



Hartpury Active Essex Systems Evaluation: Essex Pedal Power Findings Report - January 2023

DR KEVIN HARRIS, DR ALEX KAY, LOUIS RYAN, CLAIRE HANNAH-RUSSELL AND TRAVIS FISHER.

Phase 2 Programme theory testing

- Having carried out the comprehensive collaborative process from phase 1, this phase consisted of the evaluation testing the wide range of explanatory assumptions and beliefs underpinning the areas of focus.
- Here, we utilised a range of qualitative and quantitative research methods to test these assumptions and beliefs, and then offer insights and reflections for refinement to inform overall learning to action.
- These methods were tested with a wide range of stakeholders in the active Essex system ranging from beneficiaries to senior decision makers and influencers.
- This phase was also supported by the embedded SROI approach.
- It is important to state that during this testing phase we were conscious of existing evaluation work and data collection taking place across Active Essex. As a result, we made every effort to collaborate and avoid duplication (for example supporting and working with the LDP realist evaluation framework in progress).

Our methods

Over the course of the evaluation, we implemented a range of qualitative and quantitative methods to facilitate the deep dive process. These are outlined below.

12 - Interviews

Semi-structured interviews captured the impact and illustrated which changes were observable across the four areas of focus. We explored how and why engagement across the four areas of focus contributed to change in individuals, communities, and the system.

11 - Stories of change

Capturing stories of change is a rich qualitative approach that involves individuals and communities describing the most significant changes that take place through their experiences of something. Hearing the stories of beneficiaries of free bikes within EPP helped to unearth the true meaning underpinning their journeys.

719 - Surveys

Surveys were co produced as a mixed method to gather quantitative and qualitative data across the four areas of focus from participants and strategic stakeholders. These informed the programme theory testing, deep dives and the social return on investment forecast. The four ONS Wellby questions were built into each survey.



HARTPURY
UNIVERSITY



Pedal Power findings

Initial assumption

EPP provides opportunities for recipients to access more opportunities for a better quality of life.

EPP through the issuing of a bike helps to breakdown travel barriers for those impacted by the cost of travel to work and other aspects of their lives.

EPP offers the opportunity for social and professional networking, to build capacity for employment.

How is this playing out?

The bike gives recipients in communities the opportunity to connect, link and develop relationships because they use the bike in a way that suits their needs. Utility cycling, family and friends cycling and mental and physical wellbeing are key drivers of this.

For many the provision of a bike is seen as a lifeline because it gives them access to work, shops, healthcare and other important aspects of their lives (without incurring the cost of a quality bike).

Recipients, that engage in led rides and EPP, in Clacton and Jaywick are able to socialise together, bridge and build relationships through the medium of cycling.

Recipients of bikes in EPP, who have engaged in led rides have gone on to develop employability skills through volunteering and additional qualifications because of the support they have received from EPP staff.

Pedal Power impact headlines

Going Deeper into findings - Essex Pedal Power stories of change

Julie is 51 years old and lives in Clacton. She was saving up for an electric bike to travel around locally to see friends and visit clients for work when she applied and received an EPP bike. She hasn't ridden a bike for 4 years but feels with the cost of driving and parking increasing that cycling is a good option to save money.

Julie is well connected socially, regularly visiting her friends and family.

Since cycling I would say I feel more positive and optimistic... I am getting more fresh air and I'm more physically active [since receiving the bike].

I've recommended it to my friends and five of them have now applied for a bike!

Julie receives a free EPP bike



Julie uses the bike regularly to travel for work, go to the shops, visit friends, and to blow off steam after a stressful day.



Julie plans to go cycling with her mum as well as joining led rides when Julie can find time in her work schedule.

Julie is saving money on fuel costs and parking. It also saves time by not needing to queue in traffic. It has helped to strengthen her **social connections** as Julie can visit friends easily as she can visit her friends for free by cycling.

I do feel closer to Clacton since cycling. It is easier to look around because I'm not driving and only looking at the road.

Going Deeper into findings - Essex Pedal Power stories of change

Chris is 47 years old and lives in Jaywick. He lives with his wife, who has health issues, and his daughter that has higher needs. Chris has social anxiety which makes it almost impossible for him to engage in group activity. He does not work and due to his social anxiety, he will not enter work anytime soon. Chris owns a bike he received as a gift from his mother-in-law and does not own a car or have a driving license because he sees cars having a negative impact on the environment. Chris couldn't afford a bike to the same quality as an EPP bike.

I can travel quickly [on the EPP bike] because it is lighter and easier to ride than the bike I already had. This means I can go out in the morning and get home in time to help my wife.

Chris does not drive and is very reluctant to use public transport due to his social anxiety. The new bike has allowed him to access the hospital and Clacton via the seafront cycle route.

I am more active with the bike. I feel fitter, my legs feel stronger.

Chris receives a free EPP bike

Chris uses the bike for journeys into Clacton, to access the hospital, go cycling alone or with his child, and to play Beat the Street

Chris already felt a connection with Jaywick as he regularly litter picks and greets others. Chris has met more people when greeting others playing Beat the Street or on an EPP bike, but he still doesn't feel ready to socialise with new people or join led rides.

Bike riding helps to relieve anxiety for Chris, but he is still not confident enough to do anything new. Being outside also makes Chris feel happier. Chris has **increased mental health and reduced mental health issues**, albeit still has social anxiety.

I can quickly chat with people at the Beat Boxes (Beat The Street), but I don't socialise with them.

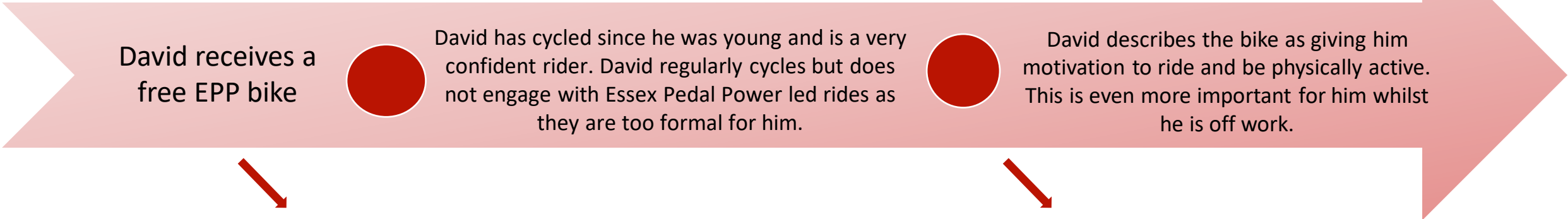
Going Deeper into findings - Essex Pedal Power stories of change

David is 32 and lives in Jaywick with his partner and 2 children. He is currently off work due to injury and would previously use the EPP bike to cycle to work. He doesn't own a car and describes the bike as a "lifeline" to access shops in Clacton, and to get outside through cycling to maintain his mental and physical wellbeing. David does not feel he could afford to buy a bike, especially one to the same quality as an EPP bike.

I've cycled my whole life, so I don't need the lessons or going out with the group. I go out with mates, or I go out myself. Sometimes I'll go out at 11 in the evening if I feel like going out.

When David's mental health is playing up, he uses cycling to exercise to clear his head whilst being able to explore Clacton and Jaywick.

The bike is wicked... you can cycle in the wind, and you actually go forward. The tyres mean I can go off road and exploring more. I've got an app on my phone that identifies different rocks... last week we found a WW2 bunker in Clacton.



David receives a free EPP bike



David has cycled since he was young and is a very confident rider. David regularly cycles but does not engage with Essex Pedal Power led rides as they are too formal for him.



David describes the bike as giving him motivation to ride and be physically active. This is even more important for him whilst he is off work.

David doesn't use the helmet or hi vis provided because he finds this too formal for him. He is thankful for the lock to keep his bike safe as well as being provided with a pump. He worries that once he owns the bike and it needs new tyres, he won't be able to afford the same level of quality to replace them.

David found the bike to be helpful in maintaining his physical and mental wellbeing whilst off work. When he was feeling low, he was able to get out and cycle further and to different places without being too far to get back to his partner and children quickly.

Going Deeper into findings - Essex Pedal Power

What we Explored:

With less than 50% of residents in a locality not owning or having access to vehicles, their ability to travel for work and other opportunities is stifled. With Essex Pedal Power providing bikes and the equipment necessary for travel and maintenance, it may open the opportunity to increase the ability to travel, not only for work, but to enable access to cheaper food shops without the need to use the bus network which is perceived as inaccessible and difficult by some respondents

What we found:

For some residents in Jaywick, like David (bike recipient), ***"The bike means I can get into Clacton quickly and get home to my family, especially where my [partner] looks after the little ones"***. Before the bike, these journeys would have taken up more time due to not having access to a car or having a bike that was heavier or slower than an EPP bike and discouraged use. A quicker journey on an EPP bike encouraged some residents to travel further because ***"I know I can go out for miles and still get back to my family quickly"*** (Chris, bike recipient).

Recipients who own or have access to a car still use their car for journeys as ***"I still need to take the kids to school or to rugby matches"*** (Veronica, bike recipient) but there was modal shift when ***"cycling to a friend's house is easier than having to sit in traffic and try to find a parking space"*** (Julie, bike recipient) and ***"where the journey isn't too long [3 miles or less] I will try to cycle... I rarely use the car now"*** (Ron, bike recipient).

The cycle route along the seafront to Clacton was important for those who had experience anxiety (social and when cycling) because this route is away from traffic and feels safer to travel along. ***"I stick to the seafront because I'm still too nervous on the roads... there is too much traffic, but the seafront is quiet and quite flat too"*** (Veronica, bike recipient).

Going Deeper into findings - Essex Pedal Power

What we Explored:

With Essex Pedal Power training ride leaders and enabling the community to take part in activities, there may be an opportunity for overall increased community connectivity, decreasing loneliness and isolation which has been either caused or exacerbated by the pandemic. By taking the initial cost of the bike and other accessories needed to cycle which is a large barrier to people in the area, there may be greater uptake of the programme because it becomes more affordable and accessible.

What we found:

Many recipients cycle leisurely to spend quality time with their family or friends, with the seafront a popular destination to cycle because it is a local place to cycle where it feels safe from cars. None of the recipients spoken to feel lonely as they either live with family members or they are socially connected through work, volunteering or hobbies although there are many that felt isolated due to their responsibilities in caring for family members with additional needs and feel this may have negative impact on their mental health.

Chris (bike recipient) benefits from having a "quality" EPP bike because *"Having the bike has meant I can go out on a ride in the morning and play Beat the Street but still get home before my wife wakes up and I need to help her"*. Dan (bike recipient) is also able to become more physically active and manage his care responsibilities thanks to receiving a new bike as *"the bike encourages me to get out and cycle, sometimes at 6am, because I've got to get home for my partner to help look after them"*.

For many recipients that own a car, they cannot afford to buy a quality bike with the cost-of-living increase and the car is important for school runs, work travel, shopping and leisure activities for them and their family. They recognise that saving money on driving was beneficial to them, with EPP bikes providing them with free transport for smaller journeys and for leisure opportunities. Sally (bike recipient) loves the fact that *"we can go out as a family on led rides and be active all for free"*.

For those without a car, they already owned a bike however *"the EPP bike is easy to ride... it is much better than the bike I owned"* Sally (bike recipient). The greater quality bike means they can cycle quickly and on different terrains they couldn't previously. The cost of the EPP bike is removed, with equipment provided to safely cycle and lock up the bike so recipients were confident they in safely cycling into Clacton and locking up their bike.

For some, the EPP bike does not remove a barrier to accessing cycling because they already have a bike of similar or better quality compared to the EPP bike or can afford a bike, but they live in a priority ward and were eligible to apply for a free bike.

Going Deeper into findings - Essex Pedal Power

What we Explored:

While Essex Pedal Power provides things such as led rides and group rides, there is no compulsion to participate in these activities. This allows for those who may have beliefs and feelings such as embarrassment surrounding aspects of their life such as physical fitness to get involved without the pressure to engage in group activities, but still gain the benefits of increasing their activity. In an environment where the cost of living is high, some people cannot afford a bike, particularly in deprived areas. By eliminating the cost and providing free bikes to communities, this has the potential to bring more people together through community cycling, fostering greater community cohesion.

What we found:

Where staff have use the EPP office in Jaywick as a 'hub' for residents to engage with EPP socially, some recipients have gone on to set up cycle groups where they connect with other individuals who wish to cycle with as a group. EPP staff can support and provide ride leader training for individuals that engage with EPP staff and demonstrate potential skillsets to be a ride leader. This allows for community led cycle groups where participants meet through EPP and are supported by staff to run independently of EPP led rides.

Some recipients do not wish to join in led rides due to their mental health issues (social anxiety) stopping them from engaging in group activity or because of the formal aspect of led rides where they would be expected to wear a helmet and follow the rules of a led ride.

For Brennan and Dan (bike recipients), engaging with EPP allowed them to experience Jaywick in a way that changed their perceptions of the area. ***"I've definitely seen Jaywick in a different light... I've made friends with residents, and I regularly cycle around there." (Brennan). The potential to bond over cycling has been important where Dale relates to Jaywick residents through EPP because he wouldn't have engaged with before. "We share an enthusiasm for cycling and it's something we connect over" (Dan).***

Cycling for leisure was popular, with many recipients cycling alone for leisure when they feel stressed or after a long day. They feel it helps them to maintain or strengthen their mental health because they can ***"think things through and get some fresh air"*** (Brennan, bike recipient).

Recipients also cycle to spend quality time with their family, where they go out with their children or partner around their local area because they were comfortable or along the seafront which is safe from cars. Most recipients reported they had increased their physical activity levels through cycling with many recipients not having cycled for years before receiving an EPP bike. Family commitments is cited as a reason for not having time or money to afford a bike to go cycling.

Going Deeper into findings - Essex Pedal Power

What we Explored:

Where Pedal Power offers opportunities for residents to access a bike through the programme, it holds great potential in supporting individuals accessing employment or educational opportunities. Whilst training individuals to maintain and use a bike safely and confidently, Pedal Power also offers an opportunity for social and professional networking with others involved in the programme who may offer support to allow these individuals to access these opportunities.

What we found:

EPP staff foster an open-door policy at the EPP office in Jaywick where recipients can turn up to socialise and volunteer but also to get support and advice on other issues they need. ***"We can pop into the office for a cup of tea and a chat during our cycle ride" (Ron, bike recipient) and "the staff are so welcoming. It's encouraged me to be more involved in volunteering... I was encouraged to get involved through the CVS and last week I helped to remove a bed for a family!" (Brian, bike recipient).***

There was support provided to the job centre so individuals could loan a bike to attend job interviews with the relationship built between EPP staff and Jobcentre staff. The EPP staff was important in starting this relationship through promoting the mutual benefits in building a relationship but ensuring it was focused on individuals living in the priority wards EPP was targeting.

There open-door policy helps to provide some professional networking where EPP staff can identify cyclists or volunteers that engage with led rides to potentially undertake ride leader training. Those encourage to do the training demonstrate an enthusiasm for cycling, as well as a friendly and welcoming attitude so that led rides are fun, safe and seek to encourage people to continue cycling.

Where recipients have been able to swap their car or public transport for their EPP bike to travel to work they are already in employment or have access to employment without an EPP bike.
Julie (Bike recipient) stated ***"I'm using the bike to cycle to work instead of driving so I can save money and get still get around to clients".***

Further supporting evidence for Essex Pedal Power

Community residents agreed that after receiving a pedal power bike, they

- 91% felt able to be more physically active
- 78% felt they had the opportunity to be physically active
- 78% found that exercise in general was more enjoyable and satisfying
- 77% thought that engaging in community activities could lead to positive changes in the way their local areas are run (e.g. how they function and how they are organised, including approaches like pedal power).

Almost a third of survey participants also said that in addition to increasing their physical activity levels, they engaged with others more often:

- 31% felt that having their pedal power bike enabled them to exercise with others
- 31% felt that having their pedal power bike enabled them to feel included by others
- 31% felt that having their pedal power bike enabled them to socialise with others



What do these findings mean and where do we take them for refinement?

EPP creates a good relationship with the surrounding community where residents can pop in to see a friendly faced staff member or volunteer. This relationship is based on staff providing holistic support that is more than just cycling opportunities but also help with wellbeing and other issues.

EPP has contributed to employment within EPP but there is scope to understand how EPP is impacting on employment opportunities outside of EPP.

For some recipients, the EPP office is a hub of socialisation with EPP staff as well as other bike recipients. People are exposed to opportunities for socialisation whether it is a led ride, cycling group or opportunities to volunteer (for EPP or Community Voluntary Service).

EPP helps people develop more of a positive perception of neighboring towns (for example Clacton's perception of Jaywick) through the bonding and relationships being built through cycling.

EPP staff have an excellent relationship with residents who engage with cycling which provides an sound platform to further engage these communities and give them some control in the sustainability of the programme – a hallmark of place-based approaches.

EPP, and the opportunity to cycle, as well as connect with others is good for people's overall wellbeing and mental health.

For some recipients that are isolated or at risk of isolation because of family care requirements, the EPP bike provides an opportunity for active leisure opportunities that they would not initially pursue.

EPP helps recipients who do not own or have access to a car use their bike to access shops and healthcare in (e.g. Clacton) without the financial cost of public transport, or the time spent walking.

EPP helps recipients that own or have access to a car still make use of the bike because they see the benefits gained from cycling to increase their physical activity levels, and help with their mental health.

EPP helps people to think differently about how they travel because they realise the benefit of swapping their longer journey in a car to work for the much shorter bike journey.



Initial
assumption

How is this
playing out?

Pedal Power System headlines

If there is a coordinated approach across various sectors and stakeholders that values cycling programmes like EPP, there is potential for collaborative policy driven resourcing.

EPP contributes to bringing strategic stakeholders together for a common purpose of active travel and physical activity, because it helps to align the values, goals and beliefs that people have. This helps with leveraging funding. Having something 'concrete' like EPP is a conduit and mediator for getting people around the table for a shared vision.

Partners are at the heart of a shared approach moving beyond pure transactional and siloed approaches to physical activity. This shared approach embodies place based ways of working through distributing leadership to wider stakeholders who can take control.

EPP has the potential to increase the number of people cycling if it is able to reduce, address and better understand the structural inequalities that surround these communities.

The use of GPS trackers is providing greater insight around the number of people cycling and where they are cycling. This insight is helping EPP to inform and improve cycling infrastructure which may boost cycling participation.

The mixture of behaviour change and infrastructure as a focus through EPP open up greater funding opportunities which is supported by the shared goals and beliefs amongst partners. A shared vision created through EPP helps to bring to the fore important issues about funding and key challenges surrounding sustainability

EPP is giving opportunities for stakeholders across the system to access and develop better relationships with communities. This is driven by a place based approach that acknowledges and respects the wide diversity of stakeholders in local communities.

Going Deeper into findings - Essex Pedal Power

What we Explored:

EPP has the potential to achieve its outcomes when the system is considered to not just include policy decision making, infrastructure investments and other mid-level actions. In addition to this, if EPP considers the role communities, third sector organisations and other place-based approaches play in influencing goals and beliefs, there is greater scope to provide more of a positive environment in Essex towards cycling, which will then lead to more people cycling.

What we found:

There is system buy in from Essex County Council Transport and Localities that would traditionally work outside the physical activity sector, with 3rd sector organisations also involved where they share beliefs in the benefits of cycling to the wellbeing of individuals and communities. The ability to leverage more funding across sectors is important in helping these sectors reaching their strategic goals which influences their belief in EPP.

Where Active Essex position ABCD and place-based working at the core of its approach to physical activity, EPP operational staff work to collaborate with 3rd sector organisations based in Clacton and Jaywick, where EPP is seen to have the potential to help individuals' wellbeing wider than increasing physical activity levels. For example, "**Community participation is evident with 3rd sector organisations heavily involved in providing resource and support to EPP to help run its operations but also to provide signposting opportunities for volunteering opportunities**" (Gloria, System Stakeholder).

The use of GPS trackers allows the community to provide insight into how they are cycling in the area that is to be inform future networking planning. This is with the intention of providing safe cycling infrastructure with cycle parking to encourage more cyclists to use the routes because they are safe and there is capacity to park.

Going Deeper into findings - Essex Pedal Power

What we Explored:

Within an environment where EPP has grabbed the attention and started to influence goals and beliefs of certain stakeholders (e.g. healthcare, transport, workplaces, third sector orgs, education), we can start to see changes in the way cycling infrastructure is resourced and acknowledged through real actions (e.g. workplaces providing cycling facilities for workers, and wider stakeholders building cycling priorities into their operational plans that put the community first). These actions are contributed to and anchored by AE and its collaborative approach to working across a wide range of stakeholders. This results in a number of outcomes – increased physical activity, more accessibility for cycling and opportunities to attract funding.

What we found:

Essex Pedal Power has aligned stakeholders with mutual interests to work together towards their respective strategic goals through increasing cycling participation where there is potential to leverage funding, hit strategic goals and distribute leadership to respective experts. Active Essex has been a key driver in bringing together and aligning these stakeholders where ***"prior to this project we wouldn't have been able to link or synergise with other areas... Essex Pedal Power has helped us leverage new funding"*** (Neil, Senior System Stakeholder).

We see an influence of Essex Pedal Power on how cycling infrastructure is being planned for because of the GPS tracking data being used to inform stakeholders of the cycle routes recipients are taking. Some control over planning has been distributed to the community where ***"one of the benefits that we are seeing is that GPS data is starting to help us inform our network planning"*** (Andy, Senior System Stakeholder). Where there is trust that recipients will cycle the bikes, it has meant their journeys are helping to inform future network planning and cycle parking.

Essex Pedal Powers approach to behaviour change of cycling – providing free bikes, training and access to led rides – alongside upgrading cycling infrastructure – cycle routes and parking – open opportunities that leverage greater funding. This joint approach happens because of shared goals and beliefs amongst partners in Essex Pedal Power, where they have a mutual interest in increasing cycling participation.

Going Deeper into findings - Essex Pedal Power

What we Explored:

If there is a coordinated approach across various sectors (e.g. AE, Travel, Education etc) who value cycling programmes like EPP, then this has the potential for collaborative policy-driven resourcing that creates a holistic approach to supporting active travel. This approach involves resources being pooled in an appropriate way that serves the best interests for cycling in Essex.

What we found:

EPP stakeholders are committed to and pool resources into infrastructure helping EPP grow. There has been support and resource provided to operational staff to try and maintain provision of opportunities to cycle. This also saw a change in structure in EPP stakeholder organisations where there was commitment of staff to EPP to be involved further than just on a transactional basis. The goals and beliefs of EPP stakeholders are aligned with respect to how it can help them reach their strategic goals with extra resource committed evidenced through their belief in EPP being part of transformational change. This is occurring with system partners that hold a mutual interest in the benefits of increasing cyclists to their strategic goals. Active Essex are key facilitators of this within a place-based approach.

Where sectors have a mutual interest in cycling and an understanding how it can contribute to their strategic goals, there is a coordinated approach towards delivering Essex Pedal Power. ***"Partners are at the heart of Essex Pedal Power, moving away from a transactional relationship"*** (Neil, Senior System Stakeholder). There is not one sector in control with leadership distributed amongst stakeholders where partners share beliefs and goals that partnership working will help work to achieve common goals.

EPP operates in a context where there are shared beliefs amongst a wide range of stakeholders that cycling, active travel and health are important things to invest resources into. AE are 'captains' of this bringing people together. As a result, an environment of 'opportunity' exists where we see 'action' in the structures and goals of stakeholders which are then seen in local policy. However, this is only the starting point, and more work is required to branch out to other areas of the system. This includes additional third sector organisations and community level stakeholders.

What do these findings mean and where do we take them for refinement?

Essex Pedal Power is a conduit that has been able to integrate and bring together stakeholders across sectors that hold mutual interest in increasing participation in cycling. Strategic goals and beliefs have been aligned through the opportunity to leverage funding that can help stakeholders to achieve their outcomes and potential for sustainable approaches to physical activity with funding wider than the physical activity sector.

Where there is mutual interest and a reliance on different partners to deliver on EPP, there is distributed leadership amongst partners to deliver on their "expert area" in a place-based approach. EPP helps stakeholders to value ABCD approaches to achieve shared goals.

EPP's place based vision provides system stakeholders with a lens to understand community assets and strengths through cultural intermediaries who have positive relationships with people in place. This should be enhanced and continued to embed EPP into community ownership.



Further Reading

These findings are part of an overall evaluation report. If you would like to see the overall report, please email kev.harris@hartpury.ac.uk for the Active Essex Systems Evaluation Report