

Press Release

9.30am - Thursday 19 December 2019

**94 % of Playing Fields Protected**

New figures released today (Thursday, 19 December) show playing fields throughout the country are being protected and enhanced thanks to Sport England’s role as a statutory consultee on planning applications. In 94% of concluded planning applications involving an existing playing field, Sport England’s interventions have seen these playing fields either protected, or improved.

The data, which covers the period between April 2017 and March 2018, shows that:

* In 45% of the cases where Sport England originally objected to an application, further negotiations led to an overall improvement in sports provision.
* Of the 135 applications where Sport England maintained its objection, 61 were either withdrawn by the applicants or refused planning permission.
* During this period there were 1,274 planning applications affecting playing fields which is a 4.5% increase on April 2016/2017.

Councils are required to consult Sport England on any proposed development that would affect or lead to the loss of a sports playing field. Sport England objects to all applications unless the developer can prove it will improve or protect sports provision locally.

**Head of Planning at Sport England, Nick Evans said:**

“Many of our first experiences of sport and physical activity happen on playing fields - that’s why the places where we get active really matter. Protecting these fields is at the heart of what Sport England does - enabling more people in local communities to take part in grassroots sport and physical activity. Today’s figures show that we are continuing to protect critical spaces for people to be active. This forms part of our wider work with local authorities to develop strategies to make sure we have enough playing fields to meet the changing demands of local communities. Our ultimate aim is to create a network of high-quality playing fields that we can all be proud of.”

As of 18 December 2019, Sport England’s Active Places data shows that across England there are 22,204 playing field sites, containing a total of 70,648 pitches.

**ENDS**

For information and to request interviews, please contact the Sport England press office: Jonathan Jones on 020 7273 1593 or jonathan.jones@sportengland.org

**Notes to Editors**

The data covers the 12 months from April 2017 to March 2018

To view the planning application section of the Sport England website [click here](https://www.sportengland.org/facilities-planning/planning-for-sport/planning-applications/playing-field-land/).

These figures **do not** involve the sale of playing fields, school or otherwise. They relate to the use of playing fields.

**Planning applications affecting playing fields**

Sport England is a statutory consultee on all planning applications affecting playing fields, including applications affecting any land that has been used as a playing field in the last five years and any replacement of a grass pitch with a synthetic surface.

The number of planning applications does not necessarily represent the overall threat to playing fields. Many of these applications are from clubs / schools / local authorities wanting to improve the quality of their sports facilities.

The figures do not include new playing pitches created outside Sport England’s consultee remit such as those built in conjunction with new housing developments.

A playing field is defined as the whole of a site that encompasses at least one playing pitch.

A pitch is defined as a delineated area, which together with any run off area, is of 0.2 hectares or more and which is used for football, rugby, cricket, hockey, lacrosse, rounders, baseball, softball, Gaelic football, American football, Australian rules football, shinty, hurling, polo or cycle polo. The previous definition stated that the area needed to be 0.4 hectares or more.

‘Detrimental impact’ on sport includes issues such as loss of space around the margins of a field, temporary loss of school playing field space during re-building works, or the creation of a new sporting facility which does not meet all of Sport England’s design standards.

Active Places is the national sports facilities database for England [www.activeplacespower.com](http://www.activeplacespower.com/).

**About Sport England**

Sport England is a public body and invests up to £300 million National Lottery and government money each year in projects and programmes that help people get active and play sport.  It wants everyone in England, regardless of age, background, or level of ability, to feel able to engage in sport and physical activity. That’s why a lot of its work is specifically focused on helping people who do no, or very little, physical activity and groups who are typically less active - like women, disabled people and people on lower incomes.