



# More than just movement; Bat & Chat at Mevagissey

Themes: older adults, social table tennis, wellbeing, connected communities

Following on from previous successful growth projects, St Austell Table Tennis Club received seed funding through the Active Cornwall Live Longer Better programme to establish an over 55's Bat & Chat project in Mevagissey. According to Sport England 42% of people aged 55+ are inactive, compared to 29% of the adult population. St Austell TTC's project focussed on creating safe, welcoming opportunities for people over 55 to be active and socially connected through table tennis.

## Background

Funding from Active Cornwall allowed St Austell TTC to create two new weekly sessions at Mevagissey Activity Centre, as well as enhancing their existing weekly 55+ session in St Austell. Through the sessions the club aimed to contribute to increasing physical activity, better mental wellbeing, offer a positive routine, a sense of achievement and a place to connect.

To promote the sessions, St Austell TTC partnered with Wild, Wonder and Wisdom to promote a series of 3 taster sessions at the activity centre.

Following the success of the taster sessions, attendance has steadily grown week by week with sessions now being run by the group under the umbrella of St Austell TTC.

A coach was introduced to provide initial support the group, giving guidance to increase both skill and confidence of participants. Soon afterwards a volunteer from within the group took over as session leader. The sustainability of the sessions has been ensured by charging a small fee of £3 per session. The club continues to provide safeguarding, risk assessments, first aid cover and additional equipment if required.



## The Impact

Craig at St Austell TTC notes how the *Bat & Chat* project has encouraged movement in an enjoyable and manageable way for participants. The regular weekly structure has helped form a routine and support ongoing attendance at the sessions. Several players attend multiple sessions each week, increasing their physical activity levels both within and outside the sessions as their energy and confidence has grown.

*"Many arrived feeling unsure about their physical ability or concerned about trying a new activity. Through gentle coaching, peer encouragement and the relaxed pace of the sessions, participants gradually became more comfortable taking part. As they saw their skills improve, their self-belief grew – this confidence often extends beyond the activity itself, with individuals feeling more capable, more willing to try new things, and more positive about staying active as they age"*

*Craig  
St Austell Table Tennis Club*

One of the biggest impacts has been the formation of friendships and supportive social networks. For some participants this was the first regular social engagement since retirement, bereavement or moving to the area;

*"The shared experience of learning, laughing and playing together has reduced feelings of isolation. The group now has its own sense of identity and belonging".*



*"My fitness has improved enormously; I've made new friends with other players. Pure enjoyment."*

*John, Player*

Each session attracts between 12-18 participants, with the project also resulting in a growth in club members, with around 29 players joining the club – reinforcing a sense of belonging and strengthening sustainability.

## Key Learnings

- Social connection is just as important as movement
- Ownership leads to sustainability
- Small, friendly activities make a big difference
- Consistency of activity is more important than intensity of activity

