

Alexandra Park Sports Hub – Milnbank Housing Association

Background

The Sports Hub in Alexandra Park has been a venue in some form for several years, with a variety of activity being delivered from the site. The main area around the sports hub is made up of four bowling greens and the Alexandra Park Golf Course.



Over the past few years Milnbank Housing Association (MHA) have been operating the sports hub as a bike hub. There have been several cycling initiatives delivered from the hub, from a popular commuter cycling scheme and free daily bike hire through to a repair workshop with maintenance classes for cyclists. These projects were delivered by funded posts hosted by MHA.

During the initial lockdown, MHA appointed John Gormlie as the new Sports Hub Coordinator to run and develop new activity for the local community and local clubs. This appointment was key to the success of the Alexandra Park Sports Hub and the many local clubs and organisations involved in delivering activity from the park. With the exceptional demand an additional member of staff has recently been added to the team to provide support with the sports hub and bike related activities.

What did you expect to achieve?

The appointment of a coordinator at the sports hub was expected to kickstart and develop some key activities in the park, linked to some grant funding. The coordinator would also help develop strong links with local residents and community groups to encourage more local people to become more active.



The aim was to have a safe and welcoming environment for the local residents to go to for information and support on activities being delivered locally.

What we actually did?

Given the unique situation that the country finds itself in now, the outcome from the appointment of a sports coordinator was overwhelming. The lack of indoor and leisure facilities led to many local groups and deliverers approaching the Alexandra Sports Hub for support to help them to deliver their sport and fitness.

This led to a full programme of activities happening in the park on days and evenings seven days a week. The Boost Your Health project by MHA is currently delivering 15 free group fitness sessions per week which includes T'ai Chi, Yoga, boot camps and holistic activities. Core activities include hundreds of school children every week from the local primary, nursery schools and local families. A variety of local sports clubs, personal trainers and youth clubs use the sports hub on a weekly basis throughout the year. Daily activities included youth clubs, organised athletics coaching, volleyball,

football, lawn tennis, a putting green and social bowling. With hundreds of persons of all age groups attending sports hub was at times operating a full capacity with numerous activities ongoing at the same time. Through effective operational management all groups were fully supported and accommodated at the hub by the MHA team as part of their wider role community engagement.

This service delivery has attracted many more local people to the North side of Alexandra Park and allowed them to enjoy the range of activities at the hub, on the greens or in the area around the hub. This includes free community Wi-Fi indoors and outdoors as well as access to refreshments and public toilets.



During the recent lockdown, MHA have managed to buy new sports and fitness equipment for local people to use at the hub. The sports coordinator facilitates a programme of activities delivered by trusted coaches and club instructors with a full range of options for local people.

In addition to the new activities, the sports hub has hosted a local cross-country running event in partnership with Shettleston Harriers. This has now led to the park hosting the Western District Cross-Country Relays in October. This is the second biggest participation event for athletics in Scotland, with over 50 clubs bring teams to compete in the park.



What differences we actually made?

In a time when the country has struggled to get active and health issues were on the rise, the activity at the hub has allowed many local groups and residents to find a new purpose. Encouraging local residents to become active and engage in healthy activities has been the biggest success of the sports hub. There are a lot of people who would not have engaged in organised activities, now they are able to participate in activity at a local outdoor venue.

Challenges and Changes or Learning for the future?

The challenge we faced was capacity to deliver everything that was asked for. The timetabling of local groups and activities was vital to the success. The constant support of the MHA Management Committee and MHA team of volunteers has been pivotal in providing the variety of activities in a sustainable manner. Further developments are imminent at the sports hub to commence health walk groups, jogging activities and a digital café which should provide a further boost to the mental and physical health and wellbeing in the local community and target social isolation.

As we leave the latest lockdown and we look to a brighter future; the sports hub will continue to engage all the local people in positive activity. It is hoped that the routine of regular exercise and social engagement will continue as we see more venues and clubs open.

Reacting to the changing landscape of physical activity will be key to the continued success of the sports hub. MHA will continue to offer sport, physical activity, social activities and fitness programmes at the hub for the benefit of the wider community.