A PIONEER CITY
WALKS THE TALK

SINCE 2005, THE BRITISH CITY OF LIVERPOOL, HAS BROUGHT TOGETHER ITS SPORT AND
HEALTH-RELATED INITIATIVES UNDER A SINGLE PROGRAMME ENTITLED “LIVERPOOL ACTIVE
CITY”. PROACTING PHYSICAL ACTIVITY, HEALTHY LIFESTYLES AND ACTIVE TRANSPORT
TODAY, THE CITY IS SHARING ITS EXPERIENCE AS PART OF THE GLOBAL ACTIVE CITY
PROJECT, SUPPORTED BY THE INTERNATIONAL OLYMPIC COMMITTEE (IOC) SINCE 2014

The turn of the century, several trends emerged that alarmed the authorities in the City of
Liverpool. Located in the metropolitan county of Merseyside in the north-west of England, the city had suffered the full-blown impacts of the industrial decline of the 1970s and was struggling to cope with a tense socioeconomic climate (high unemployment and increased levels of antisocial behaviour).

For example, fewer than one person in five exercised for at least 30 minutes three times a week; what is more, levels of physical activity between neighbourhoods varied greatly. Meanwhile, obesity-related conditions led to more than 130,000 employee sick days in companies and offices, while obesity was estimated to cost the local health service GBP 329 million in 2015. As a consequence, the city had one of the highest mortality rates in the country, while life expectancy was among the lowest.

Yet, within the city, several initiatives had been launched as part of efforts to counter these trends and Liverpool was also a member of the World Health Organisation’s Healthy Cities Network. However, some of these measures were implemented in isolation or failed to reach those most in need.

Liverpool, known all over the world for its two Premier League football clubs (Everton and Liverpool) and as the hometown of The Beatles, decided to take action to reverse these trends. The City Council began by appointing John Marsden as Head of Liverpool Active City with a mandate to coordinate all existing sport and health initiatives under a single umbrella for all inhabitants of the city to encourage increased participation in sport and to improve health.

Officially launched in May 2005 by the city’s Sports & Outdoor Recreation Services and the Public Health Department, the Liverpool Active City strategy and programme had four main objectives: improve the reputation and perception of Liverpool as an active city; promote coordination of existing services; provide access to sport for all; and ensure that support for physical activity be factored into urban planning. In order to coordinate the efforts of all stakeholders, the Liverpool Sport & Physical Activity Alliance was established in 2006 with the mandate to develop and deliver the programme. Following the success of several local projects, in 2014 the city launched its new strategy for 2014-2021 to build on successes and strengthen these objectives. Now Liverpool’s new target is to become the most active city in England by 2021.

The programme is bearing fruit and whereas once the city’s ambition was not to attract high-profile international sporting events, thinking has evolved. For example, Liverpool will organise the 2019 Netball World Cup and is also bidding to host the Commonwealth Games either in 2022 or 2026. These are examples of how inspiring the grassroots demographic to participate in sports can create enthusiasm to get involved and become a spectator, a volunteer or an organised team.
ACTIVE CITIES

University (LJMU) have seconded him to Liverpool and Liverpool John Moores University to become a Senior Sport Manager at Liverpool City Council, to implement the Liverpool Active City programme. The former Senior Sport Manager at Liverpool City Council, to implement the Liverpool Active City programme, was able to paint a realistic picture of the situation in the city. The Council Leader was especially concerned by the statistics that showed low levels of sports activity by adults, and particularly by those indicating low sports participation by children. The time had come to launch a concerted action which could both improve the general state of health among the population and at the same time help to eradicate antisocial behaviour by strengthening social cohesion. Our vision was clear and simple: increase participation in physical activities and affordable rates within a 25-minute radius of the city. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, sporting activity has to be fun for participants. This is crucial if we want people to continue practising sport in the long term. We also try to communicate using the best channels and our network of activists in different neighbourhoods. Today, almost 20 role models – not football stars but individuals who have discovered the benefits of sport – motivate their peers to follow their example.

Q. What was the triggering event of the Liverpool Active City project?
A. In 2005, I met with the Council Leader and, armed with data from research originally carried out by LJMU about health and sports participation, was able to convince him to second me to Liverpool. This was the key moment to launch the project. Our vision was clear: to improve the general state of health in the city. The Council Leader was especially concerned by the statistics that showed low levels of sports activity by adults, and particularly by those indicating low sports participation by children. The time had come to launch a concerted action which could both improve the general state of health among the population and at the same time help to eradicate antisocial behaviour by strengthening social cohesion. Our vision was clear and simple: increase participation in physical activities and affordable rates within a 25-minute radius of the city. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, sporting activity has to be fun for participants. This is crucial if we want people to continue practising sport in the long term. We also try to communicate using the best channels and our network of activists in different neighbourhoods. Today, almost 20 role models – not football stars but individuals who have discovered the benefits of sport – motivate their peers to follow their example.

Q. How did you manage to bring all stakeholders together to create a common vision?
A. City model. The former Senior Sport Manager at Liverpool City Council, to implement the Liverpool Active City programme, was able to paint a realistic picture of the situation in the city. The Council Leader was especially concerned by the statistics that showed low levels of sports activity by adults, and particularly by those indicating low sports participation by children. The time had come to launch a concerted action which could both improve the general state of health among the population and at the same time help to eradicate antisocial behaviour by strengthening social cohesion. Our vision was clear and simple: increase participation in physical activities and affordable rates within a 25-minute radius of the city. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, sporting activity has to be fun for participants. This is crucial if we want people to continue practising sport in the long term. We also try to communicate using the best channels and our network of activists in different neighbourhoods. Today, almost 20 role models – not football stars but individuals who have discovered the benefits of sport – motivate their peers to follow their example.

Q. What is your role in the Global Active City project?
A. My role is, above all, to listen to the needs and priorities of the city and at the same time help to implement the project’s goals. The role is also to support the city in developing a vision and strategy, and to help them to implement it so that it can be adapted to any city regardless of its context and situation.

Q. What are the next steps?
A. The ISO-compatible standards, as well as user guidelines intended to provide cities with information and about the requirements necessary to achieve certification, will be published in autumn 2017 by the Global Active City team. We are also planning to organise advocacy sessions to promote the concept more widely and encourage cities to develop a vision and strategy, and to help them to implement it so that it can be adapted to any city regardless of its context and situation. The role is also to support the city in developing a vision and strategy, and to help them to implement it so that it can be adapted to any city regardless of its context and situation.

Q. What advice would you give to a city wishing to follow in your footsteps?
A. It is crucial to have a clear vision and strategy and to stick to them at all times. But that alone is not enough. Cities need to be able to rely on a network of partners that are committed to the same objectives. Not only does this require the establishment of a decision-making body, but it also requires an implementing body that can report back on results from the field and ensure that all work is done to our expectations. This is the only way that they will continue to receive support. All cities must have at least one or another, but the key is to persevere and keep in mind the vision.

Q. What is the role of the Global Active City project?
A. The role is, above all, to listen to the needs and priorities of the city and at the same time help them to implement the project’s goals. The role is also to support the city in developing a vision and strategy, and to help them to implement it so that it can be adapted to any city regardless of its context and situation.

Olympic Review met with John Marsden, the driving force behind Liverpool Active City. A passionate advocate for this ambitious programme, he describes his experience and shares advice with cities hoping to emulate the success of Liverpool using the Active City model. The former Senior Sport Manager at Liverpool City Council, was sent on to work full-time for the Liverpool Active City programme and since 2008 has been Head of Public Health Delivery. Today, the City of Liverpool is one of the most successful in the UK. The Liverpool John Moores University (LJMU) have seconded him to the Global Active City project.