

SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL

# Sport and Physical Activity Strategy

2026



# INTRODUCTION

## Welcome to the Scottish Borders Strategy for Sport and Physical Activity

This strategy is our evolving blueprint for building a healthier, more active Scottish Borders. Developed in partnership with NHS Borders, Sport Scotland, Live Borders, Public Health Scotland, and Third Sector organisations, it reflects the voices and insights of our communities and stakeholders. It's a living document—designed to grow and adapt as we work together to achieve our goals.

Physical activity is more than just sport—it's about moving more in everyday life. Whether it's walking the dog, cycling through the countryside, or hiking in the hills, physical activity includes daily movement, active recreation, and organised sport. This inclusive definition, guided by the UK Chief Medical Officers, is central to our vision for a more active Borders.

Sport is a key part of physical activity—often competitive and organised, involving skill, effort, and teamwork. The Borders has a proud sporting culture, from school programmes

and community clubs to individuals competing on the world stage. Sport plays a vital role in bringing people together, building skills, and inspiring future generations.



## Why Sport and Physical Activity Matter

Being active isn't just about fitness—it's about feeling good, having fun, and connecting with others. Regular physical activity boosts mental and physical health, strengthens communities, and even supports the local economy. It helps us flourish—at every stage of life. Exercise can reduce the risk of major illnesses like heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes, and cancer, and lower the risk of early death by up to 30% (NHS). It's one of the most powerful tools we have to improve quality of life.

While 60% of people in the Borders meet recommended activity levels, some groups—such as older adults, people with disabilities, and those on lower incomes—are less likely to be active. The Scottish Household Survey (2022) shows a 20% gap in participation between the most and least deprived areas, and a similar gap between younger and older age groups.

This strategy aims to close those gaps by promoting behaviour change and helping more people meet the target of 150 minutes of activity per week.



# WELCOME

**As the Leader of Scottish Borders Council, I am thrilled to introduce the new Sport and Physical Activity Strategy for the Scottish Borders.**

Sport is deeply woven into the fabric of our region. The Scottish Borders has a proud history of producing exceptional athletes, including Olympic and Paralympic Gold Medallists, world record holders, international rugby and football players, and stars in athletics, hockey, and cycling. Our vibrant club network and reputation for hosting world-class events, like the recent UCI World Cycling Championships, are testaments to our region's commitment to excellence in sport. In the Scottish Borders, we don't just punch above our weight, we are truly a heavyweight region!

However, we cannot rest on our past successes. Just as flowers won't continue to bloom without care, we must nurture and adapt our approach to sport and physical activity in a changing world. This is why we are launching this new strategy not only to sustain the growth of sport but to inspire and engage people and communities across the Scottish Borders in leading active, healthy lives.

On a personal note, sport and a passion for Esports has been transformative in my own life. They have built my confidence, opened up opportunities I never imagined, and instilled in me lifelong habits of staying active. These experiences have taught me the value of perseverance, teamwork, and the importance of maintaining a healthy lifestyle. It is this passion for sport and its positive impact

and the value of Esports set out in a complimentary strategy, that drives my commitment to ensuring that every person in the Scottish Borders has the chance to experience these same benefits.

Our strategy is designed not just to keep up with the times, but to lead the way in ensuring that our sport and physical activities are fit for a modern world, all while holding onto the rich traditions that make our region unique. We will continually assess outcomes to make sure we are meeting the needs of our communities, helping people of all ages and backgrounds to thrive.

An active lifestyle offers benefits far beyond the playing field. From improving physical and mental health to fostering community spirit and creating opportunities for volunteering, the positive impacts of regular physical activity are profound. This strategy isn't about imposing a set of ideals; it's about opening up pathways and opportunities for everyone to explore and develop lifelong healthy habits.

Our strategy is designed to be as dynamic as the patterns of sport and physical activity themselves. We will continue to evolve and adapt it to meet the changing needs and interests of our communities. Together, let's make the Scottish Borders an even more active and healthy place now and for future generations.

Cllr Euan Jardine,  
Leader of the Council



# SPORT AT THE CENTRE: PEOPLE, PATHWAYS AND PARTICIPATION

This strategy is unapologetically sport-led. Sport in the Scottish Borders is a defining part of our culture, our communities, and our national contribution. Sport creates its own outcomes but has the added bonus of delivering outcomes for other agendas. This strategy places sport firmly at the centre, while recognising that people engage with sport in different ways and at different stages of life.

Sport in the Scottish Borders operates as a connected community system, sustained by people. It includes clubs, teams, and competitions; coaches, volunteers, officials, and organisers; schools and development pathways; facilities, places, and local sporting identity. No single organisation owns this system. Its strength comes from local leadership, shared effort, and community pride. This strategy is designed to support that reality, not replace it.

Coaches, volunteers, and officials are the backbone of sport. Without them, facilities are empty and pathways break down. This strategy treats people and pathways as core sporting infrastructure. Progress will be reflected in whether:

- more people are confident to coach, volunteer, or officiate
- clubs can sustain leadership and reduce burnout
- pathways are clear, visible, and navigable
- fewer participants are lost at key transition points
- talent and leadership are retained within the Scottish Borders

Putting sport at the centre does not mean narrowing who it is for. People do not need to be elite, competitive, or lifelong athletes to belong. Informal, entry-level, and recreational engagement matters. Confidence, enjoyment, and connection often come before competition. For some, sport leads to performance and excellence. For others, it leads to lifelong participation, volunteering, or leadership, but both strengthen our communities.

For many people, the first step into sport is simply moving more. Walking, running, cycling, informal recreation, and social activity are often the front door to sport. This strategy recognises physical activity as a valid starting point and a pathway into deeper sporting engagement, when and if people choose.

**Progress will be seen where:**

- more people feel confident to be active in their own way
- movement becomes a normal part of daily life
- informal participation feeds stronger sporting pathways
- people who felt sport “wasn’t for them” now feel included

**Physical activity supports sport it does not replace it.**

The Scottish Borders consistently delivers sporting success and leadership that outperforms its size. This strategy reflects that ambition: community-rooted, people-led, and confident on a national stage. It is intended to be used, tested, and judged by the strength of sport it helps sustain now and for the next generation.

# SUPPORTING ACTIVE LIVES IN THE SCOTTISH BORDERS



## Our vision for a healthier Scottish Borders

Our vision is simple yet ambitious: to ensure that everyone living, working, and visiting the Scottish Borders can take part in and benefit from sport and physical activity. We want to create opportunities for people of all ages and backgrounds to improve their health, wellbeing, and reach their full potential.

This vision supports the Scottish Borders Council's Good Health and Wellbeing theme, and aligns with the goals of NHS Borders and the Health and Social Care Partnership Strategic Commissioning Plan. Together, we aim to empower every resident to lead a healthier, more active life in the beautiful region we call home.

## Our principles

At Scottish Borders Council, we're passionate about helping everyone enjoy the benefits of sport and physical activity. Working with partners across the public, private, and voluntary sectors, we offer a wide range of opportunities—from modern sports facilities and school PE to walking groups and health referral programmes.

We believe being active is a right, not a privilege. That's why we invest in grassroots sport, fund local clubs, and support initiatives like active travel and 20mph zones to make our communities safer and healthier. Our goal is to increase participation and improve wellbeing across the Borders.

This strategy brings together schools, healthcare, transport, planning, workplaces, and communities to create more chances for people to get moving. It's about more than just health—it's about building stronger, more connected communities and a better quality of life for everyone.

Everything we do is guided by the Council Plan 2025/26 and the Scottish Borders Council Outcomes, ensuring our work delivers real impact for local people.

# WHAT ARE THE HIGH-LEVEL PRIORITIES FOR THE STRATEGY?

## Our Process

Our vision is that everyone in the Borders benefits from participating in sport and physical activity. To make this a reality, we must break down barriers to participation, encourage behaviour change, create opportunities for involvement in all forms of physical activity including sport, and ensure that people have the support they need to stay physically active every day.

To achieve this vision, we have adopted Public Health Scotland's new strategic systems-based approach to physical activity in Scotland. This approach focuses on eight key strategic delivery priorities:

1. **Enabling the Physical Activity and Sport system:** Building a robust and integrated system that supports sport and physical activity.
2. **Sport and Active Recreation for All:** Ensuring that sport and physical activities are inclusive and accessible to everyone, regardless of age, ability, or background.
3. **Active Places of Learning:** Promoting physical education, physical activity and sport within educational settings, ensuring schools and other learning environments encourage active lifestyles.
4. **Active Travel:** Encouraging walking, cycling, and other forms of active transport as part of daily routines.
5. **Active Places and Spaces:** Creating and maintaining accessible, well-designed spaces that inspire people to be active.

6. **Health and Social Care:** Integrating sport and physical activity into health and social care services to improve overall wellbeing.
7. **Communications and Public Education:** Raising awareness and educating the public about the benefits of physical activity and sport and how to incorporate them into daily life.
8. **Active Workplace:** Promoting physical activity and sport within the workplace to enhance employee health and productivity.



# Strategic Priority 1 – Enabling the System

## Aim

To build a connected, collaborative system that supports and allows sport and physical activity to flourish across the Scottish Borders.

## Objectives

### 1. Strengthen leadership and governance

Ensure clear accountability for implementation of the strategy across the system.

### 2. Strategic collaboration

Work together via strategic groups and forums to drive the best sport and physical activity outcomes for the Scottish Borders.

### 3. Data, intelligence and evidence

Make use of locally collated data to identify priority populations who have the most to gain from being physically active and support evidence based decision making and evaluation.

### 4. Community empowerment

We will explore participatory budgeting to give communities a say in how funding is allocated to support local sport and physical activity priorities.

### 5. Advocacy and rights-based approach

In the Scottish Borders, we will promote physical activity as a human right and as a public health priority.

### 6. Capacity building

Encourage coproduction and knowledge sharing across departments and partnerships to build sport and physical activity infrastructure.



# Strategic Priority 2 – Sport and Active Recreation for All

## Aim

To work in partnership across the Scottish Borders to ensure equitable and inclusive access to appropriate places, spaces, and services, with a particular focus on under-represented groups and those facing the greatest barriers.

## Objectives

### 1. Equity & Inclusion

Engage and listen to those who are least active, while also retaining existing participants. Alongside this, we will work with partners to reduce barriers and improve access for traditionally harder-to-reach groups, ensuring that opportunities in clubs and communities are welcoming, inclusive, and accessible to all.

### 2. Community & Club Development

Support clubs and community organisations to deliver inclusive, sustainable opportunities and empower them—through Community Sport Hubs and Clubsport networks—to collaborate with health and third sector partners to strengthen community wellbeing and participation.

### 3. Workforce Development

Grow and support a diverse network of coaches and volunteers, recognising their vital role in delivering sport and active recreation. An action plan will be developed to ensure workforce development is aligned with supporting lifelong participation across all communities.

### 4. Strategic Facility Planning

Develop a strategic approach to planning and delivering sporting facilities across the Scottish Borders, ensuring they are accessible, affordable, and tailored to meet the needs of local communities.

### 5. Public Health & Economic Impact

Strengthen the public health role of community sport clubs and promote



the Scottish Borders as a destination for sport, physical activity, and health-related investment and tourism to boost local participation and wellbeing.

### 6. Performance & Inspiration

We will support elite athletes through the Athlete Support Programme and use their success to inspire participation and community pride.

### 7. Innovation & Engagement

Explore Esports as a way to engage new audiences, aligning with the Digital Learning & Esports Strategy to broaden participation through innovative approaches.



# Strategic Priority 3 – Active Places of Learning

## Aim

To embed sport and physical activity across all levels of education in the Scottish Borders by creating active places for learning and promoting movement throughout the school day and beyond.

## Objectives

### 1. Implement a PEPAS Policy

Implement a consistent Physical Education, Physical Activity & Sport policy across Borders schools, covering curriculum, training, leadership, club links, and risk assessment.

### 2. Outdoor Learning

Introduce a standardised Outdoor Learning Policy to support active engagement with nature across all schools.

### 3. Active Travel

Integrate active travel into the Council's strategy, promote it through schools, deliver bikeability training, and implement School Travel Plans.

### 4. Workforce development

Provide training for teachers and early years staff in active play, PE, outdoor learning, physical literacy, and inclusive practices.

### 5. Facility design

Ensure education and childcare facilities are designed to support indoor and outdoor activity and are accessible to all in Scottish Borders communities.



# Strategic Priority 4 – Active Travel

## Aim

Prioritise active travel by improving infrastructure, promoting behaviour change, enhancing road safety, and engaging communities—leading to more people walking, wheeling, and cycling across the Borders.

## Objectives

### 1. Delivery of the Active Travel Strategy

Ensure the recommendations/opportunities listed are incorporated into the development of the Active Travel Strategy.

### 2. Events and legacy

Use our UCI City Region status as a catalyst for meaningful change and progress, with events like the UCI World Championships and Tour of Britain.

### 3. Road safety approach

Trial 40 mph limits on quiet rural roads to support safe walking and cycling. Balance streetlighting for safety, cost, and light pollution. Maintain active travel routes in line with the Road Asset Management Plan (RAMP)

### 4. Community-based active travel programmes

Deliver inclusive programmes for walking, wheeling, running, cycling, and horse riding, with training and support to build confidence. Work with schools, community groups, and local partners to embed active travel into daily life.

### 5. Community and youth engagement

Embed placemaking and integrate place and town plans into strategy development. We will facilitate community conversations and engagement sessions, and involve young people through the Youth Engagement Strategy to help shape infrastructure and programmes.



# Strategic Priority 5 – Active Places and Spaces

## Aim

Places and spaces across the Scottish Borders are designed, created, and maintained to support physical activity in everyday life.

## Objectives

### 1. Urban Design & Infrastructure

Support active, liveable environments by applying National Planning Framework 4 and Active by Design principles in the planning and improvement of public amenities, including community campuses and care villages.

### 2. Access to Public Spaces

Promote inclusive access to green, blue, and recreational spaces through community engagement, placemaking, and clear communication.

### 3. Partnership with LIVE Borders

Continue working with LIVE Borders to deliver the Transformation and Facilities Programme, ensuring sustainable and accessible services

### 4. Placemaking & Active Travel

Factor in travel distances to facilities in placemaking and development plans to encourage active travel and physical activity

### 5. Strategic Alignment

Support delivery of updated Green Space and Pitch Strategies and raise awareness of existing SBC strategies, including the Public Play Facilities Strategy.



### 6. Collaboration & Knowledge Sharing

Maintain collaboration with other local authorities and forums like APSE to share knowledge and improve public service delivery.



# Strategic Priority 6 – Active Health and Social Care

## Aim

To embed a consistent approach to physical activity in routine NHS health and social care across the Scottish Borders.

## Objectives

### 1. Healthcare & Physical Activity Partnerships

Work with NHS Borders, the Scottish Borders Health & Social Care Partnership, and physical activity providers to integrate the NHS Physical Activity Pathway into appropriate clinical settings across primary and secondary care.

### 2. Staff Knowledge & Training

Ensure Health & Social Care Partnership staff have the knowledge and confidence to promote physical activity by embedding the National Physical Activity Pathway e-learning and aligning with Health and Care Professions Council Public Health Standards.

### 3. Social Prescribing & Referrals

Continue to develop social prescribing and exercise referral through What Matters Hubs, the H&SCP Wellbeing Programme, health pathways, LIVE Borders Disability Wellbeing membership, and sports club volunteering.

### 4. Referral Standards & Service Design

Follow Public Health Scotland's Physical Activity Referral Standards when commissioning, reviewing, and delivering referral services across the Scottish Borders.



# Strategic Priority 7 – Communications and Public Education

## Aim

Communications and public education established as an integral component of the system-based approach to physical activity in the Scottish Borders

## Objectives

### 1. Targeted programme of engagement

Develop and implement a communications plan to complement the actions highlighted within the sport and physical activity strategy.



# Strategic Priority 8 – Active Workplaces

## Aim

Promote everyday physical activity in the workplace by reducing sedentary behaviour and increasing active travel to and from work, supporting healthier lifestyles and contributing to environmental sustainability.

## Objectives

### 1. Leadership & Culture

Lead by promoting a healthy workplace culture that supports physical activity and reduces sedentary behaviour.

### 2. Policy Development

Work with partners to strengthen workplace policies that enable physical activity, such as flexible working and active travel support.

### 3. Workplace Programmes

Develop and promote initiatives like walking meetings, wellbeing hour participation, and activity-focused wellbeing allocations for staff.

**4. Active Workplace Design**  
Support partners in designing workplaces that encourage movement, incorporating facilities like showers, changing rooms, and bike storage.





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