

SPORT & THE CITY



THE EVERYDAY

HOW URBAN LOCATIONS CAN GENERATE GREATER SOCIAL VALUE BY ENABLING EVERYDAY ACCESS TO SPORT.

**Future
Places
Studio**

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RESEARCH OVERVIEW

***Sport & the City* is a two-part report that examines the role of sport in urban locations.**

Part 1 of the research looks at the everyday role of sport in the city and explores how urban locations can generate greater social value through improved integration and access of everyday sport into the urban environment. Part 2 of the report which will launch in 2024, will explore the same topic from the perspective of ‘the matchday’, looking at the role of stadia, sports infrastructure and sporting events in an urban context.

The hypothesis which underpins this report is that greater social value can be generated across the urban environment by enabling everyday access to sport for all.

This report will:

1. Determine the importance of providing everyday access to sport in a city from the perspective of public health and wellbeing, community cohesion, and local economic development.
2. Identify learnings from a range of cities delivering innovative and best-in-class examples of integrating sport into the everyday.
3. Make a series of recommendations for how cities can improve their approach to integrating sport into the everyday.
4. Present an inspiring and innovative blueprint for built environment practitioners and city governments.

The report was written and produced by Future Places Studio and sponsored by Art-Invest Real Estate, British Land and Ryder Architecture.

Research Methodology

Sport & the City is a combination of primary and secondary research.

The primary research involved was undertaken via a series of site and location visits and interviews with practitioners, subject experts and built environment specialists.

Utilising a range of secondary sources – including Sport England, London Sport and the Centre for Social Justice – we have gathered key contextual data relating to sport and social value.

Thank you to those who have taken the time to be interviewed for this research:

Emily Coe, London Youth Rowing
Nancy Coombes, Rooster Boxing Club
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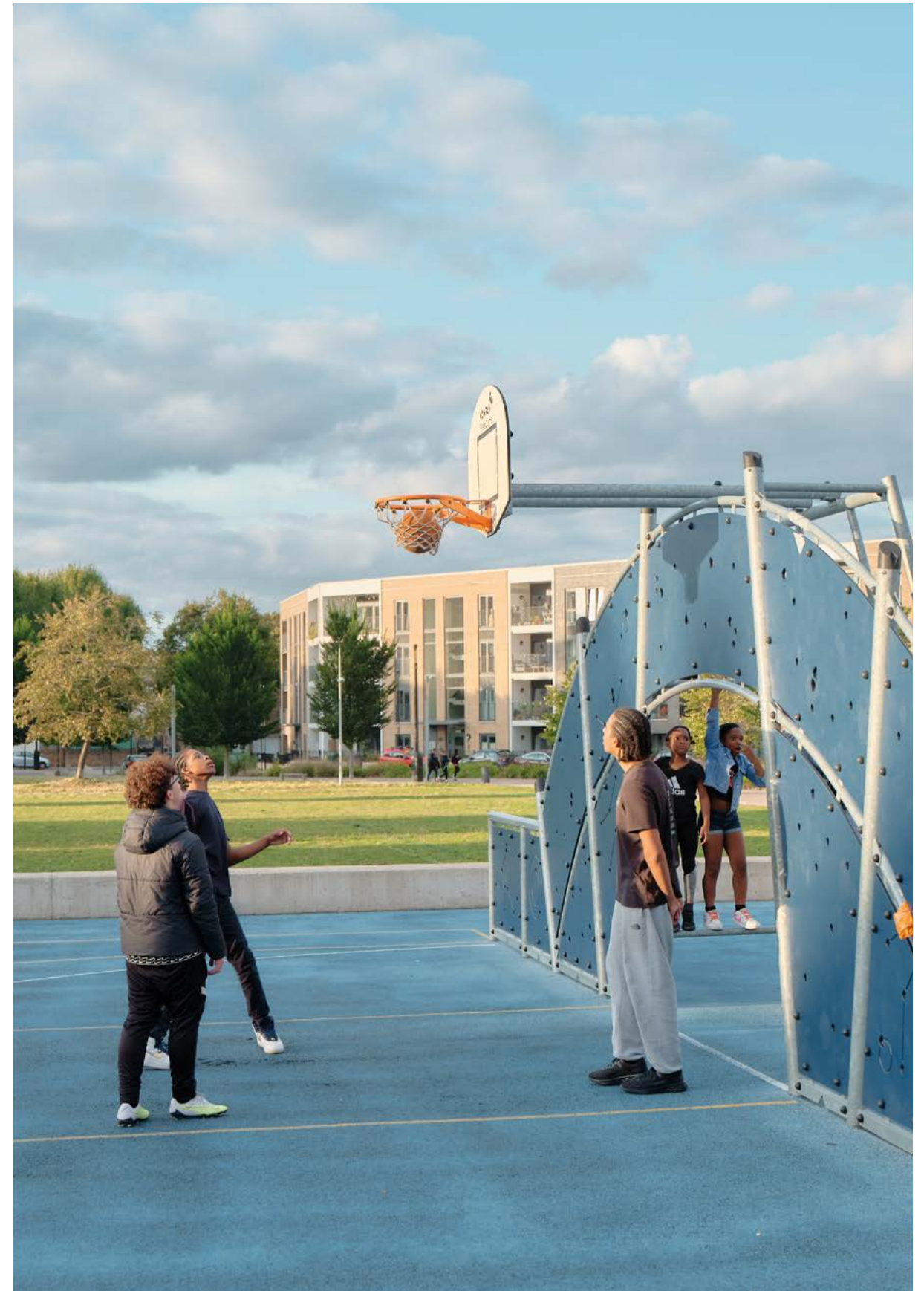


Image opposite: Myatt's Fields Park



IN LONDON, NEARLY **38%** of the population does not participate in the recommended amount of physical activity, and the capital has the highest proportion of inactive children in the UK.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Our cities are better places with the presence of sport.

Rows of football pitches in London's parks and commons come alive every weekend. Floodlit padel courts hum with activity and chatter on warm city evenings in Lisbon. Space-constrained Tokyo has created a buzz 20 storeys up by activating rooftops with football pitches and running tracks. Copenhagen has signed off plans to make its waterfront even more accessible to swimmers. Malmö employs a 'skateboarding coordinator', and across Sweden residents can borrow sports equipment for free from a Fritidsbanken (leisure bank).

Sport in its many forms, formal and informal, contributes to the bustle of community life and economic activity in our cities.

Regular physical exercise is one of the best and most affordable ways of maintaining good health and improving overall wellbeing¹. Despite the known benefits, one-third of the global population aged over 15 engages in insufficient regular physical activity. The World Health Organisation has warned that almost 500 million people will develop heart disease, obesity, diabetes or other noncommunicable diseases attributed to physical inactivity between 2020 and 2030 if governments don't take urgent action².

A 2020 study from McKinsey & Company forecasted that the UK could boost GDP by more than \$400 billion, if it were to invest in public health to reduce the number of health conditions suffered³. In August 2023 the UK government launched 'Get Active', its future sport and physical activity strategy, which sets out an ambition to get an additional 2.5 million adults and 1 million children active by 2030⁴.

With over 84% of the UK population living in cities, the urban environment has a pivotal role to play in facilitating and inspiring sporting activity. In London, nearly 38% of the population does not participate in the recommended amount of physical activity, and the capital has the highest proportion of inactive children in the UK⁵.

Image opposite: Southwark Park Tennis Courts

This report has identified a series of challenges that impact access to sport across our cities:

Urban Density & Design

- Continuous urban development and densification have led to land pressures, which in some cases have resulted in sports facilities being pushed to the city edges⁶.
- A legacy of poor urban design related to sports facilities impacts on usability and accessibility⁷.
- In London, 67% of parents say that air quality affects their health-related decisions⁸.

Financial Challenges

- A Sport England survey identified that 39% of people say the current financial crisis is affecting their ability to be active⁹.
- One in three UK-based district councils are expected to close public gyms and swimming pools due to financial challenges¹⁰.

Image below: London Tennis Courts

Climate Change

- Overheating is more prominent in cities due to the urban heat island, which can cause temperatures to increase by 10 degrees Celsius¹¹.
- The likelihood of pluvial flooding is higher in urban areas due to the high proportion of tarmacked and paved surfaces¹².

Inclusivity

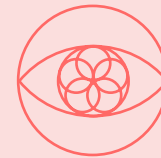
- People from Asian, Black and Chinese backgrounds are far more likely to be physically inactive than those who are white¹³.
- 49% of girls say they feel unsafe in their local park¹⁴.
- 1.3 million teenage girls who once considered themselves 'sporty' have dropped out of exercise and activity after primary school¹⁵.
- In the most deprived areas in England, the prevalence of obesity or being overweight is 14 percentage points higher than in the least deprived areas¹⁶.





FRAMEWORK FOR CHANGE

Our cities need a new model for integrating sport into the city. This research has established four principles that inform a place-based approach to the provision of everyday sport in an urban context. These principles should be used as a toolkit for change, informing how local communities, developers, architects and local governments can integrate sport into our cities in a way that is fun, inclusive and democratic:



1. VISION-LED & HOLISTIC

Sport should sit at the heart of a holistic and evolving place-based vision connecting existing communities, future users and visitors.



2. VARIED & CLIMATE-RESILIENT

Cities should ensure they provide a varied offer of sports facilities and clubs that reflects the rich diversity of the population, is a mix of informal and formal facilities, and is designed with the effects of climate change in mind.



3. CREATIVE & ON-SHOW

Urban places and spaces should pioneer creative approaches to how they integrate sport and physical activity into the everyday.



4. CONNECTED & INCLUSIVE

Sports facilities of all shapes and sizes should be 'wellbeing anchors' that inform a local urban design that is inclusive, walkable, connected and green.





SPORT & THE CITY: THE CONTEXT

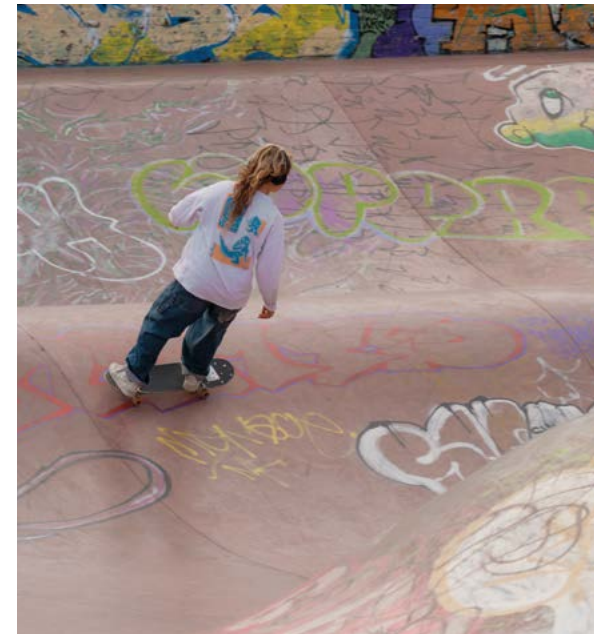
Since the late 19th and early 20th century, we have been increasingly aware of the crucial role that sport can play in an urban context.

In 1909 the American activist Jane Addams wrote in her essay *The Spirit of Youth and the City Streets* that the modern city “robbed children of their youth”, and only by providing them with proper places to exercise and play could the city do them justice. Addams argued that children playing and competing in sport showed the “undoubted power of public recreation in bringing together all classes of a community in the modern city¹⁷.”

In the last 120 years, the relationship between sport and the city has grown in prominence. The late 19th century to the early 20th century was a time when many organised sports were established and spread, mainly on an amateur basis. Across Europe, the growth of organised sport reflected a strong demand created by urbanisation, rising incomes, increased leisure time, and a greater awareness of sport as vital for health. By the 1890s, London County Council controlled more than 400 cricket pitches, 300 tennis courts, and 100 or so football pitches¹⁸.

The second main phase of sporting facilities appeared between the 1920s and the 1960s. Demand was strong as a result of the mass popularisation of sport in the post-war period, which resulted in a proliferation of sports venues, specialised sports grounds, outdoor swimming pools and indoor facilities. In the late 1960s, nearly 70% of male Londoners said they played sport regularly or occasionally¹⁹.

Image above: Pexels.com
Image opposite top left: Stockwell Skatepark
Image opposite top right: Pexels.com



Fast forward to today, and the UK population is roughly 20% less active than in the 1960s. The UK government forecasts that if current trends continue, the UK will be 35% less active by 2030²⁰.

The London 2012 Olympics were positioned as a pivotal moment for UK sport, with the Games set to leave a generational legacy of young people playing sport. Recent data released by Youth Sport Trust identifies that the number of hours public secondary school children spend doing PE has fallen by more than 12% since the Games²¹.

2017 data identified that independent school pupils spend up to five hours per week engaged in sports activities versus two hours for state school pupils. Despite accounting for just 10% of all schools in England, independent schools hold 43% of all sports halls, 32% of all swimming pools and 27% of all playing fields²². This disparity in access impacts sport in the UK at an elite level, with 43% of professional men’s cricketers and 37% of men’s rugby union players coming from private schools²³.

The provision of locally accessible, well-maintained sports facilities is key if the UK is to increase the number of people participating in regular physical activity. The challenge of delivering such facilities is becoming harder for cash-strapped local authorities, with one in three district councils expected to close public gyms and swimming pools due to financial challenges²⁴. The impact

of the decline of public facilities will be further exacerbated by the cost of living crisis affecting households across the country. Sport England research shows that 39% of those surveyed say the crisis has already affected their ability to be active²⁵.

In a city context, continuous urban development and densification have led to spatial pressure on sports facilities, which in some cases has resulted in these being pushed to the city edges. Where sport facilities and provision are found, they often suffer from limited spatial planning, mono-functionality, poor integration in their neighbourhood, hidden or caged pitches, and isolation from their urban surroundings²⁶.

An additional challenge facing sport and the city is the impact of climate change and temperature change. How feasible will sports participation be in the city during record hot summer months or record wet winters? Those who can afford it will turn to indoor, air-conditioned gyms, but those without such access will be unable to safely exercise. Sport England, which invests more than £300 million of public money every year into UK sport, has announced that sports will need to do far more to fight the climate crisis as a future condition for receiving funding²⁷.

A cross-sectional assessment of more than 1.2 million adults in the US found that people who exercised reported 43% fewer days of poor mental health than people who did not.



Sport as a Stimulus for Economic Growth

An active population can equal an economically prosperous country. A study in 2020 from McKinsey & Company suggested that the UK could boost GDP by more than \$400 billion if it were to invest in public health to reduce the number of health conditions suffered, thus enabling expanded participation in the labour force²⁸.

The number of UK-based working-age adults who are economically inactive because of long-term sickness rose from around 2 million in spring 2019 to around 2.5 million in summer 2022. The total economic cost of sickness absence, lost productivity through worklessness, informal caregiving, and health-related productivity losses is estimated to be over £100 billion annually²⁹.

For those in full-time work, there is the opportunity for sport to play a greater role in improving employee health and wellbeing and driving up productivity. Evidence suggests that 13% of sickness absence days in the UK can be attributed to mental health conditions³⁰. A cross-sectional assessment of more than 1.2 million adults in the US found that people who exercised reported 43% fewer days of poor mental health than people who did not³¹.

The challenge in the context of the city for time-limited workers is how to better embed sport and physical activity into the Monday to Friday routine.

A UK study suggests that 80% of men and 70% of women want sport to be a part of workplace culture to boost performance and productivity in the company. Research has also shown that 38% of Brits are more likely to apply for a job that has exercise benefits, rising to 53% among Gen Z³².

As many companies seek to 'earn the commute' and attract employees back into the office on a more regular basis, access to quality sporting provision in and around their offices could become an attractive proposition.

PRINCIPLES FOR INTEGRATING SPORT INTO THE CITY

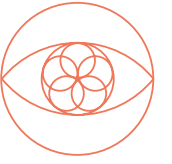
In the face of the climate crisis, urban densification, funding cuts and rising inactivity levels, our cities need a modern, innovative and holistic model for integrating sport into the city.

This report advocates for an approach that empowers local actors to implement a place-based framework for embedding sport into our cities in a creative and sustainable way. We have established four strategic principles which can act as a practical toolkit for supporting the integration of sport into the urban environment.

Image below: Copenhagen (Astrid Maria Rasmussen)



PRINCIPLE 01: VISION-LED & HOLISTIC



Sport should be at the heart of a future-facing place vision that seeks to reimagine the urban environment while connecting existing communities, future users and visitors. The process to arrive at a sports-based vision must be a collective effort developed between landowners, local authorities, developers, existing sports providers and potential occupiers, and co-created with the community.

Sport shouldn't sit in isolation from other local policies; it should instead be integrated into economic growth ambitions, education policy and wider local health data, including GP and NHS referrals. The ambition should be to clearly establish sport as a lever that can be used to positively impact on a local area beyond health and wellbeing.

Leveraging Natural Assets

Placing sport and wellbeing as part of a city's placemaking vision has grown in prominence over the last decade as cities have sought to improve the health and wellbeing of local communities while also seeking to attract and retain global talent.

Cities with geographical assets such as mountains, rivers, lakes and seafronts have become increasingly focused on utilising these as part of their work/life approach. For example, in a relatively short time frame the city of Lisbon has risen in prominence for its international tech scene, due in part to the work/life balance offered by the city's accessibility to sea and surf.

In some cities, municipalities and city governments are seeking to improve access and usability of natural assets to provide a sporting offer unique to that location. In Oslo, investment in the city's

public transport enables residents to access cross-country skiing and downhill skiing via a fast and well-maintained train service.

In Copenhagen, the municipality is transforming the capital's harbour into a vibrant public space with recreational activities and residential developments. As part of this strategy the city has released access to swimming along its entire waterfront instead of confining it to specific zones.

In Paris, swimming in the River Seine has been prohibited by French law since 1923; however France's capital has launched a €1 billion strategy to purge the Seine of toxins with the ambition of holding Olympic swimming events in the Seine in 2024 and allowing public use after that³³.



Embedded at a Community Level

A clearly articulated vision helps set the ambition for a place, build widespread support and spark enthusiasm for its future. This vision may be driven and financed through a top-down approach, but the most effective way for the vision to take hold is to embed it at a community level.

Due to rapid urbanisation, high levels of car use and rising temperatures, Malta has become inhospitable to outdoor exercise. This has become of increasing concern, as Malta has the highest rate of obesity in children in the European Union³⁴.

While change in the country has been slow, a bottom-up, community-led approach is emerging. One such example is the Bugibba Skatepark, where the community came together to bring a former skatepark back to life. In parallel, initiatives such as the Malta Street Sports Association have been established by community groups to use street sport like BMX, street football and parkour to encourage communities to participate in physical activity.

In Barcelona, the morning 'bicibus' is a fun, safe and healthy mode of transport for school children run by local parents. Each morning, Monday to Friday, a group of 60 parents and children aged 3 to 11 ride to school on bikes and scooters as a collective through the streets of Barcelona. In order to navigate the busy streets of Barcelona safely, the bicibus occupiers the entire road and acts as a single vehicle. Adults flank the bicibus and a police patrol car follows behind. The initiative first started in the 1990s in the Catalan town of Vic and is organised via local parents on a group What'sApp chat.



Image above: London Youth Rowing



Social Cohesion

Sport can bring communities together, creating a shared sense of purpose and belonging. This is especially valuable in cities, where many different ethnic groups and nationalities are located in close proximity.

In Denmark, Superkilen in the Nørrebro district of Copenhagen is a public park designed to bring communities together in one of Denmark's most ethnically diverse and socially charged communities. Stretching 750m along either side of a public cycle track, the park includes 108 objects from the 62 homes of the local inhabitants, including a swing bench from Baghdad, a star-shaped fountain from Morocco, chess tables from Sofia and basketball hoops from Mogadishu.

In the context of an urban neighbourhood undergoing regeneration, the challenge for developers is how to integrate incoming communities with existing communities. Team sport can be an effective and powerful way to achieve this, as it provides a shared space and endeavour in which to bring people together.

In the city of Warsaw, the Our Sports Field Initiative (Inicjatywa Nasze Boisko) in the district of Powiśle uses team sports such as basketball, volleyball and football to better integrate members of the local community. The project involves a regular weekly meet-up every Sunday at 6pm on an accessible public space in the immediate vicinity of where people live. Everyone who wants to play are included in a game, irrespective of sex, age, ability, and social and economic status. Participation is completely free of charge, and any element of rivalry is excluded. Over 250 people have taken part, and the initiative has been expanded across 24 sports fields over several districts of Warsaw.

Future-Facing

In the context of increasingly dense urban environments, climate change and community wellbeing, cities across the globe are rethinking their approach to urban design to be more resilient and responsive to changing needs.

In Barcelona the Barcelona Superblock is a government-led scheme designed to transform the city into a "space where everyone can have a better life³⁵." Barcelona is a dense and compact city, and despite efforts over the last decade, it has few green spaces.

As part of the Superblock model, the city is prioritising wide pavements, more plants, and more spaces for play and sport. The model does not involve major physical changes but rather 'tactical urbanism'³⁶ through the promotion of soft measures that are often low-cost and easy to adapt. The new city model has been driven by an ambition to make Barcelona better prepared to take on climate change, with cleaner air and less noise.



Image opposite top: Superkilen, Copenhagen
Image opposite bottom: Barcelona



Image below: Southwark



Well-Communicated

An effective local communication strategy to inform residents and visitors of the local sports provision should be part a key part of a local sports vision.

Taking inspiration from large-scale sporting events such as the London 2012 Olympics, where wayfinding and signage successfully directed visitors to the different events and facilities across the Olympic Park, local walkable wayfinding strategies could direct the public to local sports facilities. In conjunction, hyperlocal outdoor advertising on bus stops and billboards could be utilised to further promote and embed a sporting narrative in local areas.

To coincide with the Paris Olympic Games in 2024, the city municipality has launched an online

platform to notify residents and visitors of free-to-access sports provision and facilities across the city, which include football pitches, rugby stadiums and athletic tracks. The platform also promotes city routes suitable for rollerskating and hiking, as well as village-style dances taking places across different Paris neighbourhoods.

Data should also play an important role in analysing the use of local sports provision and promoting specific facilities, events and classes to relevant demographics. A joined-up approach across different facilities is needed to ensure an effective and tailored communication to residents. Within this context, local authorities play a key role through the datasets gathered at public gyms and swimming pools.

Preventative Measures

As the health profile of populations continues to change, cities across the world are faced with rising rates of chronic disease, mental illness, social isolation and loneliness. Cities need to find new ways to support good health outcomes and ensure the sustainability of their health systems.

One such solution is social prescribing, whereby GPs, nurses and other healthcare professionals are enabled to refer people to a range of local, non-clinical services. Social prescribing schemes can involve a variety of activities typically provided by voluntary and community sector organisations.

In the UK, social prescribing has become an increasingly popular method, with 2019 data identifying that 65% of doctors said they frequently coordinated patients with social services or other community providers³⁷.

In Australia, the Royal College of General Practitioners (RACGP) has partnered with Parkrun Australia, a free and timed 5km run, to tackle increasing rates of chronic illness³⁸. The community-based partnership allows GPs to make ties with 1 of 450 local events and prescribe Parkruns to their patients for health and wellbeing.



PRINCIPLE 02: VARIED & CLIMATE-RESILIENT



Cities should ensure they provide a variety of sports facilities and clubs.

A mixed offer is key to catering for diverse populations, and should include free and paid-for facilities, informal and formal settings, and a wide variety of sports suited to different interests and abilities.

Sporting facilities should be designed with the effects of climate change in mind. Hot summers and wet winters will increasingly restrict the viability of sports for many, and factoring this in as a design consideration will only grow in importance.

Providing for Specific Cultures

London is the most ethnically diverse region in the UK. In total, 287 ethnic groups and nationalities are represented across the city. Research from Sport England has established that people from Asian, Black and Chinese backgrounds are far more likely to be physically inactive than those who are white³⁹. If the UK is to achieve its ambition to get 2.5 million more adults and 1 million more children active by 2030, developing a sports offer that caters for the level of diversity in London is crucial.

In Oslo, 30% of the city's 650,000 population comes from abroad. A large part of this migrant community comes from Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran, nations where wrestling is especially popular. With a focus on social integration and increasing activity levels, the city bid to host the World Wrestling Championship in 2021 and established a wrestling programme for children from ethnically diverse backgrounds. As Guillaume Dupay, VisitOSLO's project manager for sport, said: "we wanted to offer something to these children and maybe integrate them first into sport, then into city life"⁴⁰.

"We wanted to offer something to these children and maybe integrate them first into sport, then into city life."

– Guillaume Dupay,
Project manager VisitOSLO.

Image below: Fritidsbanken, Sweden

Free or Subsidised Offer

In the most deprived areas in England, the prevalence of obesity or being overweight is 14 percentage points higher than in the least deprived areas⁴¹. This puts a greater emphasis on free or subsidised sporting offers being made available to these communities.

At a local level, delivering accessible and free or subsidised sports facilities for local communities has been severely impacted by budget cuts over the last decade. Recent research suggests that one in three district councils expect to close public gyms and swimming pools due to financial challenges. In Woking, the local council has responded to its financial crisis by announcing a raft of cuts,

including scrapping funding for the town's sports pavilions, swimming pool, parks, public toilets and youth sporting events.

The cost of equipment has proved a prohibiting factor for mainstream engagement in many countries. In Sweden, this has resulted in the founding of the Fritidsbanken (leisure bank) concept. Acknowledging that sports equipment can be expensive, a Fritidsbanken acts as a library for sports and leisure items, with users able to borrow equipment such as skis, skates, life jackets and snowboards for 14 days for free. Fritidsbanken are spreading across Sweden, and each location is underpinned by three principles: anyone can borrow, everything is free, and equipment is reused.





Alternative Provision

Sometimes the most effective sporting provision is an informal and flexible space where users determine its use. This might be by a group playing 'jumpers for goalposts' football on an area of grass or skateboarders doing tricks on a public square. This approach requires a more liberal and relaxed approach to the use of public spaces for sport and play.

In Esbjerg, Denmark, the country's fifth largest city, GAME Streetmekka has seen the transformation of an abandoned industrial train engine depot into a social platform for street sports, creativity and community. The multifunctional facility was launched with the vision to make street sport and unorganised sports inclusive and accessible on a year-round basis. Aimed at children, teenagers and young adults who do not feel at home in the mainstream sports culture, the ambition is to keep young people off the streets by engaging them in street sports and culture. The distinct aesthetics of a typical raw industrial building – the train engine roundhouse – have been transformed into a facility that supports and embraces the new wave of emerging unorganised street activities⁴².



Image opposite: Cardenas Sports Complex, Canales, Mexico
Image below: Benthempleim, Rotterdam



a concrete structure. The complex, commissioned by the Mexican Secretariat for Agrarian, Land and Urban Development (SEDATU), includes a long double-height steel and concrete structure to shade the facilities from extreme heat and sun. In addition, new trees have been planted at the periphery of the complex to help offset the typical high temperatures⁴⁴.

In Rotterdam, Benthempleim is the world's first full-scale water square, designed to retain nearly 2 million litres of water. The primary aim of the square is to prevent flooding in the city, but it also has a dual use of being a public square with facilities for football, basketball and skateboarding. The square is part of a strategy in the city to increase climate resilience by adaptive measures while also improving liveability⁴⁶.

Hot summers are a challenge in some cities, while in others increasingly wet winters represent a potential flood risk. The likelihood of pluvial flooding is higher in urban areas due to the high proportion of tarmacked and paved surfaces⁴⁵.

Climate-Resilient Design

With increasingly hot summers and wet winters, people's ability to safely participate in outdoor sport will become increasingly challenged.

Hot summers in cities are already leading to behaviour change for those who regularly participate in sport. During record hot temperatures in Texas, runners have been taking to the streets at midnight to avoid the heat, and football teams have been meeting to practise at 7am.

Built-up areas can be 10 degrees Celsius hotter than their surrounding areas⁴³. Increased tree planting is one possible solution, as it is estimated that tree cover of over 40% or more can lower summer daytime temperatures in cities by as much as 5.5 degrees Celsius. Trees and soft planting attenuate solar radiation, and reduce heat through shade and evapotranspiration, which is water evaporation with a cooling effect. This reduces the need to mechanically regulate temperatures, which in turn reduces emissions from greenhouse gases. In the Mexican town of Canales, Mexican architecture firm Quintanilla Arquitectos has created a sports complex and skatepark covered by

It is estimated that tree cover of over 40% or more can lower summer daytime temperatures in cities by as much as 5.5 degrees Celsius.





Biodiversity

Sports areas comprise a significant part of the European urban landscape, and in some cities they are more extensive than nature reserves, which means they could have an important role to play as major ecological resources that contribute to urban sustainability.

Playing fields are frequently regarded as poor environments for wildlife because of their monocultural planting and need for regular mowing and other management activities. However, even these 'green deserts' can support a variety of species. Like formal parks and other open spaces, they can, if designed well, be rich in biodiversity when integrating a considerable degree of plant diversity. For example, lawns, pitches, and courts can be framed by a mix of native tree planting, shrubs and grasses that support local wildlife. Soft planting improves the local microclimate by reducing local air temperatures, providing shade and shelter, trapping air pollutants, and buffering noise. In addition, sustainable urban drainage systems can provide flood mitigation and water filtration as well as habitats for a range of urban dwelling species, such as invertebrates and amphibians.

In Manchester, Whalley Range Cricket Club has created a biodiverse environment where badgers, hedgehogs and foxes are regular visitors. The grounds have more than 200 trees, and the club has stopped using pesticides, fitted swift boxes under the eaves of the clubhouse and installed solar panels on the roof. Vegetables grow in large wooden planters.





Image: Greenland Dock

PRINCIPLE 03: CREATIVE & ON-SHOW



Urban places and spaces should pioneer creative approaches to how they integrate sport and physical activity into the everyday. The space-constrained nature of many sites should no longer be seen as a barrier to what can be achieved, and instead should stimulate new and creative solutions. A refreshed narrative for what we constitute as a ‘sports facility’ is needed that reflects a more informal and urban approach.

There is an opportunity to put sport and physical activity on show, celebrating its presence and making a statement that sport and play are welcomed and encouraged in this place. Sport on show can also act as a tool to bring different communities together to form the backdrop of a vibrant and diverse location.

Everyday Spaces

A key pillar of increasing activity levels and access to sport is better integration of sport and play into the everyday.

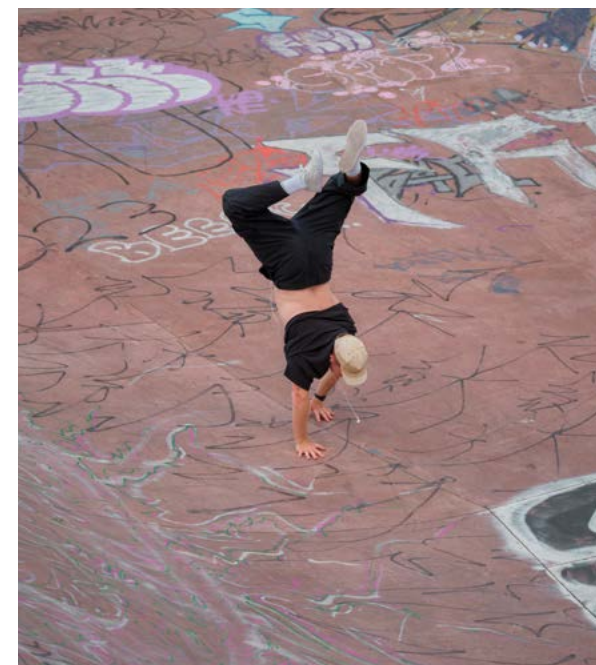
In Paris, the Rue Leon Cladel is a pedestrian street that now includes a 60m-long skate area open for everyone to use. The linear skatepark, which zigzags alongside a footpath, provides a fun and playful way to animate the urban space and put sport firmly on display.

The city of Malmö has gone a step further by appointing renowned skateboarder Gustav Eden as the city’s first ‘skateboarding coordinator’, with the objective of developing new skate spots around the city. As opposed to the traditional model of providing skateboarders with designated skateparks, the city is embracing the integration of skateboarding into public spaces. “Public spaces

are subject to negotiation between users. Skaters have to learn how to get along with the rest of the public and vice versa. In a skatepark, skaters will only meet other skaters, which doesn’t make for a very diverse appreciation of their cities and the people who live in them⁴⁷.”

The interactive social benefits of integrating skateboarding into the city, chime with the work and writing of the sociologist Richard Sennett. In his book *The Uses of Disorder*, Sennett argues that instead of cities relying on prescriptive plans and rigid self-conceptions, people should remain open to difference and disorder. In addition, he states that “the population should be actively prevented from self-segregating into orderly communities within the urban setting⁴⁸.”

Image below: Rue Leon Cladel, Paris
Image bottom: Stockwell Skatepark





Co-Location

Sport has a greater role to play as a placemaking tool to drive footfall and enliven otherwise lacklustre spaces. Sport also presents an opportunity to reimagine traditional spaces and a user's relationship with that space.

In the city of Annecy, France, the Galeries Lafayette is a new shopping centre that includes a beautifully designed climbing and bouldering facility with a café, bar and restaurant. The facility has become a focal point of the shopping centre and reimagines what a contemporary retail space can be.

As cities become increasingly dense, there is a need to become creative and activate previously underutilised spaces such as rooftops, which is a feature in Tokyo, where football courts and running tracks can be found at roof level. In Nordhavn, a

densely built neighbourhood in Copenhagen, there are limited sports and leisure opportunities on street level. Here, JAJA Architects has used the roof of a multi-storey car park to create space for Crossfit, TRX training, trampolines and Panna football⁴⁹.

In the UK, a new strategy launched by Badminton England aims to make the sport more inclusive and accessible by opening up 200 new facilities in church halls, shul halls and Islamic centres. The strategy is based on pilot work conducted in Manchester, Bolton and Bradford that identified how community spaces provide a conducive setting for people who may be inactive or uncomfortable taking part in sport⁵⁰.

Meanwhile and Pop-Up

There is the opportunity to utilise sport as part of a meanwhile strategy for an area undergoing development. Meanwhile uses are worthwhile investments that can bring a multitude of benefits and quick wins to a location. Short- and medium-term interventions can create a strong sense of place by activating a site with a programme of temporary uses that welcomes people in, increases footfall, adds value and energises the place.

In King's Cross, London, the King's Cross Pond Club was a natural, chemical-free swimming pool surrounded by green landscaping that acted as a meanwhile facility during the wider King's Cross regeneration. The swimming pond included changing facilities, and was surrounded by landscaping that included wildflower grasses, pioneers plants and bushes⁵¹.

When the ice skating season ends at Wollman Rink in New York City's Central Park, the area will be home to 14 pop-up pickleball courts. Pickleball, a sport similar to tennis and the fastest-growing sport in the US, has quickly developed a reputation for being inclusive and intergenerational. It is easy to learn and is played on a smaller court than tennis, meaning players don't have to run as much or hit the ball as far.

Over the coming years, we can expect to see innovative new sports facilities and products developed to enable people to exercise and keep fit in non-traditional spaces and facilities. One such example is PT pods, off-the-shelf pop-up facilities that provide a compact gym and exercise suite for virtual personal training sessions. The structures can be temporarily accommodated and easily moved if required. Spaces are bookable and unlocked via an app, with no upkeep or ongoing operational support needed.

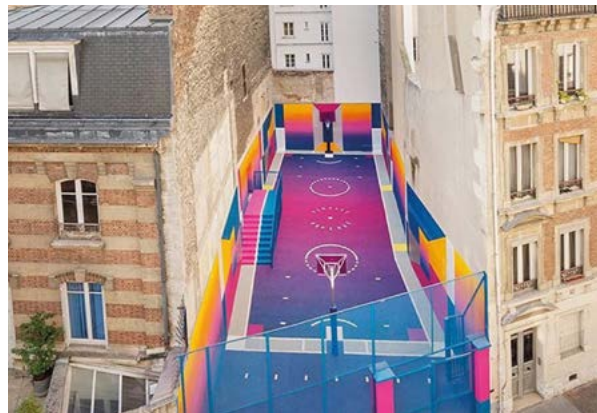


Creative Design

Sport on show can be amplified through the design of colourful spaces and facilities that celebrate the presence of sport. Exemplars include a basketball court nestled within the historic walls of the city of Dubrovnik and a basketball court in between buildings in Paris.

Site limitations and constraints can also lead to the need for a creative approach to the design and construction of a sports facility. In Los Angeles, the Michelle and Barack Obama Sports Complex was designed using pre-engineered metal buildings as part of a programme facilitating multi-phase construction to avoid interrupting the ongoing athletic activity on the site⁵².

The design of sports facilities also provides the opportunity to engage local communities in the process. Home Court, a basketball court at the heart of the D'Eynsford housing estate in Camberwell, London, was a project created by urban designer Mark Warren in partnership with the local community. Through a series of workshops, Warren worked with the local community to design and deliver Home Court, which has breathed new life into a tired local basketball court and provided an engaging space for residents to come together and play sport⁵³.



Iconic Locations

In the city of Lisbon, the empty space under the iconic Ponte 25de Abril bridge across the River Targus is home of Clube de Padel, Portugal's first club devoted exclusively to padel. Padel, a hybrid between tennis and squash, is one of the fastest-growing sports in the world, due in part to the fast-paced nature of the game. The presence of padel under Ponte 25de Abril has helped to activate the area into a new social space that includes outdoor seating, a bar and views across the Targus.

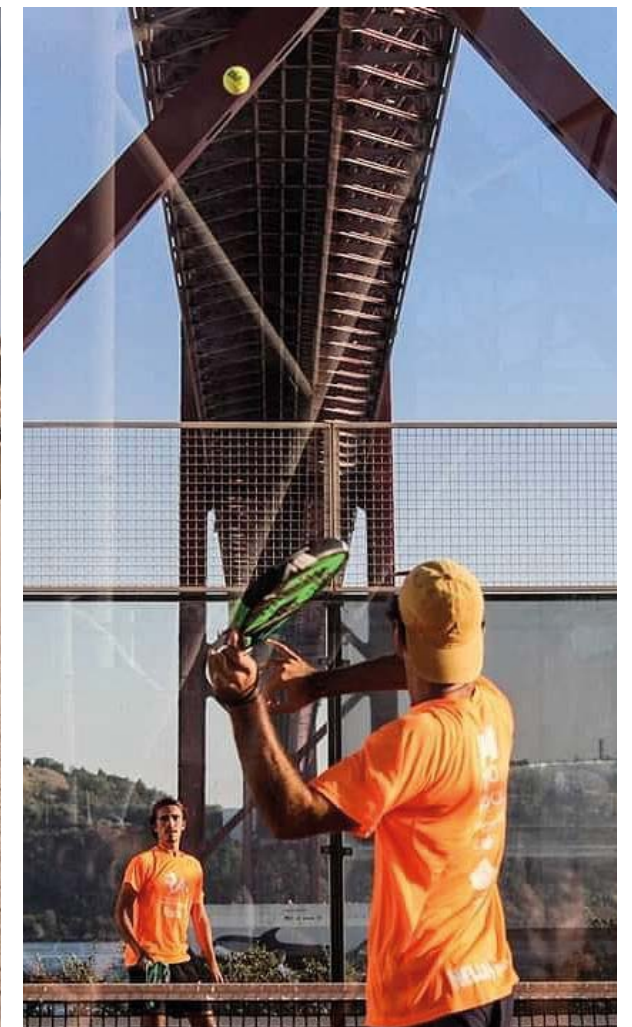


Image top: Home Court, Camberwell.
Image opposite bottom: Pigalle Duperre, Paris
Image below middle: City Wall Rooftop Court, Dubrovnik
Image below right: Clube de Padel, Lisbon

PRINCIPLE 04: CONNECTED & INCLUSIVE



Sports facilities of all shapes and sizes should be ‘wellbeing anchors’ that inform a local urban design that is inclusive, walkable, connected and green. Where possible, access to sporting activity should be encouraged via foot or bike, with routes made safe and accessible for all.

The built environment has a powerful role to play in supporting the inclusivity of sport. This requires designing spaces and facilities that are safe, clean and accessible.

15-Minute Neighbourhoods

The concept of 15-minute neighbourhoods has risen in prominence post-Covid. As an urban design approach, the idea is that city governments, developers and designers plan a city around making sure all necessary amenities are within a 15-minute walk of where people live. Within this approach, the access to sport via foot, bike or a short public transport journey is an important consideration when trying to engage inactive communities in sport and physical exercise. Research in Copenhagen identified that a child from an average income family will travel 300m for a leisure activity, while children from disadvantaged homes will travel 50m⁵⁴.

The city of Paris is one of the pioneer cities of the 15-minute model. The city mayor, Anne Hidalgo, aims to decarbonise the city’s economy and make Paris a healthier place for its citizens. By adopting an approach of ‘hyper-proximity’ and ‘multipurpose localities’, the city is seeking to reduce the number of car lanes to free up road space for pedestrians and cycles, and looking to utilise public spaces for varied purposes – for example, daytime schools that can also serve as sports facilities and night-time leisure centres⁵⁵.

Image below: Turia Park, Valencia

Green Routes

Sport has a role to play in linking up disconnected green spaces. In London, there are 3,000 parks of varying sizes, which provides the perfect foundation for green routes that connect sports provision on a borough-wide or even city-wide basis.

In Copenhagen, a city renowned for its cycling culture, close to 50% of the total number of people working or studying in the city cycle⁵⁶. The success of the city’s cycling strategy is in part due to a vast network of green cycle routes designed with safety and convenience of the bike user in mind.

In Valencia, in 1957, the River Turia flooded, killing 81 people, destroying 5,800 homes and leaving 3,500 families homeless. In response, the city municipality diverted the course of the Turia around the city, leaving a huge tract of land that crossed the city from west to east, bordering the historical centre. Today, the former River Turia is now Turia Park, a 7km urban park that runs through the city centre, providing access to sports pitches, running routes, cycling, yoga classes, skateboarding and children’s playgrounds.





Inclusive Design

The built environment has a powerful role to play in supporting the inclusivity of sport. This requires designing spaces and facilities that are safe, inviting, clean and accessible. User research has identified that caged multi-use games areas or five-a-side football pitches are off-putting for many users, who fear being 'caged in' or kicked off the pitch by older groups. In the Netherlands and Denmark, you are more likely to see pitches surrounded by benches or terraced seating rather than fences⁵⁷.

Public parks have a vital role to play in providing free and accessible places to play sport; however, the design, facilities on offer and security often limit the opportunity for parks to achieve their full potential. Research from Women in Sport identified that 49% of girls feel unsafe in their local park and only 34% of girls enjoy exercise in their local park. Specific issues identified include safety, lack of things to do, and lack of changing facilities and toilets⁵⁸.

In the UK, the last decade has seen an estimated 50% decline in public toilets due to budget cuts⁵⁹. Research has shown that limited access to toilets reduces the likelihood of a specific location being visited. Age UK identified that 81% of respondents to a survey in 2022 said that they would be more likely to visit shops, cafes and businesses if public toilet provision were better⁶⁰. Women in Sport found that 78% of girls list lack of toilets and changing facilities as a barrier that prevents them from participating in sport⁶¹.

In Japan, toilets are considered a symbol of the country's world-renowned hospitality culture. The Tokyo Toilet Project celebrates this, with public toilets redesigned in 17 locations thanks to the help of 16 creators invited from around the world to contribute⁶².

Dwell Time

The design of sports facilities shouldn't stop with just delivering the facility or providing access to equipment, but should also factor in the wider user experience. For example, places that encourage people to sit, watch and dwell are important considerations when using sport to create a buzz, foster a sense of community and improve safety. They are also necessary considerations for places where parents or carers bring children to play sport. This approach requires considered access to toilets, shelter, comfortable seating, lighting and planting, and even places to grab a coffee and work from.

In Pazhou, in the Guangdong province in China, the Earth project is a range of visitor facilities for a sports park located on a promenade on the Pearl River waterfront. The spaces, carved out of an artificial concrete-walled mound, include a visitor reception, rest room, changing spaces, equipment store and public toilets.





CANADA WATER

A close-up look at how sport is playing a key role in the evolving Canada Water masterplan in central London



Vision-Led & Holistic

Canada Water is a 53-acre regeneration scheme in central London bookended west to east by Southwark Park and Russia Dock Woodland, with Canada Dock and Greenland Dock sitting to the north and south. Together this green and blue infrastructure provides the natural assets to springboard a place-based sports vision.

The developers active in the area, Art-Invest Real Estate and British Land, are developing a separate but complementary future place vision focused on sustainability, wellbeing and sport. The existing parks and lakes of Canada Water act as a nature-based playground to support a healthy and vibrant local community.

Situated halfway between London's urban centres, the City and Canary Wharf, Canada Water benefits from the dual offer of a central London location with leafy, green and peaceful surrounds.

British Land's component of the regeneration will include 3,000 net zero carbon homes, 1 million square feet of retail and leisure space, and offices for over 20,000 people.

In addition, the local community will access a brand-new, state-of-the-art leisure centre delivered in partnership with Southwark Council. The council-run leisure centre, situated in The Dock Shed, will include a new eight-lane, 25m swimming pool, a learner pool, a four-court sports hall, a 150-plus station gym, two dance studios, soft play, and a spin studio. The Dock Shed will also provide over 180,000ft² of new workspaces, and is the first part of a thriving new high street and town square.



“The beauty of Canada Water is that you can feel the vibes of sport all around you.”

— Delphine Mazillier, Decathlon

On Canada Water Dockside, Art-Invest Real Estate is building a world-class green commercial campus across a 4.5-acre site designed by architects Bjarke Ingels Group (BIG) and HWKN.

Already present on the Canada Water Dockside is the sports retailer Decathlon, which provides visitors with access to a range of sports clothing and equipment and provides facilities such as a rooftop MUGA, table tennis, dance studio and a golf simulator. Visitors can also hire a kayak to put to use only a few hundred yards away, on Greenland Dock.

Image above: Canada Water Dockside (CGI)
Image opposite: Leisure centre (CGI) The Dock Shed



“In Canada Water, we connect into this amazing green and blue hinterland where there are so many opportunities for sport and incidental play.”

– Roger Madelin, British Land

Varied & Climate-Resilient

Canada Water is already home to a community of 30,000 people who live in Rotherhithe and Surrey Docks. The population benefits from a strong community-led sports provision which provides access to sports such as kayaking, football, cricket, touch rugby, boxing, tai chi, Nordic walking, angling and table tennis.

Local providers Ballers Academy (football), Southwark Park Cricket Club and Roosters Boxing Club each provide the foundations for an accessible and community-delivered sports offer. Financial support from Art-Invest Real Estate, British Land and Decathlon have helped sustain and strengthen the provision of local sports clubs. The community infrastructure provided by such grassroots provision transcends sport, with life skills such as communication, teamwork and timekeeping all forming a key part of the offer for the young people who attend sessions. For London Youth Rowing, a charity that provides opportunities for young people to get into rowing on Greenland Dock, many of the young people it works with have limited or no experience of the water, and some have never left their home boroughs.

In partnership with the charity London Sport, Art-Invest Real Estate has identified and mapped local sports provision by way of supporting the local community to better understand what is available in their unique local area. Canada Water is surrounded by over 130 acres of green and blue space, and has easy access to 40 established sports clubs, groups and amenities. By having a map as a tool to share, it supports the network of sports infrastructure already in place.

Southwark Park and Russia Dock Woodland provide access to cricket nets, an athletics track, a bowls club and cycle routes adorned on either side by established London plane trees, willows and poplars, which help shade users from hot summer temperatures.

Image opposite top: Canada Water Docks
Image opposite bottom: UK Wallball



30k
people

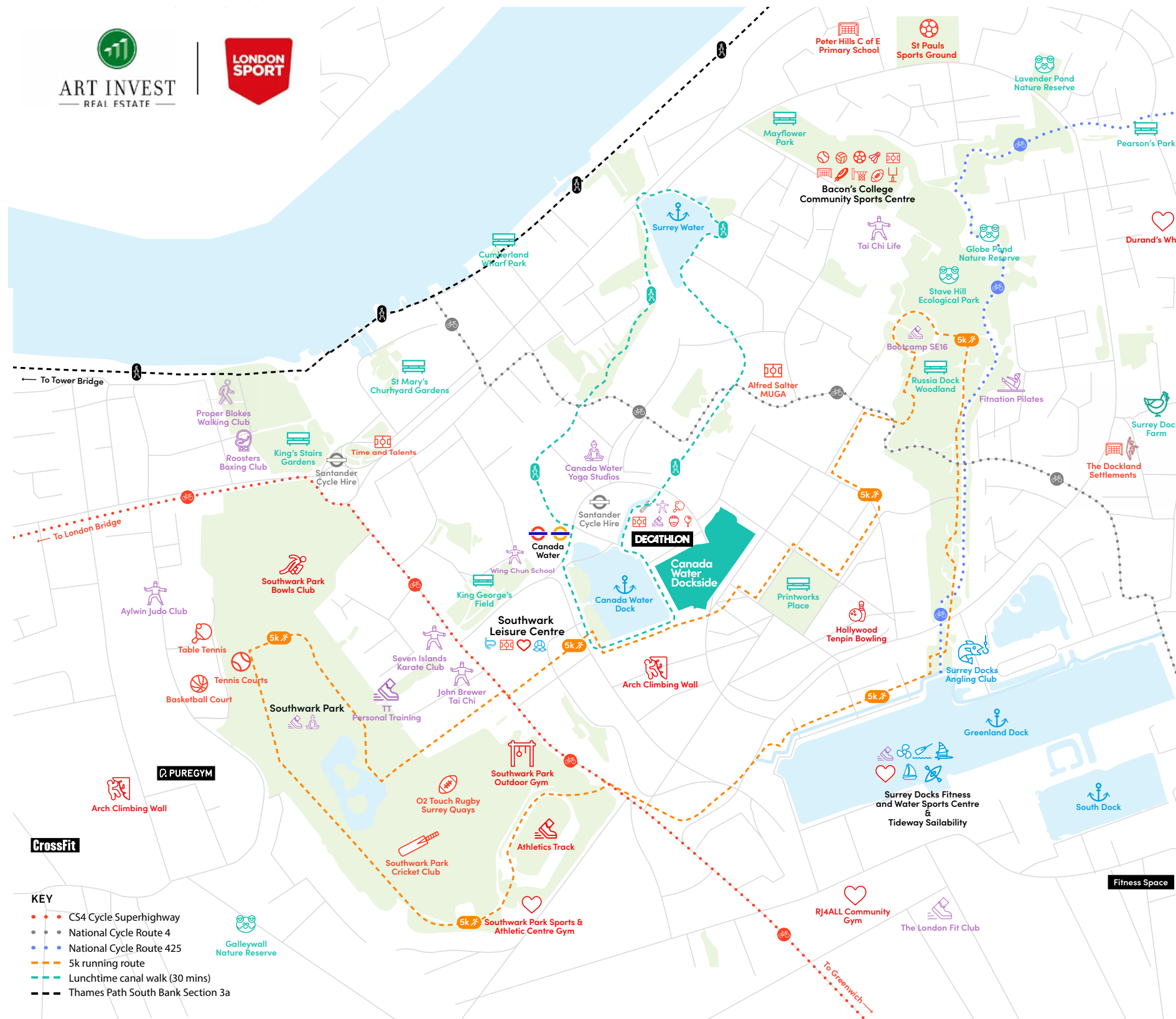
130
acres

40
sports clubs

“After meeting with the local community, we realised that there are about 40 physical activities available to do within a 1km radius of our site.”

– Luka Vukotic, Art-Invest Real Estate

Canada Water



Decathlon

- Golf simulator
- Virtual reality skiing and tennis
- MUGA inc. football, netball, tennis and basketball
- Table tennis
- Fitness classes inc. Pilates, yoga, dance etc.
- Taekwondo and other martial arts
- Cycle repair

Surrey Docks Fitness and Water Sports Centre

- Sailing
- Windsurfing
- Kayaking
- Power boating
- Rowing
- Gym
- Group fitness classes

Southwark Leisure Centre

- Swimming pool
- Southwark Aquatics Swimming Club
- Bermondsey Scuba Diving Club
- Gym
- Sports hall

Southwark Park

- 50 station gym
- Yoga
- HIIT and Personal Training
- Supreme Fitness Bootcamp
- London City Athletics Club
- Sports and Athletics Centre Gym

Bacon's College Community Sports Centre

- 3G 11 a side Astro pitch
- 2 MUGA pitches
- 4 Outdoor hard courts for netball/tennis
- 2 Grass football pitches
- 2 Sports halls for badminton, basketball or volleyball
- Go Mammoth Netball
- Kings College Regents American football team
- Men's and women's volleyball teams
- Kapow Ultimate Frisbee team
- Tag rugby
- Canada Water Tennis Club

St Pauls Sports Ground

- Ballers Football Academy
- Fisher Football Club

MAP COLOUR KEY

- Green = Parks & Nature Reserve
- Purple = Martial arts/yoga/fitness
- Red = Facilities
- Blue = Water-based activities

KEY

- CS4 Cycle Superhighway
- National Cycle Route 4
- National Cycle Route 425
- 5k running route
- Lunchtime canal walk (30 mins)
- Thames Path South Bank Section 3a

Creative & On-Show

“Our ambition is to create a healthy new town which alleviates the pressure on the local health services by supporting the community to live healthier and happier lives.”

– Roger Madelin, British Land

Image below: UK Wallball, Canada Water

Against the wall of the Surrey Quays Shopping Centre in Canada Water is an eye-catching and free-to-access Wallball court, a simple yet innovative example of how to use sport as a meanwhile project to enliven an otherwise empty space.

With the motto ‘any wall, any ball, any time’, the game simply requires a wall and a ball, with players using the palm of their hand to hit the ball against the wall in a similar fashion to squash. In New York City, Wallball has quickly become the second most popular street game after basketball, with over 2,500 courts across the city. The Canada Water courts, delivered by British Land in partnership with the UK Wallball charity, are the UK’s first wallball venue to feature two outdoor courts.

A short walk from the Wallball court is The Arch Climbing Wall. Located in the former Dorothy Perkins and Burtons units of the Surrey Quays Shopping Centre, the climbing centre is a creative way of reimagining a former retail space while adding to the local sports offer.

The 7,500ft² space offers a bold new vision for indoor bouldering while providing vibrantly designed interactive and social space for visitors.

Wallball and The Arch are pioneering examples of how sport and our understanding of what constitutes a sports facility should always be evolving. Too often our approach to sports facilities is driven by old norms or tradition. Canada Water illustrates that empty spaces can be a blank canvas, allowing different sports to emerge and flourish.



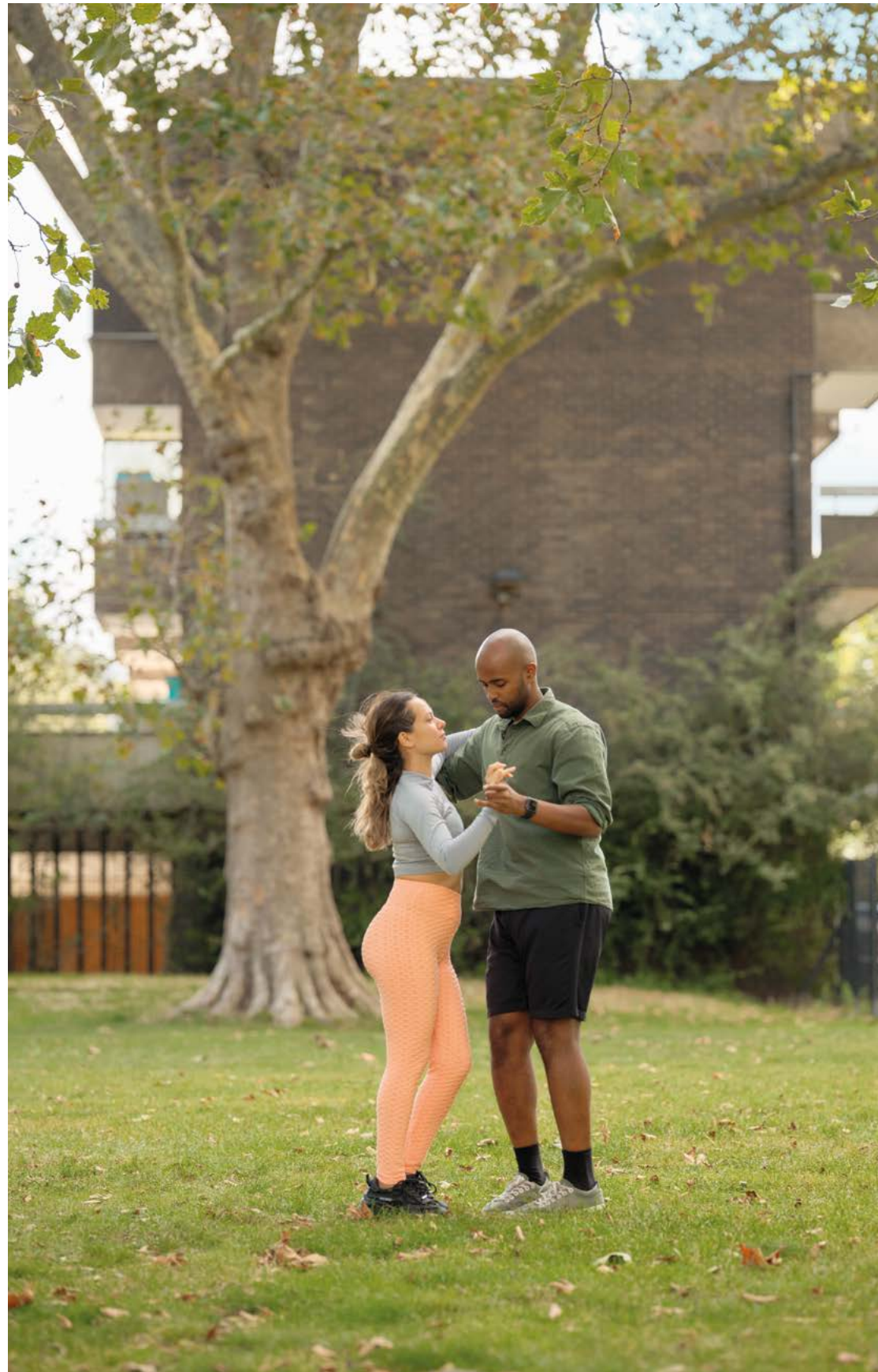


Image opposite and above:
Southwark Park
Image left: Southwark Park
Sports and Athletics Centre

Connected & Inclusive



Connecting Canada Water's health and wellbeing offer is a series of pedestrian walkways which meander alongside banks of water and through green parks. This 5km route around the local area only requires crossing a main road once. As part of both British Land's and Art-Invest's regeneration, new public realm will be provided, allowing ample opportunities to sit, pause and rest.

Across Canada Dock, British Land is developing a 170m boardwalk alongside steps down to the water's edge, plus an amphitheatre, dipping pond and pergola. The plans will transform Canada Dock into a place where people can move, connect with nature and enjoy being close to the water.

Over the coming years, Canada Water will be the home of new residents, employers and employees. By supporting a local sports-based vision now, British Land and Art-Invest Real Estate are strengthening the future infrastructure and facilities that will connect existing communities with those incoming communities.

The future vision for Canada Water is for the local SSW Park cricket team to be made up of old and new residents and the sailing club on Greenland Dock to be a meeting point that brings people from different backgrounds and cultural experiences together. If this vision comes to life, it will illustrate perfectly the power of sport in the city.



CONCLUSION

From Barcelona to Bolton, Canada Water to Copenhagen, Paris to Powisle, local communities, developers, architects and city municipalities are finding innovative and inclusive models for how sport can be integrated into everyday urban life.

Despite the promise that different examples in this paper illustrate, everyday access to sport needs to be supercharged across the urban environment. The World Health Organisation has warned that almost 500 million people will develop heart disease, obesity, diabetes or other noncommunicable diseases attributed to physical inactivity by 2030 if governments don't take urgent action⁶³.

In the last 150 years, our cities have seen the relationship between sport and the urban environment go through different cycles of investment and development, reflecting the pressures, challenges and opportunities of that time. We are now at a juncture where a similar period of change and development is needed to ensure that our cities' sporting provision responds to the populace and context of today:

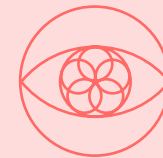
1. 84% of the UK population lives in cities⁶⁴.
2. In London, nearly 38% of the population does not participate in the recommended amount of physical activity, and the capital has the highest proportion of inactive children in the UK⁶⁵.
3. In the UK the total economic cost of sickness absence, lost productivity through worklessness, informal caregiving, and health-related productivity losses is estimated to be over £100 billion annually⁶⁶.

4. 39% of people say the current cost of living crisis is affecting their ability to be active⁶⁷.
5. In the most deprived areas in England, the prevalence of obesity or being overweight is 14 percentage points higher than in the least deprived areas⁶⁸.
6. 1.3 million teenage girls who once considered themselves 'sporty' have dropped out of exercise and activity after primary school⁶⁹.

In order to respond to these challenges, our cities need new and creative models for integrating sport, incidental play and informal movement into the everyday.

Sporting facilities can suffer from a legacy of poor design, lack of associated facilities, failure to enable inclusive usability and failure to mitigate the impacts of extreme weather events.

This research has established four key considerations that inform a place-based approach to the provision of sport in an urban context:



1. VISION-LED & HOLISTIC

Sport should sit at the heart of a holistic and evolving place-based vision connecting existing communities, future users and visitors.



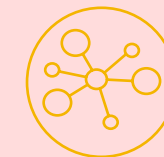
2. VARIED & CLIMATE-RESILIENT

Cities should ensure they provide a varied offer of sports facilities and clubs that reflects the rich diversity of the population, is a mix of informal and formal facilities, and is designed with the effects of a changing climate in mind.



3. CREATIVE & ON-SHOW

Urban places and spaces should pioneer creative approaches to how they integrate facilities and spaces for sport and movement into the everyday.



4. CONNECTED & INCLUSIVE

Sports facilities of all shapes and sizes should be 'wellbeing anchors' that underpin a local urban design that is inclusive, walkable, connected and green.

THESE CONSIDERATIONS ARE A TOOLKIT FOR CHANGE, INFORMING HOW COMMUNITIES, DEVELOPERS, ARCHITECTS AND LOCAL GOVERNMENTS CAN GENERATE GREATER SOCIAL VALUE BY ENABLING EVERYDAY ACCESS TO SPORT.

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