



## Summary

### What is Sport England seeking to achieve through forward planning?

Sport England aims to ensure positive planning for sport, enabling the right facilities to be provided in the right places, based on robust and up-to-date assessments of need for all levels of sport and all sectors of the community. To achieve this our objectives are to seek to **PROTECT** sports facilities from loss as a result of redevelopment; to **ENHANCE** existing facilities through improving their quality, accessibility and management and to **PROVIDE** new facilities that are fit for purpose to meet demands for participation now and in the future. We work with the planning system to achieve these aims and objectives, seeking to ensure that they are reflected in local plan policies, and applied in development management.

The Government's National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) is clear about the role that sport plays in delivering sustainable communities through promoting health and well-being.

Sport England, working with the provisions of the NPPF, wishes to see direct reference to sport in local planning policy to protect, enhance and provide sports facilities, as well as helping to realise the wider benefits that participation in sport can bring.

### Delivering Sound Policies

Sound policy can only be developed in the context of objectively assessed needs, in turn used to inform the development of a strategy for sport and recreation. Policies which protect, enhance and provide for sports facilities should reflect this work, and be the basis for consistent application through development management. Sport England is not prescriptive on the precise form and wording of policies, but advises that a stronger plan will result from attention to taking a clearly justified and positive approach to planning for sport.

Policies could be included in a separate chapter on sport and recreation or, following the NPPF, be part of a chapter on health and well-being. In all cases, however, policies for sport and active recreation must be properly justified, include criteria against which development proposals will be judged and be based on a robust and up-to-date assessment of need. In this way, planning authorities will be able to demonstrate that their plan has been positively prepared (based on objectively assessed needs), is consistent with national policy (reflecting the NPPF), is justified (having considered alternatives) and effective (being deliverable). Without such attention there is a risk that a local plan or other policy document could be considered unsound.

### Further Guidance

Further guidance on Sport England's approach to planning for sport is set out in the following complementary documents:

- Aims and Objectives
- Development Management
- Supporting Advice





## What is the Place of Sport in Local Plans?

The NPPF clearly recognises the role of sport and recreation as a fundamental part of sustainable development, and expects local authorities to plan positively for these needs and demands accordingly. The protection and provision of opportunities to participate in sport is seen as fundamental to the health and well-being of communities (NPPF, section 8), meaning that local authorities must plan and provide accordingly through policy and development management. Without a robust and up-to-date assessment of need, there is a risk that a local plan document could be considered unsound.

Sport England advocates that planning for sport in communities should be based on a clear strategy for sport which sets out the case to protect, enhance and provide facilities. In doing so, it can be demonstrated how sport is important both for its own sake, but also how it contributes to complementary agendas including those illustrated below.

Further information on sport's wider benefits is available at:  
[www.sportengland.org/research/benefits-of-sport](http://www.sportengland.org/research/benefits-of-sport)  
[www.sportengland.org/our-work/local-work/local-government/in-it-for-the-long-run](http://www.sportengland.org/our-work/local-work/local-government/in-it-for-the-long-run)



*Sport contributes to many complementary agendas*



## Sport and Planning: Demonstrating Sound Policy

The NPPF clearly establishes the requirement that local plans ensure that there is proper provision of community and cultural facilities to meet local needs. Policies could be included in a separate chapter on sport and recreation or, following the NPPF, be part of a chapter on health and well-being.

In all cases, however, planning authorities need to be able to demonstrate that their plan has been positively prepared (based on objectively assessed needs for sport and active recreation), is consistent with national policy (reflecting the NPPF), is justified (having considered alternatives) and effective (being deliverable). Without such attention there is a risk that a local plan could be considered unsound.

### Positively Prepared: policies should reflect objectively assessed needs and provide opportunities for sport

The NPPF (para 73) explicitly notes that:

*“Planning policies should be based on robust and up-to-date assessments of the needs for open space, sports and recreation facilities and opportunities for new provision. The assessments should identify specific needs and quantitative or qualitative deficits or surpluses of open space, sports and recreational facilities in the local area”.*

Similarly, positive planning includes accommodating the needs of sport in relation to, for example, sports lighting (NPPF para 125), noise (NPPF para 123) and the opportunities for sport-related development in the Green Belt (NPPF para 89). Sport England has produced guidance on Assessing Needs and Opportunities which should be used to help satisfy the demands of para 73 of the NPPF and thus help to produce a sound plan.

## Consistent with National Policy: in spirit and in practice

The NPPF sets out wide-ranging requirements and aspirations for making the most of delivering sport and recreation opportunities within sustainable communities. There is room for interpretation, but the fundamental messages are clear: protect existing facilities, enhance through improving quality and accessibility, and provide for the future through a planned approach, based on robust and up-to-date assessments of need.

### Justified: reasonable alternatives considered as part of the preparation of the Plan

As one of the tests of soundness, the NPPF requires that:

*“the plan should be the most appropriate strategy, when considered against the reasonable alternatives, based on proportionate evidence”.*

For sports facilities this means a robust and up-to-date assessment of need and opportunities as well as consideration of the role of sport in specific development opportunities such as town centre renewal and urban extensions.

### Effective: deliverable through realistic proposals

The NPPF (para 73) requires that:

*“assessments should identify specific needs and quantitative or qualitative deficits or surpluses of open space, sports and recreational facilities in the local area. Information gained from the assessments should be used to determine what open space, sports and recreational provision is required.”*

This means that there should be clear evidence as to what sporting provision is required to meet identified needs and that this provision is deliverable. This could be through new and/or enhanced provision and should, where appropriate, be included in the Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP), the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Schedule and in site allocations, including specification of how new development will contribute to meeting existing and future needs.





## The Demands of the NPPF in Planning for Sport: Key References

### Sport England's Planning Objective

#### **PROTECT:**

To prevent the loss of sports facilities and land along with access to natural resources for sport.

#### **ENHANCE:**

To ensure that the best use is made of existing facilities in order to maintain and provide greater opportunities for participation and to ensure that facilities are sustainable.

### NPPF Requirements

Planning Principle (12): take account of and support local strategies to improve health, social and cultural wellbeing for all, and deliver sufficient community and cultural facilities and services to meet local needs.

70. To deliver the social, recreational and cultural facilities and services the community needs, planning policies and decisions should:

- guard against the unnecessary loss of valued facilities and services, particularly where this would reduce the community's ability to meet its day-to-day needs;

74. Existing open space, sports and recreational buildings and land, including playing fields, should not be built on unless:

- an assessment has been undertaken which has clearly shown the open space, buildings or land to be surplus to requirements; or
- the loss resulting from the proposed development would be replaced by equivalent or better provision in terms of quantity and quality in a suitable location; or
- the development is for alternative sports and recreational provision, the needs for which clearly outweigh the loss.

17. ... planning should: promote mixed use developments, and encourage multiple benefits from the use of land in urban and rural areas, recognising that some open land can perform many functions (such as for wildlife, recreation, flood risk mitigation, carbon storage, or food production)

28. Planning policies should support economic growth in rural areas in order to create jobs and prosperity by taking a positive approach to sustainable new development. To promote a strong rural economy, local and neighbourhood plans should:

- support sustainable rural tourism and leisure developments that benefit businesses in rural areas, communities and visitors, and which respect the character of the countryside;
- promote the retention and development of local services and community facilities in villages, such as local shops, meeting places, sports venues, cultural buildings, public houses and places of worship.

81. Once Green Belts have been defined, local planning authorities should plan positively to enhance the beneficial use of the Green Belt, such as looking for opportunities to provide access; to provide opportunities for outdoor sport and recreation; to retain and enhance landscapes, visual amenity and biodiversity; or to improve damaged and derelict land.



**PROVIDE:**

To ensure that new sports facilities are planned for and provided in a positive and integrated way and that opportunities for new facilities are identified to meet current and future demands for sporting participation.

17. ... planning should: promote mixed use developments, and encourage multiple benefits from the use of land in urban and rural areas, recognising that some open land can perform many functions (such as for wildlife, recreation, flood risk mitigation, carbon storage, or food production);

70. To deliver the social, recreational and cultural facilities and services the community needs, planning policies and decisions should: plan positively for the provision and use of shared space, community facilities (such as local shops, meeting places, sports venues, cultural buildings, public houses and places of worship) and other local services to enhance the sustainability of communities and residential environments;

73. Access to high quality open spaces and opportunities for sport and recreation can make an important contribution to the health and well-being of communities. Planning policies should be based on robust and up to date assessments of the needs for open space, sports and recreation facilities and opportunities for new provision. The assessments should identify specific needs and quantitative or qualitative deficits or surpluses of open space, sports and recreational facilities in the local area. Information gained from the assessments should be used to determine what open space, sports and recreational provision is required.

156. Local planning authorities should set out the strategic priorities for the area in the Local Plan. This should include strategic policies to deliver:

- the provision of retail, leisure and other commercial development;
- the provision of health, security, community and cultural infrastructure and other local facilities;

158. Each local planning authority should ensure that the Local Plan is based on adequate, up-to-date and relevant evidence about the economic, social and environmental characteristics and prospects of the area.

171. Local planning authorities should work with public health leads and health organisations to understand and take account of the health status and needs of the local population (such as for sports, recreation and places of worship), including expected future changes, and any information about relevant barriers to improving health and well-being.





## Delivery Through Forward Planning

The NPPF expects planning policy to be based on meeting objectively assessed needs at the local level, to be positive in character and have sufficient flexibility to address changing circumstances. In developing policies for sport, local authorities should undertake: **evidence gathering** (basing policy and its implementation on a robust and up-to-date assessment of need, including existing and likely future provision and demands); **strategy development** (a clear strategy to help guide the provision of facilities); and **policy development** (which help to deliver the wide-ranging aspirations associated with sustainable communities).

### 1. Evidence Gathering

#### The Needs and Opportunities Assessment

Fundamental to understanding the place and potential of sport in sustainable communities is a robust and up-to-date assessment of needs and opportunities for all sports across the plan area and further afield. This could be adapted from past work (typically a 'PPG17 Assessment'), but will need to be re-visited where information is dated, and should include an assessment of both supply and demand factors such as an audit of facilities (both quantity and quality of provision), data on capacity and usage, and projections of fitness for purpose for future needs. The latest guidance on developing a robust needs and opportunities assessment is available on Sport England's website at:

[www.sportengland.org/facilities-planning/planning-for-sport/planning-tools-and-guidance](http://www.sportengland.org/facilities-planning/planning-for-sport/planning-tools-and-guidance)

#### Sport England Supporting Advice

Sport England has developed a comprehensive suite of supporting advice and guidance to assist with the preparation of needs assessments for built sports facilities and playing pitches as well as understanding participation rates and trends. Further information is given in the Supporting Advice Guide which complements this Guide.

#### Planning Across Boundaries

The development of a comprehensive evidence base and assessment of need offers the opportunity to co-ordinate interests both within an authority area and across boundaries. This includes the potential to share costs in data collection and analysis and could make practical and economic sense, particularly where the catchment areas of sports facilities straddle authority boundaries. Such work might also be used to help demonstrate fulfilment of the Duty to Co-operate.

#### Key Sport England Evidence Base Guidance and Tools

- Guidance on developing a robust needs and opportunities assessment
- Playing Pitch Strategy Guidance
- Active Places Power
- Sports Facility Calculator
- Facilities Planning Model

[www.sportengland.org/facilities-planning/planning-for-sport/planning-tools-and-guidance](http://www.sportengland.org/facilities-planning/planning-for-sport/planning-tools-and-guidance)

#### Checklist for Evidence Gathering

- Undertake an assessment of need to understand if the current provision is adequate to meet current and future demands and identify any requirements for new and/or enhanced provision.
- Establish whether existing data is 'up-to-date', in line with local circumstances, as required by the NPPF.
- Draw on parallel data gathering and analysis exercises undertaken as part of initiatives such as green infrastructure planning which could provide opportunities for joint working.
- Appraise significant cross-boundary issues, particularly relating to facility provision to robustly consider facility catchments.
- Use information from other local authority strategies, including leisure and play strategies, green infrastructure strategies, and housing and population projections.
- Consider whether evidence is robust enough to support the development of policy, strategies for provision and delivery plans/ CIL schedules.



## 2. A Strategic Approach

### A Strategy for Sport

The assembly of evidence and assessments of need for policy making should be brought together in a strategy for sporting provision. This could already exist and/or be developed from an existing Playing Pitch Strategy, Open Space Strategy or Leisure Strategy. Critically, the strategy must provide a focus for the translation of the evidence and assessment of need into clear goals, in turn used to underpin policy in the local plan. In all cases a strategy should:

- be sport and participation-led, based on understanding how communities currently use facilities for a wide range of sporting opportunities and their actual and perceived needs now and in the future.
- contain an audit of facility supply which assesses the quantity, quality, accessibility and capacity of provision.
- demonstrate how the area's communities will be provided for, through facility protection, enhancement and new provision.
- use the opportunity to address the needs of sport both directly and indirectly (through community use of facilities, for example) and cross-boundary provision based on catchment area planning.

A clear outcome of the strategy should be the development of an action plan that will deliver the vision and objectives of the Local Plan by identifying where and how planning intends to protect, enhance and provide sports facilities reflecting local need. In turn, there is the opportunity to rationalise existing Strategies, focusing on planning for sustainable communities as advocated in the NPPF.

### Infrastructure Delivery and the CIL

'Sporting and recreational facilities' are included within the definition of Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) infrastructure in the 2008 Planning Act (section 216). Justification for their inclusion in the Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP) and the CIL Schedule should be made through a needs assessment which underpins prioritised deliverable projects to improve the sporting infrastructure and meet local needs in the area.

In order to promote investment in sport and ensure sporting development is viable, the draft charging schedule needs to identify that sport and recreation uses should not be liable to pay CIL (i.e. £0 rate).

### Checklist for a Strategic Approach

- Translate the evidence base and assessment of need into a strategy for sports provision which establishes how the current and future needs of the community for sport and recreational provision will be met.
- Use the strategy to inform policy development, providing justification for facility protection, enhancement and new provision.
- Use opportunities to co-ordinate activity within the local authority, between local authorities for strategic issues and between stakeholders with an interest in sport.
- Ensure that there are links made between demonstrable community needs and the means of providing for them, such as through the definition of requirements through the Infrastructure Delivery Plan and direct funding contributions through CIL.





### 3. Developing Policies for Sport

Whilst the NPPF does not stipulate precisely how policies for sport should be presented in Local Plans, Sport England, following the NPPF, consider that as an absolute minimum, policy should cover the following issues:

#### Facility Protection

Policy needs to clearly state that sports facilities (built as well as pitches, open space and recreational land) will be protected from loss except where it is demonstrated that the site is surplus to requirements; or equivalent or better facilities will be provided; or the development is for alternative sports and recreational provision, the needs for which clearly outweigh the loss.

Criteria to the policy could also include reference to opportunities for the shared use of facilities, and securing increased quantity and quality of provision in line with a robust and up-to-date assessment of need. Sport England's playing fields policy and exceptions tests could be helpful in developing policy. See: [www.sportengland.org/planningapplications](http://www.sportengland.org/planningapplications)

#### NPPF para 74.

*“Existing open space, sports and recreational buildings and land, including playing fields, should not be built on unless: an assessment has been undertaken which has clearly shown the open space, buildings or land to be surplus to requirements; or the loss resulting from the proposed development would be replaced by equivalent or better provision in terms of quantity and quality in a suitable location; or the development is for alternative sports and recreational provision, the needs for which clearly outweigh the loss.”*

#### Enhanced and New Provision

Policy should identify the beneficial role that sport and recreation plays in existing and new development through the provision of new and enhanced formal sports facilities (including built facilities) and open space used for active recreation. Specific requirements for meeting the needs of new residents should be addressed, along with opportunities to overcome existing deficiencies.

#### NPPF para 70.

*“...planning policies and decisions should: plan positively for the provision and use of shared space, community facilities ... to enhance the sustainability of communities and residential environments.”*

#### NPPF para 73.

*“Planning policies should be based on robust and up to date assessments of the needs for open space, sports and recreation facilities and opportunities for new provision. The assessments should identify specific needs and quantitative or qualitative deficits or surpluses of open space, sports and recreational facilities in the local area. Information gained from the assessments should be used to determine what open space, sports and recreational provision is required.”*

#### Sports Lighting

By extending the hours a facility is available, along with improving its viability, the lighting of outdoor sports facilities can provide enhanced opportunities for people to participate in sport and secure the benefits that sports can provide, especially in terms of health and well-being. Planning policies should recognise the benefits of lighting outdoor sports facilities along with the significant advances in such technology over recent years. Technical guidance in sports lighting which will help with the preparation of policy is available within the Design and Cost Guidance pages of the Sport England website. See: [www.sportengland.org/facilities-planning/tools-guidance/design-and-cost-guidance](http://www.sportengland.org/facilities-planning/tools-guidance/design-and-cost-guidance)





### Sport in the Green Belt, Urban Fringe and Open Countryside

Where relevant, sport should be referenced in policies covering the Green Belt, urban fringe and wider countryside, recognising (as set out in the NPPF para 81) the need to plan positively to provide opportunities for facility development in these areas and recognising sport's role as a complementary land use, for example in green infrastructure provision. The NPPF (para 89) specifically identifies that appropriate new or enhanced buildings and structures for outdoor sport and recreation are an acceptable use in the Green Belt. In light of this, Sport England supports the provision of appropriate outdoor facilities which help to secure the long-term sustainability of a sports facility, or enhance their quality and/or accessibility thereby maintaining and increasing participation where they do not conflict with wider Green Belt objectives.

#### NPPF para 81.

*"...local planning authorities should plan positively to enhance the beneficial use of the Green Belt, such as looking for opportunities to provide access; to provide opportunities for outdoor sport and recreation..."*

### Neighbourhood Planning

There are opportunities for sports facilities to be included in Neighbourhood Plans as valued community assets where this can be justified through evidence and supported by Local Plan policy. Links to a sports strategy and assessment of needs will be particularly important to ensure that there is adequate and justified provision.

The neighbourhood plan preparation process should involve local sports clubs in order to ensure positive planning for sport and that the plans ensure the right facilities are provided in the right place. The inclusion of new or improved facilities for sport in Neighbourhood Plans could provide a basis for securing funds through CIL and s106 contributions.

### Checklist for Policy Preparation

- Policy should set out a positive approach to the provision and enhancement of sports facilities that are fit for purpose and in suitable locations, addressing needs identified through a robust and up-to-date assessment.
- Policy needs to clearly state that sports facilities (built as well as pitches, open space and recreational land) will be protected from loss except where it is demonstrated that the site is surplus to requirements; or equivalent or better facilities will be provided; or the development is for alternative sports and recreational provision, the needs for which clearly outweigh the loss.
- Policy should recognise the role of sport in contributing to a wide range of spatial planning issues including: regeneration, health promotion, crime reduction, quality of life, engaging with colleagues in sports development, education and public health.
- Set out the expectations associated with sport and recreation that are to be included in new development, as well as those to be provided through CIL and/or planning obligations.
- Identify and promote the role of good design in helping to enable people to lead more active lifestyles and deliver sustainable communities, such as the co-location of facilities.
- Identify and plan positively for where sport and recreation can contribute to spatial planning initiatives such as greenspace networks, or enhance the urban fringe (and Green Belts) through the location of appropriate facilities.
- Make provision for the inclusion of sport and recreation facilities as valued community assets in Neighbourhood Plans, and proactively involve local sports clubs in the process.





## Complementary Guidance

This guidance on Sport England's approach to Forward Planning is complemented by guidance on Aims and Objectives, Development Management and the provision of Supporting Advice in the use of available evidence base tools and further guidance on needs assessments and sport-specific matters.

### Aims and Objectives

Sport England seeks to ensure that planning policy and practice will protect, enhance and provide for sports facilities and opportunities to take part in sport. This guidance note sets out how these objectives are supported by the National Planning Policy Framework and the key outcomes expected.

### Development Management

Sport England, a statutory consultee on planning applications affecting playing field land, works with local authorities, developers, National Governing Bodies, sports partnerships and sports clubs to help ensure that the interests of sport are properly and fairly recognised in the development management process. This guidance note summarises how Sport England and other parties can seek to achieve this in relation to particular types of development and through the different stages of development management (pre-application, submission, determination and implementation).

### Supporting Advice

Sport England provides a comprehensive range of advice on the assembly of evidence to help support the development of policy for sport and its application. This guidance note summarises the material on our website including:

- Evidence-gathering to understand local needs and provision and to help justify policy.
- Design and cost advice for new facilities.
- Dealing with planning applications and securing the best interests of sport through planning contributions.
- Detailed technical advice on the needs of specific sports and facilities.

## Sport England's Role and Contact Details

Sport England:

- advises on the development of planning policy and the planning process insofar as it affects sport and active recreation;
- contributes to the development of policy guidance;
- advises local planning authorities on matters affecting sport and active recreation in development plans and related documents;
- advises on the development of assessments of need and strategies for sporting provision;
- advises local planning authorities on planning applications affecting sport and active recreation; and
- advises sports bodies on planning issues.

**Planning consultations and any correspondence relating to a consultation should be sent direct to our Planning Administration Team using one of the following email addresses:**

**North (North West, North East, Yorkshire)**  
[planning.north@sportengland.org](mailto:planning.north@sportengland.org)

**Central (West Midlands, East Midlands, East)**  
[planning.central@sportengland.org](mailto:planning.central@sportengland.org)

**South (London, South East, South West)**  
[planning.south@sportengland.org](mailto:planning.south@sportengland.org)

**General enquiries should be sent to:**  
[planningforsport@sportengland.org](mailto:planningforsport@sportengland.org)

**Planning Team, Sport England,  
3rd Floor, Victoria House,  
Bloomsbury Square, London WC1B 4SE**