

Hartlepool Sport: Integrated System Analysis and Literacy Insight

Place Expansion Insight – October 2025



**HARTLEPOOL
SPORT**
Research and Insight

More for children to do

Blueprint for an Active Place

**Unlocking Latent Demand Through the
Urban Play & Urban Sport Model**

The Systemic Friction Map

Financial Cost

Resistance to entry fees; desire for free, accessible activity.

Local Parks as the Skeleton Key

Transport & Distance

Preference for walking-distance spaces; friction of travel reduces frequency.

High-footfall, familiar neighbourhood parks naturally remove all three barriers simultaneously.

Fear & Neglect

Perceived safety, dog fouling, and poor lighting are primary barriers.

Redefining Provision: Traditional Sport vs. Urban Play



System Levers for Habitual Movement

The Generational Pull



Designing for children is not a niche intervention; it acts as a gravitational force, pulling whole families into active spaces and establishing habits.

The Activation Lever



Environmental neglect suppresses usage even where facilities exist. Maintenance, perceived safety, and light-touch animation are active behavior-change interventions, not background services.



Proving the Model: Pumpkins in the Park 2025

Transforming underused, high-risk spaces into hives of informal movement during peak periods of family stress and antisocial behavior.

Delivered across 3 neighbourhood parks over 3 evenings (Oct 27–31) to target the school holidays—a period where Headland & Harbour ward sees antisocial behavior rates peak at 66.9 (vs national average 14.7).

The Impact Dashboard

1,500+

Estimated Participants Across 3 Nights

Headland Town Moor

708
Participants

(236 trail sheets)

Rossmere Park

474
Participants

(158 trail sheets)

Seaton Park

318
Participants

(106 trail sheets)



Methodology: Based on ONS family data (1 trail sheet equates to an average 1:3 ratio of parents to dependent children), verified by on-the-ground physical headcounts of 1,400+ people.

Activity by Stealth

The Hook

Culturally relevant, low-pressure invitation.
(e.g., The Spooky Stroll with the Grey Lady & New Perspectives).



The Action

Gamified Movement. Adding 0.5 miles of walking to participants' daily mileage before they even reach the Imposter Trail.



The Outcome

Reshaping Emotional Relationships. Fear and intimidation are replaced by fun, transitioning inactive families into regular attendees.



Expanding the Ecosystem

Panel 1: Low-Barrier Leadership



Young volunteers from 'Team Up for Change' independently identified and repaired damaged trail markers, saving the event without prompting.

Urban Play environments naturally create low-pressure leadership and confidence-building opportunities.

Panel 2: VCS Platform

Parks become platforms for local sports clubs and groups to showcase their offers.

Grants awarded for winning pumpkins are reinvested into community equipment, creating a ripple effect for good.

“I've had more conversations about our organisation in the first 30 minutes here, than I've had at any other event.”

Operational Excellence at Scale

Handling 1,500+ attendees requires robust, tested infrastructure.

The Rossmere Stress-Test



1,500+
ATTENDEES

60 SECONDS
RESPONSE

The Reality of 'Holiday Anxiety'

I “We came because the Halloween party we were supposed to go to sold out... but I couldn't afford the £5 per child entry fee anyway. I didn't want my children to miss out.” **I**

— WORKING MOTHER OF THREE

Cost of Living pressures are forcing families to sacrifice sports memberships and days out.

Entitlement changes to Holiday Activity and Food (HAF) funding increase pressure on free services.

Without free, local Urban Play options, vulnerable families retreat indoors, compounding mental health and inactivity crises.

Strategic Alignment: Place Expansion Outcomes

Active Environments

Transformed underused parks into safe, maintained, high-footfall environments reducing friction to spontaneous movement.

Positive Experiences

Replaced intimidation with fun through 'Activity by stealth' (0.5-mile walks disguised as Spooky Strolls), building positive emotional associations.

Sustained Participation

Leveraged familiar neighbourhood habits (3-7 visits/month) and child-led play to create reliable, repeatable routines without cost barriers.

Grassroots success directly driving macro-level public health objectives.

Deliberate Design for Scalability

Moving from seasonal events to a responsive, repeatable delivery model.



Conclusion: Over time, the marginal cost per participant plummets while community reach compounds.

The Pitch for Sustained Infrastructure

The Insight

The community is not asking for new standalone facilities. They are asking for existing spaces to be made safe, vibrant, and accessible.

The Ask

Continued investment must shift toward Urban Sport & Urban Play infrastructure.

Target Areas for Investment

- Staffing capacity & partnership coordination.
- Volunteer development and community stewardship.
- Reusable creative assets.
- Revenue and environmental improvements over capital builds.



Hartlepool Sport | Join the Movement

Community Insight and Place Expansion: Hartlepool Urban Sport & Play

Executive Summary

This briefing document synthesizes findings from recent community engagement initiatives in Hartlepool, specifically the **Pumpkins in the Park 2025** program and the **Sport England Place Expansion** insight boards.

The primary takeaway is that parks and green spaces are the dominant delivery environments for physical activity in Hartlepool. Engagement is driven by informal, self-directed play rather than structured sport. Programs like "Pumpkins in the Park" demonstrate a successful, repeatable model of "activity by stealth," attracting approximately 1,500 participants by embedding movement within creative, seasonal events.

However, sustained participation is currently hindered by environmental and psychological barriers—specifically litter, dog fouling, and perceived lack of safety. Addressing these "preconditions for activity" through improved maintenance and stewardship is identified as a critical behavior-change intervention. Future investment should prioritize revenue for environmental quality and informal play infrastructure over new capital builds or structured sports clubs.



1. Urban Sport and Urban Play: The Strategic Model

The data highlights the effectiveness of Hartlepool Sport's **Urban Sport & Urban Play** approach. This model shifts the focus from traditional "sport offers" toward creating "active environments."

Key Strategic Pillars

- **Activity by Stealth:** Movement (such as walking) is embedded into playful, creative, and culturally relevant experiences, such as storytelling trails or themed routes.

- **Informal Over Formal:** Residents repeatedly describe "hanging out," "exploring," and "social play." There is very little demand for clubs, coaching, or structured timetables.
- **Children as a System Lever:** Designing for children's play acts as a primary driver for adult movement (supervising, walking) and intergenerational use.
- **Local and Cost-Free:** Accessibility is the highest priority. Financial and transport friction (parking costs, travel distance) directly reduce activity frequency.

2. Case Study: Pumpkins in the Park 2025

The 2025 iteration of this program delivered the highest engagement levels to date, serving as a proof-of-concept for the Urban Play model.

Program Overview

- **Scope:** Three events across three neighborhood parks (Headland Town Moor, Seaton Park, and Rossmere Park) between October 27 and October 31, 2025.
- **Engagement:** Estimated 1,500 participants.
- **Mechanism:** Local clubs and organizations co-created a pumpkin trail and storytelling route ("The Grey Lady" with Jo Banks). Participating clubs competed for grants to invest in community equipment.

Societal Impact

- **Reducing Antisocial Behavior (ASB):** Events were strategically timed (5:00 PM – 7:00 PM) to coincide with peak periods for ASB during school holidays. This is critical in areas like the Headland & Harbour Ward, which has an ASB rate of 66.9 per 1,000 population—significantly higher than the national average of 14.7.
- **VCS Activation:** The program acted as a platform for Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) organizations to showcase their work and connect with inactive families in a low-pressure environment.

3. Community Insight: Barriers and Enablers

Data from participatory boards and "My 3 Wishes" prompts provides a clear picture of resident priorities and the factors preventing higher levels of physical activity.

Identified Barriers to Activity

The following factors are cited as significant deterrents to park usage and community wellbeing:

- **Environmental Neglect:** Litter, dog fouling, and "weeds" are frequently mentioned as reasons for dissatisfaction.
- **Safety Concerns:** Poor lighting and a lack of "police on the beat" contribute to a feeling of being unsafe, which is a primary barrier for children, parents, and disabled people.

- **Infrastructure Gaps:** Requests were made for the return of youth clubs, better maintenance of play areas (swings, slides, zip lines), and the reintroduction of community hubs like the Central Library and local hospitals.

Favorite Park Activities (Latent Demand)

Despite barriers, there is a clear appetite for specific activities:

- **Play Features:** Swings, slides, climbing, and zip lines are the most cited favorites.
- **Informal Movement:** Walking the dog, feeding ducks, bike riding, and skating.
- **Creative/Social:** Storytelling, "moving socially through space," and community togetherness.

4. Geographic and Behavioral Data

The research indicates that park usage is habitual and distributed across the town rather than localized to a single ward.

Park Usage Frequency

| Frequency of Visits | Respondent Trend |
|------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 0 visits | Very few report zero use |
| 1-2 times/month | Low |
| 3-7 times/month | Most common reported frequency |
| 8+ times/month | Significant minority (habitual users) |

High-Footfall Sites

The following locations were identified as "ready-made intervention sites" due to existing high usage:

- Ward Jackson Park
- Rossmere Park
- Summerhill
- Seaton Carew area
- Headland Town Moor

Ward Coverage

Responses spanned multiple wards, including Burn Valley, De Bruce, Fens & Greatham, Foggy Furze, Hart, Headland & Harbour, Manor House, Rossmere, Rural West, Seaton, Throston, and Victoria. This supports a **distributed, town-wide approach** rather than isolated pilots.

5. Conclusions and Future Implications

Shift in Investment Priorities

The evidence suggests a misalignment between traditional sport funding and community needs. Investment should be redirected toward:

- **Revenue over Capital:** Funding for maintenance, stewardship, and "light-touch" animation of existing spaces is more effective than building new, standalone facilities.
- **Environmental Quality:** Cleaning parks and improving lighting are not "background services" but active behavior-change interventions.
- **Sustainability:** Moving away from one-off events toward repeatable, scalable models like Urban Sport & Urban Play reduces lead-in marketing costs and improves efficiency.

Summary Statement

Residents are not apathetic toward physical activity; they are blocked by environmental and psychological barriers. By treating park maintenance as a precondition for health and focusing on informal, family-led play, the system can unlock significant latent demand for movement across Hartlepool.

Video summary of October 2025: