

# Birmingham Active Parks

***Councillor Steve Bedser***

*Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing*

***Karen Creavin***

*Head of Community Sport and Healthy Lifestyles*



# Birmingham- a public health crisis

- Birmingham has 1.1 million residents
- **26%** of the city's residents **are obese** (including nearly a quarter of 10-11 year olds)
- Around **80% of the population are inactive**
- ***Higher rates of death than the national average*** from *preventable diseases* such as coronary heart disease, stroke and certain cancers, as well as high levels of diabetes amongst its residents
- Significant health inequalities *within the city* as well: **male life expectancy varies by nearly 11 years between those living in least deprived area of the city and those living in most deprived**
- Inactivity levels in Birmingham are estimated to cost over **£20 million each year**
- Members of lower socio-economic groups, and some black and ethnic minority groups, are less likely to participate in physical activity and sport.

# Birmingham's Be Active scheme

- Initiative set up as a pilot in response to health inequalities/ low levels of activity
- Now Public Health/ Local Authority funded- Over 50 activities available in the cities gyms, pools and community venues
  - 400,000 people on the scheme
  - 16,000 attendances per week
  - Scheme is still getting an average of 650 sign ups per week
- 72% of users are from target market segments (E-K)/ 50% are from the 2 most deprived Quintiles
- 61% of users from BME groups- Majority of attendances for gym are of Asian/Asian British (45%) or Black/Black British (25%) ethnicity
- Of those swimming on scheme, largest proportion are of White (53%) or Asian/Asian British (27%) ethnicity
- Swimming is the most popular activity for the under 10s and 11-20s age groups, as well as families and is equally popular with both males and females.

# Effectiveness of Be Active:

- Evaluation shows that:
  - **74% of users were NOT previously a member** of a leisure centre, gym, or swimming pool before joining
  - Top barrier to exercise cited **was cost (40%)**
  - Top motivational factor for joining the scheme were: Improving health and fitness (83%); Help lose weight (76%)
- **People do want to take responsibility for their health but feel that cost prevents them from accessing opportunities**

## Effectiveness of Be Active- more people, more active

- **20%** of all members previously totally **inactive**.
- **89%** of these **increased their activity levels** to moderately or very active over 3 months.
- 40% of members had lower than recommended physical activity levels at baseline, of whom 70% increased their activity levels to recommended levels over 3 months.
- Higher levels of physical activity at follow up were related to lower levels of anxiety and depression.

73% said that Be Active has made them feel more positive about Birmingham as a city

# An evidence base... leading to a new approach

- Article published in British Journal of Sports Medicine (July 2012) citing it as a cost effective Public Health / Physical Activity intervention;
- Matrix Cost benefits analysis showed that Cost benefit analysis showed that Be Active generates **£21.30** in benefits for each **£1 spent**
- As well as the leisure centres, Be Active had started to use the parks and conservation work that was being done.
- A new idea was **born- Leisure centres without walls**



# Active parks... the next steps

- Birmingham has more than 600 parks and open spaces
- Working closely with Birmingham's unique Friends of Parks Groups to create
- “Leisure Centres without Walls” through the Active Parks Pilot
- Built on early work done in be active outdoors
- Pilot Project in 5 Birmingham Parks....plus Reservoir (6 open spaces in total)
- Activities in parks and green spaces – giving people the opportunity to be active on their own doorstep and interact with the natural environment
- Introducing structured activity- more traditionally found in a leisure centre- into the parks and open spaces

# Something for everyone including:

- Yoga Bugs, Buggy Fit (mums and tots);
- Parkfit and Community Fit (individuals and families, any fitness level);
- Tai Chi (popular with older participants but surprisingly, data has shown sessions popular with all ages and progs include 3-79yr olds!)
- Zumba (for all ages and abilities)
- Rowing and Cycling (for all ages and abilities, getting people who would otherwise not have the chance to try rowing, get out on the local reservoir with a programme of support)
- Walking and jogging (for all ages and abilities)
- Non traditional physical activities that get people engaging with their green space – Bushcraft, Little People in Parks (rangers linking with local early years settings to bring them into parks for various activities)
- Volunteering – involving people in their local park and community has resulted in an increase in volunteering hours and an increase in social capital.



# Early evaluation...

- 100% - enjoyed the activities on offer
- 81% -had fun
- 56% -had improved fitness levels
- 44%- enabled them to get involved with their community as well
- 38%- had improved health outcomes
- 93%- intended to still be using the park in 12 months time



# Early findings...

- Active Parks has attracted financial support from Public Health and Sport England
- What's worked:
  - Bringing in families to exercise together
  - Intergenerational take up – Park Fit has 4 – 70 year olds participating together
  - People coming in that don't traditionally access a leisure centre (and many who were previously inactive)
  - Changing people's perceptions on what should be done in a park and where they can be active
  - Changing people's perceptions about who can participate in sport and physical activity
  - People who are coming in for exercise are then getting involved in volunteering and getting active in the community

# Next steps

- 50 parks next year
- 15 bike hubs
- 10 running events each month in parks
- Increased funding levels
- New vision and way of working for the city