Background
In 2014 England Athletics approached the Herts Sports Partnership on the basis that the National Governing Body (NGB) had identified Hertfordshire as a county for potential growth in recreational running. Prior to that time, the County Sports Partnership (CSP) had worked with the NGB with some success to establish a small network of informal running groups.

At that time there was only one parkrun in the county, which on average was attracting 253 runners each Saturday in St. Albans. Discussions with parkrun representatives identified that Hertfordshire was also seen as an area for potential growth for parkruns, although various approaches to local authorities and landowners had met with only very limited success.

At the time, the county was well served by a range of mass participation running events, particularly those in support of charitable causes, including Cancer Research UK and the Willow Foundation. We decided to take a look at recreational running through the lens of whole market and understanding in Hertfordshire and to see whether we could link it back to various England Athletics and parkrun offers. We looked at how we could involve partners in the roll-out of the delivery of the programme and we sought to identify pinch points and opportunities within the supply system i.e. gaps in provision leading to the set-up of additional informal running clubs, networks, parkruns etc.

Following a series of focus groups and discussions with existing running groups and networks we identified the following gaps that, if plugged, could lead to significant growth in recreational running in Hertfordshire: -

- Scope, and latent demand for at least one parkrun in each of the 10 local authority areas.
- Concerted, insight led development programmes for recreational running in 5 of those districts.
- Series of events to bridge the gap between 5k and 10k runs - particularly for those ladies wishing to progress after Race for Life and similar events.
- Lack of qualified run leaders.

Resources
We were able to use our position as the strand lead for physical activity on the Hertfordshire Lifestyle & Legacy Partnership to secure £25,000 from Public Health Hertfordshire towards recreational running - on the basis that we would create a further six parkruns and target health inequalities in some of the county’s most socially deprived areas. Of this we transitioned £15,000 to the parkrun organisation as matching funding (£1,500 per new parkrun) for 10 additional parkruns in Hertfordshire. The remaining £10,000 was used to match fund a £15,000 investment by England Athletics who create capacity and seed funding for recreational running programmes in the five targeted local authority areas.

Service Level Agreements were put in place to ensure that all parties fully understood their respective roles and responsibilities and were committed to the delivery of agreed KPIs.

Outcomes
- The number of parkruns now established in Hertfordshire is 8, with a further 3 at the advanced planning stage.
- 3 of those parkruns are held within walking distance of some of the county’s most socially deprived wards with the greatest health inequalities.
- Average weekly parkrun participants in Hertfordshire has increased to 1,204 - 29% of whom were previously classified as inactive.
- Average number of weekly parkrun volunteers has increased fivefold to 106.
- 39% increase in the number of recreational running groups now established in Hertfordshire.
- Hatfield Five Mile Road Run Series (3 events per annum) now established with CSP support.
- Recreational running embedded into the University of Hertfordshire’s Active Students programme.
- Clearly defined pathways and exit routes from recreational running programmes to competitive events and club membership - for those wishing to take the next step.
- Up to 45 Moving Mums (school gates activity programmes for young mothers) projects either established or at an advanced planning stage - all of which will include recreational running.
- 64 run leaders qualified.
- Highly satisfied funding partners.
- Strengthened local partnerships.
- Enhanced reputation of CSP as a connector, conduit for funding, facilitator and innovator.