



**LONDON
SPORT**

Let's Move London: A Manifesto for a Healthier and More Active City

Executive Summary

This manifesto sets out what the next Mayor of London must do to ensure that every Londoner can live a longer, healthier and happier life through being active. With 1 in 6 premature deaths caused by inactivity, our blueprint for a more active city is ambitious but critical to the health and wellbeing of millions of Londoners.

We know the transformative power of sport and physical activity. From tackling obesity and increasing life expectancy, to improving a child's academic performance and mental health, access to sport can change people's lives. That's why we must be bold in our approach to tackle inactivity.

Our manifesto also offers the opportunity to finally break the link between inactivity and inequality - a link which has been emboldened by the pandemic and the current cost-of-living crisis. Our policies seek to address these inequalities head-on, championing the power of sport and physical activity to break down barriers, foster inclusivity, and build healthier and happier communities.

Finally, while our policies will provide better access for London's varying inactive communities and help them overcome their specific barriers to being active, they will also address other challenges that the city faces. Among other benefits, building an active city will enable us to tackle the climate crisis, redirect children away from criminal activities, and save money for the NHS.

This Manifesto has been supported by:



Our Asks of the Next Mayor of London

To help improve the lives of communities across London, we urge the next Mayor of London to show leadership on tackling inactivity, and to commit to the following actions:

1. Activating new developments

- **Ask:** Further embed physical activity, mental health and wellbeing into the blueprint for planning and design of major developments, including private and social housing.
- **How:** Recognising the need for dedicated and accessible spaces for informal sports and physical activities, collaborating with London Sport's team on the design process and making community engagement processes more inclusive.

2. Making better use of London's spaces

- **Ask:** Provide incentives to enable and encourage the use of underutilised and vacant spaces to better serve local communities.
- **How:** Provide guidance for landowners on the processes and costs of transforming underused spaces, work with and supporting local authorities in mapping and evaluating London's empty and non-traditional spaces, and extend the support given to schools to provide community access to accessible sports facilities.

3. Future-proofing youth sport and physical activity

- **Ask:** Protect and future-proof sport and physical activity provision for young Londoners.
- **How:** Ensure that young Londoners are able to learn crucial life skills by protecting London's swimming pools, provide bursaries to train swim instructors, and pledge ongoing support from the Violence Reduction Unit to provide diversionary sport and physical activity provision for young people at risk.

4. Promoting walking and wheeling to school

- **Ask:** Enable schools, parents, and children to promote and participate in walking, cycling and manually scooting to school safely and help foster healthy active habits for life.
- **How:** Expand accreditation and participation in TfL's Travel for Life program, work with London Sport and its networks to engage schools in active travel initiatives, and provide secure storage for bikes and scooters in public spaces and leisure centres, particularly on TfL estates.

5. Creating environments that ensure women's safety

- **Ask:** Support local authorities to ensure safe access to green and public spaces for women and girls to be active.
- **How:** Offer a wider range of accessible equipment and facilities within green and public spaces, engaging community groups to ensure women's safety is prioritised and collaborate with London Sport to develop these spaces.

Whilst we face an inactivity crisis, with 4 in 10 adults – and less than half of children – not meeting the recommended levels of activity, our asks of the next Mayor of London will help drive a healthier, happier and more active city for millions of people, whilst also ensuring that inclusivity, community engagement, and long-term sustainability are at the forefront of key policymaking within London.

As a leader in grassroots sport & physical activity, we look forward to supporting the Mayor achieve the ambitions set out in this manifesto and beyond.

1. Activating New Developments

Ask: To further embed sport, physical activity and wellbeing into the blueprint for planning and design of major developments, including private and social housing.

- **Sub ask 1:** Give a greater focus to informal sport and physical activity, including a dedicated space for ball games, within the planning and design of major developments.
- **Sub ask 2:** Work with London Sport's team to explore how accessible opportunities for physical activity can be embedded into the design process.
- **Sub ask 3:** Make community engagement processes more accessible and inclusive to reflect the diversity of local communities.

As housing will continue to be a priority for any Mayor of London, it is critical that new developments include appropriate outside provision for residents. The benefits of having access to outdoor spaces, and in particular green spaces, are well documented. It not only promotes a healthier lifestyle by encouraging exercise, play and other outdoor activities, but also improves quality of life and wellbeing, increases social interaction, and contributes to a more sustainable living environment. This provision must therefore be a crucial part of any future development. We are pleased to see current efforts to support mental health and wellbeing within planning, with partnerships such as ThriveLDN that help build communities, networks, emotional resilience and more. However, **we must go further in giving a greater focus and priority for physical activity, mental health and wellbeing within the planning and design of new major developments.**

Of course, the parameters set within current regulations¹ and guidance are welcomed as they look to ensure that appropriate spaces are provided for people to play and be active. However, **the importance of sport must be recognised within planning policy and decisions on major developments. A flexible approach is needed to provide space for a range of sport and physical activities, rather than limiting this to communal play space. This should include dedicated space in which ball games are permitted.** The common restrictions on ball games within housing developments are disproportionate and have been found to have a negative impact on the sense of community². It is important that the Mayor works with G15 Housing Associations and local councils to remove these signs. London Sport's team has a wide range of experience and expertise in consulting on and developing active environments. **The Mayor should commit to working with London Sport to further embed physical activity into the design process,** with special consideration given to the accessibility of these spaces, to ensure that all children, including those with disabilities are able to fully participate and enjoy these spaces too.

1. Activating New Developments

In addition, we note that the GLA Population Yield Calculator is used to calculate the number and age of children expected to live in a new housing development. However, the dataset used was last updated in 2019 and the GLA has stated this will not likely be updated again before 2024. With London's rising population³, **it is critical that the GLA uses up-to-date information so that the provision of sport, physical activity and communal play space that is provided is appropriate and reflective of the needs of children and young people in London, particularly those who have specific accessibility requirements.** The dataset used by the GLA should also include short and long-term projections to account for the needs of future Londoners too.

Lastly, it is important that local residents and the community are also consulted on these spaces. Early and effective community engagement increases the visibility and understanding of issues and empowers communities to have their say over decisions that impact their homes, spaces and lives. However, community engagement processes are often criticised as a box-ticking exercise⁴, proving to be inaccessible, full of specialist jargon, or unproductive consultation methods, and it is often the most underserved and underrepresented Londoners who suffer most from these often ineffective processes. To improve on this and make the process more inclusive, **we call on the Mayor to work with local authorities, developers and community groups to make community engagement processes more representative and aligned to the wants and needs of the local community.**



1. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2021 sets out planning policies for England and how these should be applied, providing a framework for locally prepared plans for development.

The London Plan 2021 sets out requirements for residential communal spaces:

- Policy D6 'Housing quality and standards', stating that outside spaces should provide sufficient space to meet the needs of different residents, be accessible, and supports social interaction and play (Table 3.2).
- Policy S4: 'Play and Informal Recreation' of the London Plan also addresses communal play spaces, requiring residential development proposals to incorporate 10sqm of good quality accessible play space per child.
- Sport England also provides advice and guidance on the planning process, setting out its 'planning for sport principles'.

2. <https://www.childinthecity.org/2023/06/29/no-ball-games-policy-gets-the-red-card/>

3. [Population changes over the decades](#), Trust for London

4. [Making the case for co-production](#), Future for London (2023)

2. Making Better Use of London's Spaces

Ask: Provide incentives to enable and encourage the use of underutilised and vacant spaces to better serve local communities.

- **Sub ask 1:** That the Mayor and local authorities produce guidance for landowners on the processes and costs involved in transforming underused spaces.
- **Sub ask 2:** Support local authorities in mapping and evaluating London's empty and non-traditional spaces to promote awareness of the opportunities available for sport and physical activity.
- **Sub ask 3:** Extend support to schools to enable community use of accessible sports facilities.

Currently, there is untapped potential for London's underutilised and vacant spaces to be used to the benefit of the community. There is a clear supply that exists in London, with Councils owning at least 442 buildings and facilities that have been out of use across 25 London Boroughs, an average of 24 per borough⁵. **These vacant spaces offer a perfect opportunity for communities to use for sport and physical activity, either on a permanent or temporary basis, and to not take advantage of these spaces would be a missed opportunity for any Mayor.** Due to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, and more recently the cost-of-living crisis, there is demand for these spaces too. In March 2023, London Sport worked with local partners to develop the Lewisham CommUNITY Space⁶, a once-vacant shopping unit which has been transformed into a wellbeing space which provides a safe and comfortable environment for the local community to be active. The space offers free physical activities and has been turned into a "warm zone", providing meals, support and advice to the local community, particularly to those who face the greatest challenges of inequality in the borough.

Unfortunately, there are a number of barriers to making better use of London's empty spaces, particularly for temporary 'meanwhile spaces' – typically used for arts, culture and sports. The first hurdle is the lack of awareness from landowners around the opportunities that are available from reusing buildings. There is flexibility in UK planning rules, where particular buildings can be repurposed without planning permission (buildings falling under 'Use Class E – Commercial, Business and Service' (includes indoor sport, recreation or fitness)). A building falling under another use will need planning permission to change to indoor sport, recreation or fitness, however, in principle this could be acceptable and planning permission could be granted. Secondly, landowners that are aware of the opportunities often overestimate the risks and undervalue the benefits of giving over a site to meanwhile use⁷. This is because the social value can be harder to quantify, and it is often more cost-effective to do nothing, rather than making use of the space. It is important that the Mayor and local authorities work with landowners and the community to better understand the benefits and processes required to transform these spaces to better serve local

2. Making Better Use of London's Spaces

residents. **Additional guidance is needed for landowners, including information on permitted development rights and what costs should be factored in.** This will help landowners overcome some of these barriers, and encourage increased take-up of unused spaces, in particular for indoor sport, recreation and fitness spaces. **London Sport can provide evidence to support the use of informal spaces for physical activity, with case studies and guidance that supports community organisations. The Mayor should work with London Sport to support connections to both sporting and non-sporting bodies to ensure a holistic approach.**

It is equally important for the Mayor to support local authorities to map and evaluate the wider range of available empty and non-traditional spaces in London, and provide a centralised database to increase awareness of the opportunities that exist. This should include mapping properties owned by the GLA, TfL and Met Police. Community groups, small businesses, community interest companies and landlords must also be consulted to consider how these spaces can be used to support the health and wellbeing of local communities, as well as exploring what incentives are available for landowners through tax and regulatory systems to support community use of underused, underutilised and vacant space.

In addition, the Mayor should also explore the traditional sports spaces that are currently underutilised. Currently, 39% of sports facilities are located on school sites⁸, and 62% of school sports facilities are available for community use, but the opportunity to access these facilities outside of school hours is still not yet being fully recognised. Opening school facilities and ensuring that they are accessible for everyone would be a cost-effective and easy win for the Mayor and London's communities. The Mayor should go further than the current support provided by existing initiatives, such as the Open Doors programme, as well as the Opening Schools Facilities (OSF) Fund which London Sport is delivering to around 200 schools. **The Mayor must work with schools that are not currently enabling community use of accessible sports facilities.**

5. [London Assembly: Call for empty buildings to be put to use](#), BBC News (2022)

6. <https://london-sport.org/our-work/community-hub-lewisham/>

7. [Meanwhile in London: Making use of London's empty spaces](#), Centre for London (2018)

8. [How we can increase community use of school sports facilities](#), Sport England (2016)



3. Future-Proofing Youth Sport and Physical Activity

Ask: Protect and future-proof sport and physical activity provision for young Londoners.

- **Sub ask 1:** Pledge on-going support from the Violence Reduction Unit to provide diversionary sport and physical activity provision for children and young people at risk.
- **Sub ask 2:** Commit to protecting London's swimming pools from widespread closures.
- **Sub ask 3:** Provide bursaries to help train swim instructors and ensure all schools fulfil their statutory obligations to deliver swimming lessons, so that children and young people can develop crucial life skills.

Youth sport and physical activity makes an important contribution to fostering physical, emotional, educational, and social wellbeing, and provides a wide range of opportunities to help young individuals thrive and succeed in various aspects of their lives. The youth services that provide these opportunities are a safe space for young people to enjoy recreational, leisure and physical activities, such as sports, dance, arts, drama, and other hobbies that can foster creativity, physical fitness, and a sense of accomplishment. However, as a result of continued financial constraints following the pandemic and more recently the cost-of-living crisis, young people are facing increasing barriers to sport and physical activity, and London's youth services continue to face huge cuts across the UK and in London, with over £36 million cut from annual youth service budgets over the last decade⁹.

We are greatly concerned by the impact this will have on worsening the child inactivity crisis currently facing London, with less than half of children achieving the recommended levels of sport and physical activity, and 1 in 12 doing no activity at all¹⁰. **The greatest impact will be felt most by children and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds as there is a strong proven link between inactivity and inequality.** Figures from our recent cost-of-living report show that children in the most deprived areas in the capital are three times as likely to be inactive compared to those in the least deprived areas, and 8 in 10 of lower-income families report lower activity levels due to the rising cost of living. The gap between the most active and least active ethnicity groups has persistently been over 10% over the last five years, suggesting that not enough has been done to tackle the barriers to activity for ethnic minority children and young people. The support provided via the Go! London Fund has been essential in empowering young people to fulfil their potential. It is important that this fund is maintained, and where possible is increased, so that London Sport can continue to work with funders and partners to achieve our shared goals.

We welcome the recent £7.4m investment from the Violence Reduction Unit (VRU) into providing varied opportunities, protections and activities for children and young people through the summer and beyond. Youth sport

3. Future-Proofing Youth Sport and Physical Activity

and physical activity proves to be an invaluable youth crime prevention tool, with research showing that children and young people who have access to structured extracurricular activities are deterred from anti-social and criminal behaviour¹¹. We are encouraged to see this investment as a crucial step towards overcoming barriers to young people being safe and active, particularly during the school holidays. However, with some experts predicting that pressures from the cost-of-living crisis will continue to be felt until 2028¹², this support must continue beyond its two-year investment so that any progress made is not diminished.

The Mayor must pledge on-going support from the VRU beyond this period, and works in consultation with children and young people in communities to evaluate challenges and opportunities.

We are also concerned by the decreasing opportunities that children and young people have to access swimming pools and learn to swim, a crucial life skill which can be the difference between life and death. Our recent report shows that we are at risk of losing 40% of available pools by 2030, and that London is estimated to face a shortage of 157 ‘average-sized’ swimming pools compared to population size¹³. It is crucial that we safeguard the future of our pools and support more young Londoners to swim, with a focused effort to address historically low participation levels for Black and Asian schoolchildren.

In addition, there is a shortage of swim instructors available for children and young people, and figures from Swim England show that 21,000 children in the capital could be at risk of missing out¹⁴, - particularly those from more deprived areas. This is particularly concerning as child drownings have increased by 85% across England between 2019-22¹⁵. Our research shows that 79% of people see swimming as an essential life skill, for example to ensure water safety, and 75% of Londoners see it as especially important for children. **We therefore ask the Mayor to commit to providing bursaries to train swim instructors for children and young people**, particularly from communities which reflect their children, thereby recognising the benefits of swimming, promoting water safety, and fostering inclusive and accessible aquatics-based activities. We also note that Sport England’s Active Lives Children and Young People Survey 2021/2022 found that only 30% of children from low family affluence can swim 25 metres unaided, with black and Asian children ranking the lowest in their capability to swim in comparison to other ethnic groups in London. **The Mayor should also ensure that London’s schools are meeting their statutory obligation to provide swimming for students**, with the expectation that **all students** should be able to swim 25 meters unaided by the time they leave primary education.



9. [London's Youth Service Cuts 2011-21: A Blighted Generation](#), Sian Berry AM (2021)

10. [Children & Young People Activity Levels](#), London Sport (2022)

11. [Youth Centres and the Prevention of Knife Crime](#), Zach Thomson (2021)

12. [When will the cost-of-living crisis end and will prices in the UK ever go down?](#), The Big Issue (2023)

13. [Exploring the Value of Swimming and Public Pools](#), London Sport (2023)

14. [Deeper Dive into the impact of the swimming teacher shortage across England](#), Swim England (2023).

15. [Parents urged to talk about water safety after rise in child drownings in England](#), The Guardian (2023)

4. Promoting Walking and Wheeling to School

Ask: Enable schools, parents, and children to promote and participate in walking, cycling and manually scooting to school safely - to help foster healthy active habits for life.

- **Sub ask 1:** Map and work with schools that have not engaged with TfL's Travel for Life programme to ensure increased take up and eligibility for accreditation.
- **Sub ask 2:** Work with London Sport to engage its network to highlight the Travel for Life programme and other active travel initiatives aimed at children and young people.
- **Sub ask 3:** Provide appropriate and secure storage for bikes and scooters in public spaces and leisure centres, including on TfL estates, to encourage active travel participation.

The benefits of active travel are well documented. It provides clear benefits to people's physical and mental health, and is a cost-effective mode of transport which also helps reduce traffic congestion and subsequently improves air quality. It will also be a significant lever for the Mayor of London to use in efforts against the cost-of-living crisis and towards the climate agenda. We believe it is critical to install active travel early-on in life as a healthy habit, starting at school.

We welcome the efforts of TfL, providing grants, programmes and other benefits through the Travel for Life programme to accredited schools to help promote safe and sustainable active travel. Currently, nearly half of London's 3,313 schools are accredited by the Travel for Life programme, which is a significant uptake from the 34 schools that had achieved accreditation to the programme formerly known as STARS in 2015. However, we recognise there is still a long way to go to ensure that children and young people across London are participating in active travel, including those with special education needs and disabilities (SEND).



4. Promoting Walking and Wheeling to School

The Mayor must prioritise mapping and working with London's schools which are not currently engaging with the Travel for Life programme to ensure that they realise the benefits and opportunities available through achieving accreditation, whilst also ensuring that the benefits of the programme are extended to students with SEND. **The Mayor should lean on the expertise within London team to engage its network of schools to highlight the Travel for Life programme and other travel initiatives, such as Bikeability and Living Streets' WOW initiative.** An awareness campaign around active travel would also help parents and children understand the benefits and would incentivise schools to participate.

In addition, appropriate provision for secure storage is needed for bikes and manual scooters, as the potential for theft is a major deterrent for those considering participating in active travel. Additionally, victims of theft often stop participating in active travel altogether, with 25% of people giving up cycling after having a bicycle stolen¹⁶.

To encourage Londoners to get on their bikes, the Mayor will need to prioritise providing secure bike storage across London to reflect the importance of active travel. London's spaces should also be evaluated on their potential to provide additional storage, with a particular focus given to all leisure centre facilities, as well as TfL's underground stations, where Londoners travelling long distances could be encouraged to travel actively for a part of their journey. We note this could also help ease pressures caused as a result of industrial action.



16. <https://turvec.com/blog/bicycle-association-publish-new-guide-on-bicycle-security>

5. Creating Environments that Ensure Women's Safety

Ask: Support local authorities to ensure safe access to green and public spaces for women and girls to be active.

- **Sub ask 1:** Provide a wider range of accessible equipment and facilities within green and public spaces to encourage women and girls to be active, using a gender-sensitive approach to budgeting.
- **Sub ask 2:** Engage with community groups for women and girls during the development of green and public spaces.
- **Sub ask 3:** Work with London Sport to further develop our Space for Girls project, to deliver safe environments for women and girls to be active.

Safety is one of the largest barriers for Londoners to participate and enjoy sport and physical activity. It's important now more than ever that safety is prioritised in public spaces, as two thirds of Londoners are changing their exercise behaviours in light of the current cost-of-living, with 1 in 5 increasing their use of free activities.

Creating spaces that are inclusive will be a crucial step. Over half (54%) of girls feel their local parks have not been designed with the consideration of needs. Where local strategies and guidance include provision for spaces for sport and physical activity, they often produce facilities such as skateparks and multi-use games areas (MUGAs), which are often predominately used by men and boys. This is a problem when 56% of girls feel uncomfortable asking boys to make space for them and their friends. **Therefore, the Mayor must support local authorities to provide a wider range of facilities within these spaces that appeal to everyone, using a gender-sensitive approach to the budgeting allocation.** This would help provide facilities more suited to women and girls and help prevent further exacerbating gender inequalities. Furthermore, the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) recognises gender as a protected characteristic, requiring local authorities to consider proactively encouraging greater participation.

In addition, 54% of girls want to help shape these spaces, but feel that they have rarely been asked their opinion and feel they are not listened to. **The Mayor must also support local authorities to engage with community groups for women and girls in the development of these spaces,** as this will not only make them more invested in the spaces, but also feel a sense of ownership and ultimately increase willingness to be physically active in them.

We urge the Mayor to ensure that these public spaces are appropriately lit, maintained and, where appropriate, include CCTV. The Mayor should also extend the public awareness campaign on women's safety to educate residents, visitors, and businesses about the issues faced by women and girls in green and public spaces and promote a culture of respect, equality, and zero tolerance for harassment.

5. Creating Environments that Ensure Women's Safety

London Sport is working to create safe, welcoming hubs in key London communities for women and girls to be physically active through our Space for Girls project. As experts in London, we are uniquely positioned to convene activity providers and local communities, to offer the right data and evidence to policy makers, landowners and developers. **The Mayor should work with London Sport to further develop the Space for Girls project** and deliver safe environments for women and girls to be active.

We commend the current work of the Night Safety Charter, which recognises the issue and is working with Sport England, ukactive, The Gym Group and a range of public and private operators to offer advice and guidance to gyms and leisure facilities to help make women feel safer. However, this work must be extended beyond formalised environments. Through supporting the above actions, the Mayor would demonstrate a strong commitment to ensuring safe access to public spaces for women and girls, fostering an inclusive and vibrant city that prioritises their wellbeing and encourages their participation in public physical activity, creating healthy habits for life.



How Can We Work Together?

We are confident that the next Mayor will continue the legacy of working closely with London Sport and relying on our expertise, services and experience. This includes our ongoing offer to:

- **Commission and share key insights and data** to improve our understanding of London's audiences and areas of need.
- **Provide strategic guidance on Active Design**, including best practice for existing spaces for sport and physical activity.
- **Build connections into communities and clubs** who are already working in underserved areas across the capital.
- **Support community clubs and other organisations** to improve activity levels through London Sport's funding opportunities.
- **Share case studies** of how underutilised and vacant spaces can be transformed to better serve local residents.
- **Build relationships between National Governing Bodies** and other organisations to improve the access to sports and other activities.
- **Share learnings of London Sport projects**, including our Space for Girls initiative, the Opening School Facilities fund, and the Lewisham CommUNITY Space.
- **Lead the use of technological and digital solutions** in the sector through our Sport Tech Hub.



To find out more about London Sport's themes, projects and insights, please visit our website at londonsport.org



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