



**SPORT
ENGLAND**

ACTIVE DESIGN CASE STUDY
**OUR PARKS:
BRINGING ACTIVITY
TO THE COMMUNITY**



ACTIVE DESIGN PRINCIPLES IN ACTION:

1. ACTIVITY
FOR ALL



5. NETWORK OF
MULTIFUNCTIONAL
OPEN SPACE



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ACTIVE DESIGN CASE STUDY

OUR PARKS: BRINGING ACTIVITY TO THE COMMUNITY

OUR PARKS CURRENTLY RUNS ITS EXERCISE CLASSES IN PARKS ACROSS 18 LONDON BOROUGHES. ITS AIM IS TO IMPROVE THE HEALTH AND WELLBEING OF LOCAL COMMUNITIES

- Our Parks is a great example of how to engage with those who would otherwise be unlikely to sign up for activity classes by bringing the exercise class to their doorstep. Making use of a network of parks and open spaces allows Our Parks to create opportunities for people to be active within their local communities.

Our Parks currently runs its exercise classes in parks across 18 London Boroughs. Its aim is to improve the health and wellbeing of local communities. It does this by engaging people by using a phone app platform and website for online booking of classes, helping to connect with people who may not normally sign up for exercise sessions. Using technology and social media also helps to create a sense of community, encouraging retention of users and creating a self-supporting network. Its classes use the existing network of local parks and open spaces close to where people live and work.

With increased social mobility and interaction where classes operate, Our Parks founder Born has noticed a breakdown of the social barriers experienced in city life:

"In East Village, the Olympic village in 2012, the idea was to do 10 sessions. We have now been going two years, there's 3,000 parkers, they are having BBQs together, and they have made that village their own. They have created a community that knows each other through exercise."

(BORN) IDENTIFIED THREE KEY BARRIERS THAT COMMUNITIES FACE:

- **FINDING A CLASS**
 - **CONVENIENCE**
 - **COST**
-





OUR PARKS

Our Parks was set up by Born Barikor in 2014, and grew from a desire to help local communities get healthy and active. Through Born's work in sports development, he identified three key barriers that communities face when looking to participate in exercise; finding a class; convenience; and cost.

Our Parks was developed to overcome these barriers, using local parks and open spaces to run a variety of group exercise classes, and smart phone apps to allow users to book. The app not only helps with measuring and monitoring users' fitness, but is essential to help in the planning and structuring of new classes to meet users' demands. All classes are provided free of charge.

Our Parks has not only helped to increase participation in physical activity, but has helped to build a sense of community amongst the participants. In March 2014, in its first week, 350 people signed up. In 2015, the number of users had grown to 15,000 'parkers' (users) participating in 150 hours' worth of exercise; the number of 'parkers' has since risen to 35,000, of which 87% are female. The variety of classes include:

- Yoga
- Circuit
- Bootcamp
- Tots Tennis
- Buggy Fit
- Athlefit
- Tai Chi
- Family Fit
- Junior Football
- Run Fit
- Basketball
- Gym Fit
- Cardio Tennis
- Parkour
- Park Walk

“WE HAVE REALLY GOOD INSIGHT INTO WHAT FEMALES WANT TO TAKE PART IN AND HOW, THIS MEANS WE CAN SET THE RIGHT LEVEL OF TRAINING AND IDENTIFY AND REMOVE THE BARRIERS THEY FACE ELSEWHERE.”

Born Barikor

“IN WALTHAM FOREST PEOPLE WHO HAVEN'T BEEN ACTIVE OR SPOKEN TO EACH OTHER FOR YEARS ARE SUDDENLY AT OUR DANCE CLASS, THEIR KIDS ARE PLAYING AND AFTER THE SESSION THEY ARE STAYING IN THE PARK, THEY ARE SOCIALISING. YOU ARE SEEING A MASSIVE COMMUNITY SHIFT IN THE SENSE THAT EVERYONE SEEMS TO KNOW EACH OTHER NOW.”

Born Barikor



Above: A good example of an ideal space for Our Parks to use. The ground quality may not be the best but it can be used for anything from volleyball to bootcamps to yoga.





FREE TO USERS

One of the main goals of Our Parks is to keep exercise classes in parks free of charge to the user. Our Parks receives funding from various sporting organisations and charities such as The London Marathon and the London Majors Sports Participation Fund. Businesses and individuals are also able to donate, or hire coaches with the incentive that one paid hour delivers one hour free for local communities. Local authorities have also recognised that Our Parks can provide them with a cost effective way to deliver exercise classes to their local residents. The average training session costs around £55 per hour for a group of 40; that is £1.38 per person.

THE NETWORK OF LOCAL PARKS AND OPEN SPACES ARE IDEAL, THEY PROVIDE VERSATILE AREAS FOR DELIVERING A VARIETY OF ACTIVITIES ON A DAILY BASIS

NETWORKS OF MULTIFUNCTIONAL OPEN SPACE

The network of local parks and open spaces provides the venues for Our Parks classes. These local spaces are ideal as they are generally close to users, free to access, and versatile areas for delivering a variety of activities on a daily basis. Using local parks can be more encouraging to those users who might not sign up to an exercise class put on in a traditional sports centre. In each training session 'parkers' are shown how to make use of outdoor gym equipment, park features or any open space for exercise.

Whilst there is no specific criteria when looking for sites to use, those parks that have a field as well as multi-use courts, Artificial Grass Pitches, outdoor gym equipment or floodlighting give Our Parks the ability to utilise these facilities to provide year-round all-weather classes, which improves the functionality and accessibility of these public spaces.

Right: All social media posts are visible on the Our Parks website. Connecting these platforms together give Our Parks the exposure and reach for getting more people participating and getting active.

ACTIVITY FOR ALL

The aim of Our Parks is to make existing parks and open spaces places where a range of sports and physical activities are available to everyone. Classes put on during the day are aimed at parents, toddlers and the older generations and students, whilst evening sessions are targeted at those who work during the day.

Our Parks focuses on promoting inclusivity and accessibility, putting the user at the centre of the design of the programme of classes. Data collected from the Our Parks app is used to help tailor the design and structure of the classes to meet the needs of the 'parkers'. This helps to create a personal and inclusive atmosphere with 'parkers', encouraging a sense of community.

Going forward, Our Parks are planning to extend and develop more classes for people with disabilities and physical health problems. Classes will focus on rehab and low impact training, as well as encouraging those living in areas of high inactivity with unhealthy lifestyles to get involved. Over time it is hoped that 'parkers' from these areas will come back with their friends, encouraging more people with a similar lifestyle to participate.





ACTIVITY PROMOTION AND LOCAL CHAMPIONS

Social media and technology is central to the success of Our Parks. Using Twitter and Facebook, coaches are encouraged to take and post pictures of their sessions, providing a personal and engaging approach to the sessions.

Coaches act as representatives, role models and group leaders and as such they benefit from various training opportunities and are able to communicate efficiently with other coaches, as well as being featured on Our Parks' coaches' database. Our Parks supports their professional and personal development and provides networking opportunities for volunteers.

MONITORING & EVALUATION

Our Parks app and website allows 'parkers' to book onto classes and track their mood and progress. The app also provided the opportunity to collect user data that helps to develop future classes and services. This data can also give Local Authorities a greater insight into users' habits and preferences. This function contributes to facilitating lasting sporting habits with users by maximising accessibility and exposure to all the activities on offer.

WHERE NOW?

By 2020 the target is for Our Parks to be established in every London Borough and have 200,000 regular 'parkers' attending classes. Our Parks also hope to begin investing in exercise facilities in the spaces used. Our Parks has shown that by providing recreational opportunities on the users' terms and at a local level, it can facilitate positive changes in the community, culture and activity habits. Our Parks, through its successful and positive model, demonstrates how having versatile local open spaces can help to increase people's accessibility to physical activity and increase participation within local communities.

