

Dave Bush – Written evidence (NPS0036)

Summary –

- 1- Encourage Parkrun
 - Open up school facilities to all
 - Build cycle-ways alongside long distance roads and heritage railways.
- 2 - Introduce aspects into the national curricular more favourable to physical recreation and aims of inclusivity.
- 3 - Physical activity does not have to be competitive.
- 4 – Encourage data collection.
- 5 – Encourage openness of minority group participation in sport and publicise their successes.
- 6 - Continued support to “Safe Guarding in Sport” and similar.
 - Concern over personality moulding of children in sports.
 - Drugs
- 7 - Financially well off professional sports should contribute much more than they do to the less well funded sports.
 - Greater measures taken to deal with people who exploit the vast funds available in sports.
- 8 – No comment
- 9 - There should most certainly be a National Sporting Plan.

My interest in this subject ---- I am representing my personal views as an individual, a 73yr old retired secondary school and tertiary college teacher who has participated in sporting activities throughout my whole life and assisted with sporting activities at the schools I taught at. I was a science teacher rather than a PE sports specialist. I have 5 adult offspring with partners and 7 grandchildren. Most of us are keen sports people and have represented our areas in various sporting activities, above average, but not at the so called elite level. My wife and I regularly walk 6 to 10 miles in the countryside. We are, and have been, involved with a number of sports and recreational clubs and teams. Looking back over my life, recreational physical activity has been, and is, immensely important to me and my family.

1. How can local delivery, including funding structures, of sport and recreation be improved to ensure that people of all ages and abilities are able to lead an active lifestyle?

1.1 - I cannot comment overly on this, not being presently involved with the organisational side of things.

1.2 - I will however straightway identify Parkrun as being very successful, of which I'm sure you are well aware. Several of my family and myself have run at a number of locations, none of which had an attendance of less than 300 people!! Between us we have probably clocked up 1000 plus Parkruns. My local run has peaked at over 700 participants and has never been less than 300. At Parkrun, we have elite runners finishing 5K in 16 mins and at the other end people coming in at over 50 mins. However, there is great encouragement for all

participants, from all. We all know that we are there to have encouragement and to give encouragement. There is a great camaraderie.

1.1.2 - So, that is the very first thing that I think is needed. More emphasis and help for Park run, particularly after Covid. I am very worried at how it is going to work in future considering the huge concentrated numbers and heavy breathing involved. All I can say is that whatever assistance has been given to Parkrun, it has been very valuable and well spent. I suspect we will have to find a way of reducing the numbers at the various Parkruns after Covid so I think more investment and encouragement will be needed to start up more Parkrun venues.

1.3 - As for coordination of local sporting facilities, I would suggest that all school's facilities be opened up out of school hours and free for local residents. Schools would of course need to be compensated for this. Caretaker's time, cleaners and security measures.

1.4 - What about making it a planning application requirement that all new longish distance roads and railways have to have a cycle lane alongside them separated from the road itself? It would cost a pittance compared to the cost of the road. Hopefully motoring is to become less polluting locally with electric, and apart from the noise, it will become much more pleasant to cycle these routes. On that thought, what about grants to heritage railways to put cycle-ways alongside their track. They have the room in most cases and the routes they take can be so idyllic. And of course continuing to convert all disused railway tracks into cycle-ways and footpaths.

2. How can adults of all ages and backgrounds, particularly those from under-represented groups, including women and girls, ethnic minorities, disabled people, older people, and those from less affluent backgrounds, be encouraged to lead more active lifestyles?

2.1 - When I was at school in the 50's and 60's I remember part of my sporting education concerned itself greatly with the fact that a very important outcome of sport was that it was to be inclusive and open to everybody. This might have been down to my particular games teachers, but in any case, it seems to have been lost over the years in the pursuit of the over commercialisation of competitive sport as a passive entertainment, rather than something that everybody should be able to access. I don't know what the National Curriculum for school PE and sports contains, but if inclusivity is already mentioned, it should be made more emphatic, and if it is not mentioned then it most certainly should be so.

2.2 - And it is blatantly obvious that one place, the absolute best place and time to encourage people to partake of physical recreation is when they are young and in school. What they encounter then, stays with them the whole of their life. Not really rocket science. Covid is teaching us that school is much more than Maths, English and other academic subjects needed to enable workers of the future. They provide much more. Babysitting, learning how to learn, socialising, and bringing children into the world of adults to name but a few. During my teaching career I saw several reductions of sport participation in school through loss of funding and resources, selling off of playing fields, and the loss of

teachers working with sporting activities because they had to deal with the pressures of academically biased league tables and such. This needs to be reversed.

2.2.1 - I used to teach dingy sailing in my state comprehensive school in the 1990's at our local reservoir. I was given some time in my timetable for this but I still had to use some of my own time to do it. However, under pressure of National Curriculum and the need to teach more to the exam to keep our SATs and other results respectable in the league tables, my Head Teacher timetabled me out of taking the sailing. I could of course continue entirely in my own time if I wanted. However I knew I would be unable to carry on in this manner and be able to deal with my work pressures, work overload and personal stress.

2.2.2 - The exact same thing happened with my assistance in taking the students skiing with the school. A middle class activity perhaps, but I presume we are not abandoning this sector of society's sporting education and encouragement. Our sailing did not cost the children anything, and there was funding and resources available for the children who could not afford skiing. However, the banning of taking the children out of school for a week during term time in the 1990's by the Ministry of Education made it impossible for me to continue participating. Organising and accompanying the children at half term was just not going to be possible for me considering the amount of normal school work that always needs to be done during that time and the general stress release time needed by teachers.

3. *Sporting Future: A New Strategy for an Active Nation, the Government's 2015 sports strategy, outlines five outcome priorities: physical health, mental health, individual development, social and community development and economic development. Are these the right priorities and how successful has the government been in measuring and delivering these outcomes to date?*

3.1 - I have speed read this document, so may not have absorbed all of it but my comment would be to strongly agree that physical recreation does not need to be competitive sport. My wife and I belong to the Midlands Hill Walkers which is a walking group of perhaps 60 members or so. Once a month we hire a coach (which is always full) from Kenilworth and are driven to the Beacons, The Peak District, Snowdonia, The Malverns, The Chiltons, anywhere where there are hills within two or three hours travel. There are three walks of different length arranged for the day for the different abilities, by our volunteer leaders. On our walks we come across many other walkers and walking groups, showing it to be a very popular activity. Of course, our walking club is presently on hold due to Covid.

3.2 - We pay £25 per walk per person, but the important thing that needs supporting, I think, are the people like our volunteer leaders. They take their responsibilities very seriously and have equipped themselves with professional qualifications as well as giving up much more time to plan and run the walks than we, as mere members, do. We are very lucky that they choose to run the walking club. I would suggest free access to training courses and help with funding the equipment they need to use, at the very least.

3.2.1 - I would also suggest more care and preservation of footpaths. Again there are a lot of volunteers involved with this, but more awareness of footpath's importance and funding should be made available to encourage footpath care.

4. Is government capturing an accurate picture of how people participate in sport and recreation activities in its data collection? How could this be improved?

4.1 - I don't know what data the government captures but I would certainly encourage them to do more, in response to the importance of this subject.

5. How can racism, homophobia, transphobia, misogyny and ableism in sport be tackled?

5.1 - Is this not a societal problem rather than a sports problem? Shouldn't the question rather be "How can sport be used to tackle racism, and the other problems in our society?" Hopefully, the openness, participation and success in sports by people of these groups will help in diminishing these problems. I think that the sports and news broadcasting media are key by being careful of the language they use. And in turn, sports will benefit from the better attitude to minorities.

5.2 - Also, as with my answer (para 2.1) to encourage inclusivity of sports participation for minorities, something to tackle this should be a prominent part of the National Curriculum, if it is not already.

6. What can be done to improve and implement effective duty of care and safeguarding standards for sports and recreation activities at all levels?

6.1 - Continued support for organisations such as "Safe Guarding in Sport". I hope that funding for this body is not on a temporary basis at the whim of the political flavour of the day.

6.2 - But it is not just the extreme abuse of children that I think has to be continued to be tackled. There is also the moulding of children's personalities that I have unfortunately seen, to make them more successful in their sport, but at the detriment to their whole personality. I have had at least one lad who was difficult to teach because he appeared to have been inculcated by his football coaches to be more aggressive in the game and this spilled out into his everyday life. Of course it could have simply been his natural temperament, so, in which case, I would ask why sports had not taught him how to deal with that, as I would have hoped it to?

6.3 - I played ice hockey as a youth in Canada before we returned to the UK in the 60's and I learnt how to deal with a body contact sport. However, the examples of the professional NHL of Canada USA, are nothing less than absolutely disgraceful. The old joke - "I went to a Hockey match and a game broke out!" It is the acceptance of fighting with minimal consequences for the perpetrators that is very wrong. But one thing that distressed me a few years ago was watching a coach taking an under 11 hockey session in our local ice rink in Birmingham and at the end of the game he picked up his young players and

threw them to land on their bellies on the rubber mats at the side of the rink!! They landed safely, thanks of course, to all the padding and helmets they were wearing. I assumed this was to encourage them to be "tough" and not be afraid of body contact but I just felt it was too much. We have a duty at all levels and areas of society to engender physical care and empathy in all of us and certainly not to encourage the opposite.

6.4 - One character who springs to mind is the tennis player of the 70's John McEnroe. We now see him as this nice guy with a good sense of humour, but his on-court antics were exactly the type of behaviour we try to bring up our children to avoid. I disliked his behaviour for two reasons. I don't want our children to behave like that, and I think it is basically cheating in the game by trying to unsettle his opponent. I don't know how we can encourage professional sports to stop this sort of thing though.

6.5 - Another example of moulding children to give high levels of competence in sporting ability that I think we have allowed to become excessive and common place. About 15 years ago, I was involved with setting up of an experimental gymnastic scoring system and display. This involved a visit to behind the scenes of the visiting Chinese Women's International Gymnastic Team. As somebody who had never seen these gymnasts up close, this was quite a shock to me. There were all these tiny "girls" who were half the size I would have expected for their age. They had multiple strappings indicating the stresses they had to put their bodies under, and most telling of all, were their black under-eyes, possibly indicative of unhealthy, over-training, lifestyles. Although not really applicable to us here in the UK, it, all the same, showed to me what people would do to children in the pursuit of "elite" sporting performance, which has become quite accepted, but which I think needs to be considered and dealt with.

6.6 - Spitting. Surely, particularly in the wake of Covid, we have to encourage hygienic behaviour as part of physical recreation? Or is this simply a lost cause? I never had to spit when I was playing sports and I don't even now at my age, though in my youth it used to be just the province of old men!

6.7 - Then there are drugs in sports. My only knowledge of such drugs is what I have read and heard through the media, but it is probably the main reason why I would not encourage any of my children, grandchildren or any child in my care, to become professional athletes. I have to risk being seen as naive, but I really don't understand people taking, or worse still, giving drugs to enhance performance. So called doctors ---!?! I can only think it are the rather obscene level of financial rewards available in professional sports. These are predatory criminals and should be prosecuted to the highest degree. More resources and more will to do so are needed.

7. What are the opportunities and challenges facing elite sports in the UK and what can be done to make national sports governing bodies more accountable

7.1 - As far as supporting "Elite" sports goes, in my book, they look quite capable of looking after themselves due to the huge amount of commercial

backing some sports get. The financially over-indulged sports should spread their money out to other sports, be they related sports or not.

7.2 - But on the topic of policing elite sports, we hear of quite disgraceful examples of criminals in elite sports management misappropriating funds and finding other ways to pocket money they are not entitled to. I'm sure there are laws that can be used against these criminals, but what I think has been lacking is the intention to prosecute and the resources to do so.

7.3 - Having criticized professional sports I would say I do remember being inspired by the foremost sports people of my childhood. That, however, is the extent to which I would wish to offer support to "elite" sports.

7.4 - And can we stop treating professional boxing as an "elite" sport worthy of a mention on main news?

8. What successful policy interventions have other countries used to encourage people of all ages, backgrounds and abilities to participate in sport and recreation, and lead more active lifestyles?

8.1 - I am not knowledgeable enough to comment on this.

9. Should there be a national plan for sport and recreation? Why/why not?

8.1 - Absolutely "Yes!"

8.2 - I have been involved with sport and physical activity all my life and it has proved to be simply the most important leisure activity to me. I'm 73 and still going strong, managing 30 mins for the 5k, 60 mins for 10K and skiing at 60MPH (just!). I feel so much better for it and it has enabled me to put more effort into my working life and be more productive to my society. My sports have encouraged me not to smoke and keep my drinking to a minimum so when I go, it is more likely to be with a bang rather than linger on, taking up a hospital bed and NHS resources that could be used by someone else.

8.3 - As a teacher, I was privileged to develop and teach a small sports science lesson to year 7 in conjunction with our PE department where the children carried out an investigation into some aspect of sports they were interested in. It was highly successful and enjoyable for both the pupils and myself. I would like to encourage a higher prominence of sports in the National Curriculum throughout as many subjects as appropriate and also taking into consideration my comments in paras 2.x.x., if a national plan could do this.

8.4 - Our natural state is to be active and I have seen people of all abilities and physiques enjoy their physical activity at the ability levels which work for them. We pay our taxes to enable the State to provide us with things that are essential to our wellbeing and I consider that access to physical recreation should very much continue to be considered essential.

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