the conclusion that the opportunity for Hartlepool Sport lies in connecting these diverse, everyday interests into a cohesive, supported network of movement.

Video summary of August 2025: <https://youtu.be/u3bxVZxX5ws>