active lincolnshire

Autumn Report South Holland

Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning
Development phase | Sport England



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Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) framework for the South Holland place-based work

Introduction

This report presents a summary of the learning, reflections and insights gathered during phase 1 of the Active Lincolnshire's place work in South Holland. The aim is to portray what we have learned about the place so far capturing both the progress made and the challenges encountered throughout the development phase of the award. The report also highlights how these insights will inform the next phase of the development and strengthen future approaches to collaboration, engagement and evaluation.

The process has focused in both individual and collective reflection, using structured prompts and guided questions to explore what has been learned what has worked well and what could be strengthened as we move into full award.

Methods statement

During the past year, we have worked alongside communities across South Holland to understand the practical and systemic barriers that prevent some residents from being physically active. The resulting evidence shaped the South Holland Local Theory of Change and the delivery plan's work strands as the programme enters its place expansion phase. Evaluation is integral to delivery, not a separate reporting activity: evidence and community insight will be reviewed regularly to assess what is working, strengthen implementation and refine the Local Theory of Change.



Our research focused on priority MSOAs and included interviews with a wide range of stakeholders and residents. Some of this work took place in communities previously regarded as difficult to reach or reluctant to engage. By building trust and rapport, our Community Connector enabled residents to share rich, in-depth insights into the challenges experienced by people in underserved communities. This work also strengthened our understanding of the realities of rural life. Our experience in South Holland, following work in East Lindsey and Boston, revealed that Lincolnshire has varying degrees of rurality and that people's experiences and outcomes can differ from village to village. South Holland's priority MSOAs are at the most acute end of the rurality spectrum.

Main approach

We used a framework combining:

- **Quantitative evidence,** including participation, engagement, facility usage, workforce development, workplace activity and partnership involvement.

- **Qualitative insight,** including community feedback, lived experience, reflective diaries, learning logs, case studies and longitudinal impact stories.

- A continuous learning cycle | Capture | Analyse | Reflect | Adapt |

- We have committed to formal reviews of progress against the Local Theory of Change every six months from 2027.



Participant statement

Who we engaged with

The Development Award enabled extensive engagement with residents, community groups, schools, employers and stakeholders, including some of South Holland's most isolated communities.

Key achievements include:

- Community insight gathered through Pride in Place engagement.
- A commissioned rurality study involving more than 550 residents.
- Engagement with children, families and staff through Sutton Bridge Primary School.
- Work with agri-food employers to better understand barriers faced by shift workers.
- Development of trusted relationships within communities often described as "forgotten" or overlooked.
- Walking interviews with community members
- Interviews with members of key community groups including Sutton Bridge Nightlife café, Tae Kwando group, walking groups.

During the development phase, place-based research, community engagement and analysis of health and socioeconomic data revealed that rurality is experienced differently across the district and often more acutely than previously understood.

Our approach to understanding place and need has focused on building trusted relationships, listening to communities and understanding the underlying factors that influence participation.

A key part of this approach has been embedding a Community Connector within South Holland. We have placed particular emphasis on the isolated rural communities described as the “Forgotten Fens”. This has generated deeper local insight, strengthened partnerships and uncovered community assets and opportunities that may otherwise have remained unknown.

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Our Community Connector Dario Tanzillo explains:

“A significant part of the learning from the development phase has been the value of investing time in building trust and meaningful relationships within communities. As Active Community Connector, I have spent time listening to residents, attending local activities, meeting community leaders, and developing connections with schools, community groups and voluntary organisations, particularly within Sutton Bridge and the wider Forgotten Fens communities.

Through these relationships, particularly with Mary Middleton from Sutton Bridge Parish Council, local schools and sports clubs, we have gained a much deeper understanding of the realities of daily life in rural communities. These conversations have provided rich insight into the barriers people face, including transport, isolation, affordability, confidence and limited awareness of local opportunities. Some of these communities had previously been described as difficult to engage. However, by consistently showing up, listening and responding to local priorities, strong and trusted relationships have been established, enabling honest conversations and ongoing dialogue. This has reinforced the importance of a community-led approach, where trust is built over time and local people are recognised as experts in their own communities.”

We've used a range of approaches to hear different perspectives, including community conversations, stakeholder engagement, asset mapping and structured questionnaires.

Our community insight has been combined with wider evidence, including analysis of local strategies and policies and learning from Pride in Place, which generated more than 1,300 responses during 2024–25. This has enabled us to identify recurring themes and understand the wider systems and structural factors influencing participation. Importantly, we have sought to understand why barriers exist, not simply what communities want.

We also commissioned Healthwatch Lincolnshire to explore the realities of rural living across Long Sutton and Sutton Bridge, with more than 550 residents participating.

This approach has given us a richer understanding of local people, places, assets and barriers. Most importantly, it is shaping what we do next: developing hyper-local, community-led responses based on trusted relationships and local assets.

Our evaluation also involved members of the Active Lincolnshire Place team, who contributed through structured reflection sessions and collaborative writing workshops. We also gathered perspectives from a diverse range of external stakeholders who attended the Theory of Change workshop and a Connect Lunch for physical activity providers in South Holland. Together, the insights of residents, stakeholders and team members have provided a well-rounded, robust and transparent picture of the barriers and challenges in South Holland. This evidence has enabled us to make informed decisions about the areas of work and demographic groups on which we will focus.

Outcome: Local priorities are now directly informed by lived experience and community insight rather than assumptions.



550+
Rurality study participants

1,300+
Pride in Place responses (2024–25)

Priority Areas resulting from our Evaluation

Four priority areas:



01. Embedding everyday movement in rural places and spaces
Building community leadership, strengthening local organisations, improving awareness of opportunities and enabling residents to shape local activity and spaces.

02. Creating positive experiences for children and young people
Co-designing safe, welcoming and affordable activities, activating community assets and increasing youth influence over local provision and investment.

03. Supporting shift workers to be more active
Working particularly with agri-food employers and employees to test workplace activity approaches, improve wellbeing and influence workplace practice.

04. Systems collaboration and leadership
Developing stronger leadership, cross-sector relationships, coordinated action and greater use of community evidence in policy, planning and investment.

Systems change, learning and future delivery

Research within the Development Award strengthened our understanding of how systems influence physical activity outcomes.

The Theory of Change workshop, System Maturity Matrix and wider stakeholder engagement highlighted the need for:

- Stronger system leadership.
- Better partner coordination.
- Improved communication and awareness.
- Greater use of shared data and insight.
- More place-sensitive responses to rurality.

This learning directly shaped the Full Award approach. As a result, four priorities have been established:

- Embedding movement in rural places and spaces.
- Creating positive experiences for children and young people.
- Supporting shift workers within the agri-food sector.
- Strengthening systems leadership and collaboration.

Method Statement: System Maturity Matrix

Drawing on our experience of conducting the SMM in East Lindsey and South Holland, we refined our approach to the South Holland SMM. We focused on a smaller set of questions that we considered more relevant to the area, which resulted in a modest increase in the number of participants submitting responses.

We have also developed a local Theory of Change, Evaluation and Learning Plan, governance arrangements, community asset mapping tools and partnerships to support delivery.

Outcome: The Full Award is evidence-led, community-informed and built directly on learning generated through the Development Award.

Stakeholders' Use and Approach of Monitoring Evaluation and Learning

During the development phase of our work in South Holland, we found evidence of extensive community engagement undertaken in recent years. Although this engagement has been valuable, systematic approaches to evaluating it and applying the learning do not appear to have been widely established. As a result, a substantial body of data and insight exists, but the next step - identifying themes and patterns and developing strategies to use this information effectively - is often unclear.



Governance and resources

Moving forward Active Lincolnshire's MEL function will continue to coordinate monitoring, analysis and reporting. Programme staff, the Community Connector and delivery partners will gather data and insight, while the Place Steering Group and wider partners will help interpret findings and agree adaptations.

Tools will include Moving Communities, community asset mapping, Power BI, qualitative analysis software, the System Maturity Matrix, Kumu network mapping and Social Network Analysis. External specialist evaluation support may also be commissioned.

Intended impact of the South Holland Place work

By March 2029, the programme aims to contribute to:

- Increased physical activity and reduced inequalities.
- Stronger community leadership and capacity.
- Better experiences and opportunities for children and young people.
- More supportive and active workplaces.
- Improved collaboration across organisations and sectors.
- Greater use of lived experience in decision-making.
- Better rural walking, wheeling and cycling connections.
- A stronger evidence base about effective rural place-based approaches.

OVERALL MESSAGE

MEL will be a continuous learning and improvement process. Success will be measured not only through participation figures, but also through changes in confidence, relationships, community ownership, organisational practice, workplace culture and the wider local system.