



# Growing junior parkrun in Hertfordshire April 2024





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The photos throughout this report are from parkrun UK stock images, Cassiobury junior parkrun and King George V Playing Field junior parkrun, Mill End (Rickmansworth).

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# Introduction

The exponential growth of the parkrun movement in Hertfordshire has been one of the real success stories of the last decade.

In 2014, the county hosted a single parkrun at St Albans. Today, on the back of a collaborative effort between parkrun UK, Public Health Hertfordshire, Herts Sport & Physical Activity Partnership, and our District and Borough Councils, private landowners, and a range of funders, that figure now stands at 31 – consisting of fourteen 5k and eighteen junior events – with more in the planning pipeline. From those humble beginnings over 5,000 individuals now take part in Hertfordshire's extensive parkrun programme every weekend.

As the Active Partnership for Hertfordshire, we are delighted that we have been able to play a small part in that development and ongoing success, but none of it would have been possible without the hard work, determination, and selfless giving of the army of volunteers that make this wonderful initiative happen.

Special thanks must also go to colleagues at Public Health Hertfordshire, who, very early in the piece, recognised the potential of parkrun and junior parkrun in helping to address some of the health inequalities faced by those in our underserved communities. The funding provided, undoubtedly accelerated the growth of the programme, and has made a massive difference to the lives of so many individuals and families in Hertfordshire.

HSP Board Member and Regional parkrun Ambassador, Louise Smith, has been a central figure in the roll-out of the programme, bringing her persuasive charm and steely determination to the support of the various event teams, and acting as conduit between parkrun HQ and the various Ambassadors and Event Directors across the county.

Like all the best programmes, it's the simplicity of parkrun and junior parkrun that sits at the heart of its success. Use of technology, flexible participation and volunteering arrangements, and the way in which both value the experience of the participants, are other contributors to that success and sustainability.

To those Local Authorities, Local Elected Members, generous individuals and various trust and grant-giving organisations that have provided the funding to underpin this growth, we owe a debt of gratitude, and we look forward to their continued support. The job is far from finished – as we strive to ensure that every community in Hertfordshire that wants its own parkrun and junior parkrun can be supported to do so.

The world has undergone dramatic change since 2014. The dots of the Hertfordshire parkrun map have proliferated. The owners of the local coffee houses have never smiled so much on a Saturday and Sunday morning at 9am as, come rain or shine, it is now parkrun o'clock in this lovely county of ours.

Thanks to all of those that have made it possible. Long may it continue to grow.

**John D O'Callaghan**

**Partnership Director at Herts Sport & Physical Activity Partnership**

# Contract objectives

The original contract ran from February 2020 to March 2021, but due to the Covid-19 pandemic a contract extension was granted until March 2024

Objective	Activity	Evaluation
<p>Identify seven areas deemed as suitable and desirable for the set-up of a junior parkrun event</p>	<p>Carry out community audits to include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• physical activity provision, i.e green spaces, sports clubs etc.</li> <li>• schools and other CYP sources close to identified areas.</li> <li>• routes for the identification and recruitment of volunteers.</li> </ul> <p>Contact and develop links with local services such as Public Health Nursing and Child Weight Management.</p>	<p>Seven areas were identified as suitable, in line with at least one of the contract requirements (e.g., areas of deprivation, areas with a higher than average prevalence of obesity, or areas identified as lacking physical activity provision).</p> <p>Routes identified for recruitment of volunteers.</p> <p>Links with local services.</p>
<p>Work with relevant partners to establish seven junior parkruns, enabling an increased number of young people to access this free physical activity opportunity</p>	<p>Work with relevant partner agencies to confirm use of appropriate green spaces to deliver junior parkruns.</p> <p>Work with relevant partner agencies, e.g., CVS, Family Centres, and Schools, in identified areas to identify volunteers and develop a recruitment and continued engagement process.</p> <p>Work with relevant partner agencies e.g. Public Health, Family Centres, Schools, Weight Management Services and GPs etc to promote the junior parkruns and engage children/families to attend</p>	<p>A number of junior parkruns.</p> <p>A number of Young People attending junior parkruns.</p> <p>Several partner agencies are aware of junior parkrun and encouraging young people to attend them.</p> <p>Number of volunteers engaged with each junior parkrun</p>

# Funding

The total budget for this contract was £46,000 which Hertfordshire County Council paid.

It was split across two payments:

- £18,000 in February 2020 to cover defibrillator costs and the basic set-up costs for the first three new junior parkrun events
- £28,000 in September 2020 to cover the remaining project costs, i.e. the final four new events.

Hertsmere Borough Council managed the funding for this contract and co-ordinated the event payments to parkrun UK.

## **Sourcing Additional Funding**

In early 2023, parkrun UK announced the organisation needed to increase the total start-up cost for each event.

Unfortunately, the Katherine Warrington School junior parkrun event in Harpenden did not get approval before the deadline, so an additional £800 needed to be sourced, as the contract would not cover this extra expense.

The Partnership applied to 'The 948 Foundation' in St Albans, a grant giving sports charity who provide awards to young people in the City and District of St Albans to improve their participation in sport and physical activity.

An application was submitted in April 2023 and a successful decision was received in May on the grounds that HSP would keep the Trustees updated on progress, which happened via email on an ongoing basis. Data from the Autumn 2022 School Census highlighted Harpenden Rural (the Local Authority ward where Katherine Warrington School is located) has a very high percentage of free school meal eligibility compared to other parts of Harpenden. Additionally, Free School Meals data was used to strengthen the application, as 21% of pupils at Katherine Warrington School were eligible for free school meals, which is 13% higher than the average for this division.

# Implementation

To ensure each new event met at least one of the contact requirements (as mentioned above), locations were identified following discussions by the steering group (HSP, HCC and Hertsmere Borough Council) and approved by the Borough / District before any of the groundwork being completed, i.e. a potential course being identified.

A mapping exercise detailing the pre-existing junior parkrun provision in Hertfordshire was completed to ensure there would not be any conflict between events or threat of volunteer saturation. Data was used to guide specific locations. For example, Obesity data (Overweight or obese children in reception / Year 6) was used when mapping the event in Rickmansworth and helped influence which Lower Super Output Area to host the event, whilst Free School Meal data was used to approve a new junior event in Harpenden. Additionally, local support and willingness to host an event was also a determining factor, as in some cases, this helped with seeking landowner permission or use of facilities (car park/toilets) each week, as was the case for Norfolk Road Playing Fields juniors and Furzefield Leisure Centre juniors.

## Volunteer Recruitment

The 2019 parkrun volunteering study reported 84% of those surveyed said “volunteering at parkrun made them feel happier” so it was paramount each new junior event continued to provide positive volunteering opportunities.

Recruiting from within the local community was the main focus, and artwork from parkrun HQ was shared with existing event teams and used on social media to build interest. Countywide artwork was initially shared, but then event-specific artwork was used, once an event location had been agreed, in the hope of attracting local people from each area. From the 20 expressions of interest received, 12 individuals are now involved with the new junior events as core team members.





# Partners

Establishing seven new junior parkrun events could not have happened without the support of the following partners who have each played a key role in supporting the growth of junior parkrun across Hertfordshire.



*"junior parkrun is a brilliant opportunity for families to take part outside in Hertfordshire's beautiful green open spaces. In Hertsmere we were lucky enough to get a new junior parkrun at Furzefield Leisure Centre in Potters Bar which is going from strength to strength. I am very grateful for the support, funding and determination from HCC, HSP and Louise Smith."*

**Helen Hopkins, Community Sports Officer, Hertsmere Borough Council**

# New event information

Event details	Total number of participants since first event*	Total number of volunteers since first event*
Cassiobury junior parkrun (Watford) started on 19/03/23	2843	1132
King George V Playing Field junior parkrun, Mill End (Rickmansworth) started on 23/04/23	1780	745
Norton Common junior parkrun (Letchworth) started on 18/06/23	1579	783
Furzefield Leisure Centre junior parkrun (Potters Bar) started on 17/09/23	606	417
Katherine Warington School junior parkrun (Harpenden) started on 07/01/24	965	291
Birchwood Leisure Centre junior parkrun (Hatfield) started on 18/02/24	39	114
Norfolk Road Playing Fields junior parkrun (Buntingford) started on 17/03/24	130	58



**\*Note, these are not unique participant / volunteer figures, but total throughput for each event up to (and including) Sunday 31st March 2024.**



# Outcomes

1

Since the first new event at Cassiobury juniors in March 2023, the total throughput (up to and including 31st March 2024) has been 7,942 participants across all seven new events. Therefore, this junior parkrun provision has increased the number of young people accessing free physical activity, particularly as numbers from the existing junior parkrun events remained fairly consistent with the number of participants they saw before the first new event launch, i.e., not too much parkrun tourism.

2

With each new event, more volunteering opportunities have been created. The total throughput (up to and including 31 March 2024) for volunteering across all seven new events is 3,540. As each event is volunteer-led, it is hoped that more people will continue to filter into their local event. Event Directors and Ambassadors are recruiting individuals for core team roles so that each event continues to thrive under the watchful eye of its hi-vis hero army.

3

Each event location met at least one of the Indicator 2 criteria (in areas of deprivation, in areas with higher than average prevalence of obesity, or in areas identified as having a lack of physical activity provision). So this new junior parkrun provision has allowed many more people to be active more often across Hertfordshire.

*“Working in partnership with parkrun, Herts Sport & Physical Activity Partnership and Hertsmere Borough Council to create seven new junior parkruns in Hertfordshire has been extremely productive, successful and enjoyable. It has been great to be able to create sustainable, place based physical activity opportunities for children across Hertfordshire, alongside providing meaningful volunteering opportunities. Having 18 junior parkruns up and running by the end of March 2024 is a massive achievement and will have a hugely positive impact on the health of many children and young people across the county.”*

**Susie Cook, Health Improvement Lead – Early Years & Childhood, Hertfordshire County Council**

# The Impact

“Cassiobury junior parkrun has created a sense of togetherness and well-being within the Watford community. All children taking part became friends and they encourage each other into getting better. There is no rivalry within schools or areas but a place where all are equal and learn to create healthy habits. We are also helping a great number of under 18 children towards their Duke of Edinburgh awards, teaching them the values of community and teamwork.”

“The parkrun at Furzefield is providing a great opportunity for all juniors to be active, challenge themselves, release tension and improve mental health through exercising outdoors. Parents and supporters are able to buy themselves a hot drink and snack from inside the leisure centre which is providing increased footfall and income for the Furzefield café.”

“After volunteering at junior parkrun for a few years I was excited to help at the new Katherine Warington School junior event. It’s a lovely, friendly parkrun, and it’s great to see another local juniors start. It’s already popular which shows how many children are keen to participate in the area, and helps to keep them active which is only a good thing.”

“The parents I spoke to said that they loved the fact that children were all getting out and being active. They like the fact that the event creates a sense of wellbeing and installs good exercise values in the children from a young age. They felt it bought the community together each Sunday and was a nice place to see friends and meet new people.”











# Sharing our experience

On Wednesday 17th January 2024, Herts Sport & Physical Activity Partnership hosted a webinar for colleagues within the Active Partnership Network, in partnership with parkrun UK.

More than 30 colleagues from 16 different organisations (Active Partnerships, County Councils and parkrun UK) joined the webinar, which charted the parkrun and junior parkrun development in Hertfordshire and shared some of the learning from that journey. The webinar also allowed parkrun UK to highlight its expansion programme as the initiative looks to celebrate its 20th anniversary in October 2024. The presenters received several follow up emails with comments asking for introductions with key contacts in their area, information about potential funding sources and whether the data was open to activity searches.

The Partnership repeated the webinar a few weeks later for the parkrun Regional Event Ambassador (REA) network, including REAs from the East Midlands, Kent, Wiltshire and Somerset. The REA for Bedfordshire has already shared positive dialogue developed with Be Active, the Active Partnership for Bedfordshire, and this webinar will likely kick start several other discussions that result in more parkruns being established nationwide.

*"The webinar, with representatives of Active Partnerships from around the country, was a great opportunity to demonstrate the positive impact parkrun can bring to communities. It showcased the fantastic outcomes that have been delivered by the partnership between parkrun and the Herts Sport and Physical Activity Partnership, and encouraged others to explore working in similar ways."*

**Dan McVeigh, Volunteer Impact and Engagement Manager, parkrun UK**



# Next steps

**1** Following the webinar in January, the Herts Sport & Physical Activity Partnership is now leading the way in setting up a parkrun Community of Learning meetings for Active Partnership colleagues, with the aim of meeting quarterly to share knowledge, experience and progress around parkrun and junior parkrun in their counties.

**2** Discussions are already underway for four possible new events in Hertfordshire. The Partnership is looking for alternative funding sources that can support these new opportunities.

**3** Volunteer recruitment is vital to the success of parkrun and junior parkrun and so the Partnership will continue to support parkrun UK and all the Hertfordshire events. The Partnership will be fully funding a Basic Life Support/AED Course for 12 volunteers in April 2024.

*“parkrun is so lucky in Hertfordshire to have the enthusiastic and proactive support of the Partnership, Public Health Herts and too many other partners to mention who share the parkrun goal of making the world a healthier and happier place. This recent funding programme has allowed us to bring junior parkrun to areas of the county that will most benefit from a free community activity that encourages young people to get active in a safe and friendly space. An enormous thank you to all the local Ambassadors and new event teams that have made this all possible.”*

**Louise Smith, Regional Ambassador (Volunteer), parkrun UK**





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