



Press Release

Embargo: 07 Dec 2017

## **Playing fields safeguards are working**

New figures released today (Thursday 7 December) show playing fields throughout the country are being protected thanks to Sport England's role as a statutory consultee on planning applications.

1138 out of 1200 concluded planning applications affecting playing fields in 2015/16 resulted in improved or safeguarded sports provision.

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.

The figures released by Sport England show that in 2015/16:

- 95% of concluded planning applications resulted in improved or safeguarded sports provision.
- In 46% of cases where Sport England originally objected to an application, our intervention and further negotiations led to an overall improvement in sports provision.
- Of the 120 applications where Sport England sustained objections, 49 were either withdrawn by the applicants or refused planning permission.
- Despite our objections during the planning process, 62 applications (5%) were approved by local planning authorities.

Sport England Property Director, Charles Johnston, said: "Playing fields are a vital part of grassroots sport as they are often the place where young people have their first experience of sport and develop habits that will help keep them active through life. That is why our statutory role is so

important. I'm pleased the latest figures show that the safeguards we have in place are continuing to work."

Sport England's Active Places data shows that across England there are 21,866 playing field sites, containing a total of 70,381 pitches.

## **ENDS**

For information and to request interviews, please contact the Sport England press office: Martin Oxley on 020 7273 1593 or [martin.oxley@sportengland.org](mailto:martin.oxley@sportengland.org) and [media.team@sportengland.org](mailto:media.team@sportengland.org)

## **Notes to Editors**

To see a full breakdown of the 2015/16 figures [click here](#).

To download the regional breakdown [click here](#).

The data covers the 12 months to 31 March 2016.

To view the planning application section of the Sport England website [click here](#).

## **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). Figures quoted are as of July 2017.

### **About Sport England**

- Sport England is a public body and invests more than £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.