



# DESIGNING FOR PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

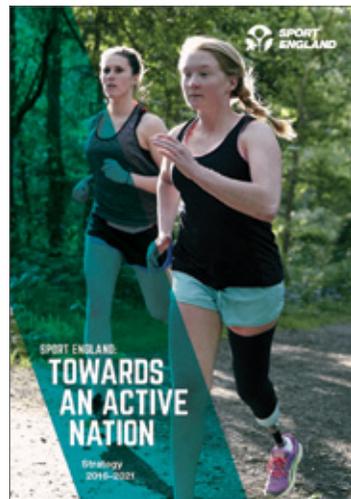
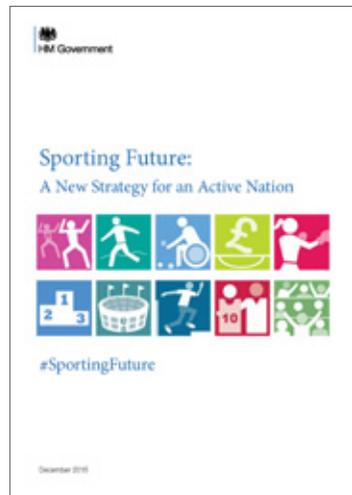
EXPLORING OPPORTUNITIES TO ENCOURAGE PHYSICAL ACTIVITY IN EVERYDAY LIFE



## OUTDOOR SPACES



The Government's 'Sporting Future' strategy was published in December 2015 with a clear focus on the benefits that sport can bring to people and to society, built around a simple set of outcomes: physical wellbeing, mental wellbeing, individual development, social and community development and economic development.



Sport England's strategy 'Towards an Active Nation' was published in May 2016 with a vision that everyone, regardless of age, background or level of ability, can engage in physical activity.

# FOREWORD

**THE CREATION OF EASILY ACCESSIBLE SPACES THAT INSPIRE AND ENCOURAGE PEOPLE TO BE MORE PHYSICALLY ACTIVE AS PART OF THEIR EVERYDAY LIVES IS A CENTRAL CONSIDERATION**

“ *Creating more opportunities to be physically active means thinking about many prompts and cues that enable positive changes in our behaviour. An active environment is one which responds to community needs and aspirations and provides the conditions and opportunities for people to be more active in their everyday lives. Active environments require a more coordinated and holistic approach to the design and operation of our surroundings from streets, neighbourhoods and public open spaces to the policies, standards and planning of the infrastructure of where we live and work.* ”

**Charles Johnston**

Executive Director of Property, Sport England

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**SEE OTHER GUIDANCE ON DESIGNING FOR PHYSICAL ACTIVITY COVERING:**

- **ACTIVITY HUBS**
- **BUDGET COSTS**
- **COVERED OUTDOOR SPACES**
- **INDOOR SPACES**
- **ROUTES AND WAYFINDING**
- **OTHER TOPICS**

**THESE AND THE ASSOCIATED ACTIVE DESIGN GENERAL PRINCIPLES AND CASE STUDIES ARE AVAILABLE AT:**

<https://www.sportengland.org/facilities-planning/active-design/>

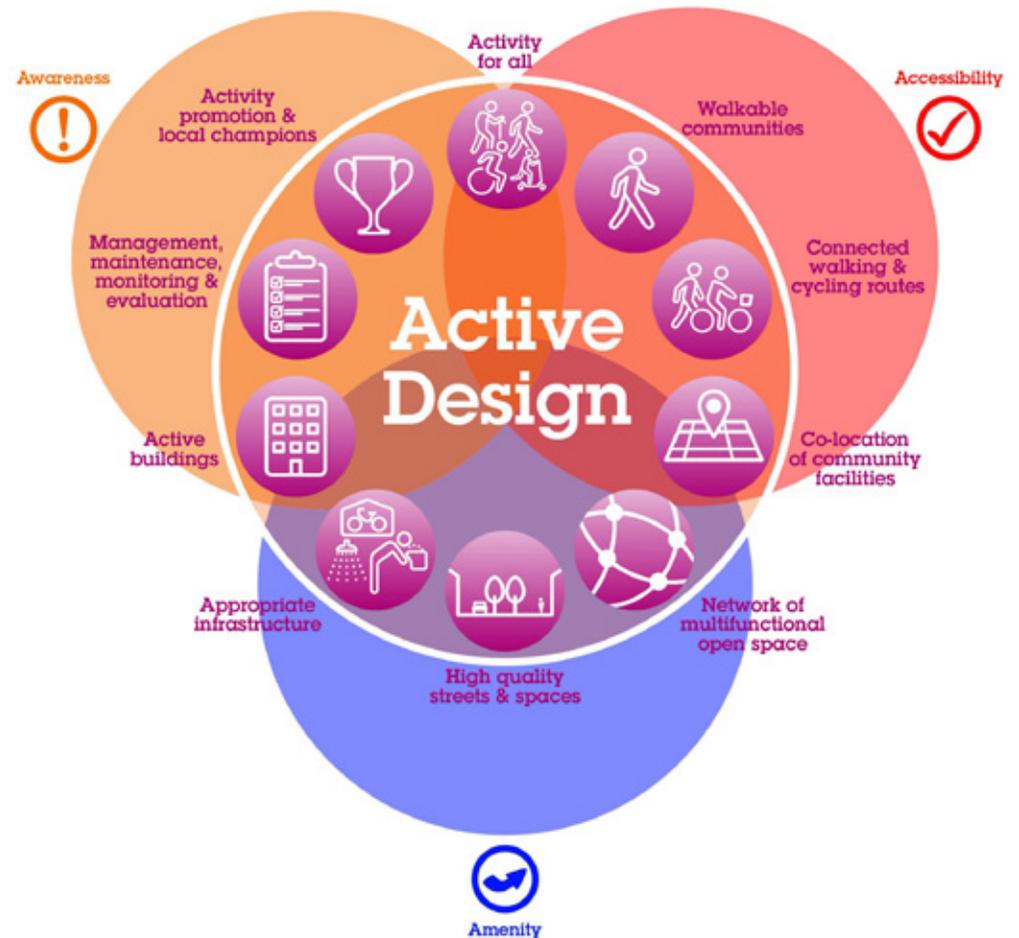
# 1.0 INTRODUCTION

## ACTIVE DESIGN

*ACTIVE DESIGN IS ROOTED IN SPORT ENGLAND'S AIMS AND OBJECTIVES TO PROMOTE THE ROLE OF SPORT AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY IN CREATING HEALTHY AND SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES.*

*ACTIVE DESIGN IS SUPPORTED BY PUBLIC HEALTH ENGLAND AND IS PART OF OUR COLLABORATIVE ACTION TO PROMOTE THE PRINCIPLES SET OUT IN PUBLIC HEALTH ENGLAND'S 'EVERYBODY ACTIVE, EVERY DAY', TO CREATE ACTIVE ENVIRONMENTS THAT MAKE PHYSICAL ACTIVITY THE EASIEST AND MOST PRACTICAL OPTION IN EVERYDAY LIFE.*

<https://www.sportengland.org/facilities-planning/active-design/>



The ten principles of Active Design - achieving as many of these as possible within an Active Environment will optimise opportunities for active and healthy lifestyles

## PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND SPORT

The term 'physical activity' can cover a wide range of informal, casual and recreational pursuits that maintain or enhance fitness, health and overall wellbeing. The term 'sport' is usually associated with more formal training or competition.

For all parts of the spectrum, easily accessed spaces that inspire and enable people of all ages to be physically active as they wish are a valuable community asset. Innovative approaches are advocated that remove barriers to participation and are proportionate and appropriate to customer needs.

Where there is a clear need for formal sports spaces, then the relevant prevailing guidance from national governing bodies of sport (NGBs), Sport England, Department for Education or Education Funding Agency should be followed. However, a distinction should be made between the formal requirements of spaces for sport and more informal spaces for physical activity, albeit that the underlying principles of any relevant prevailing guidance should not be disregarded.

Local context, potential users and site specific risk assessments<sup>1</sup> are all important considerations during the design and briefing stages of a project. For further advice on good practice, visit the Sport England, The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA) and the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) websites.

## OUTDOOR SPACES OVERVIEW

This document considers the use of outdoor spaces for physical activity within local community settings. This includes urban, suburban and rural locations with a range of characteristics. It advocates a creative approach that seeks opportunities to benefit everybody through careful planning, design and management.

There is a wealth of evidence that demonstrates the extensive benefits of regular exercise and close contact with natural landscapes. These range from improved social cohesion, increased well-being, visual satisfaction and emotional uplift to the therapeutic contact with fresh air, wildlife and

biodiversity. People often associate reduced stress levels with periodically getting away from the routines and rigours of their everyday lifestyles.

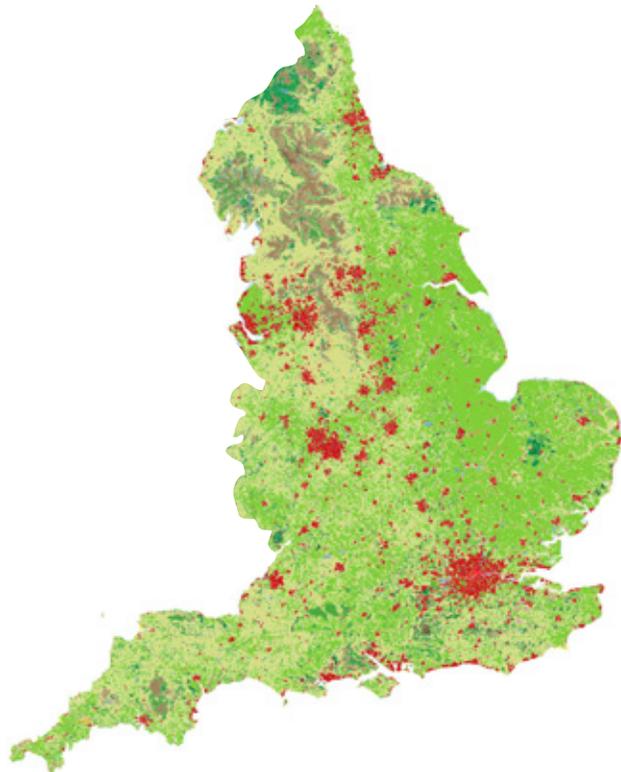
However, there can be real issues that impact on the way people use outdoor spaces. The degree of visual and physical accessibility is of particular importance. For example, enticing views of parks, open spaces, gardens and countryside from adjacent paths and roadways may attract people to use them for physical activity but appropriate planning consents will be required along with signage, parking, access points and management arrangements. Public perceptions should also be considered such as anxiety over potential antisocial behaviour, lack of supervision or security, and a negative local image of a particular area. There may also be cultural or personal sensitivities that inhibit some people from exercising in public spaces.

**AS WELL AS BEING CRUCIAL IN ENABLING PHYSICAL ACTIVITY, OUTDOOR SPACES ARE ALSO THE IMPORTANT LINK BETWEEN BUILDINGS AND FACILITIES. IF WELL CONSIDERED, DESIGNED AND MANAGED, THEY WILL BRING THE PRINCIPLES OF ACTIVE DESIGN TO LIFE AND PLAY A CRUCIAL PART IN PROVIDING OPPORTUNITIES IN THE PLACES IN WHICH PEOPLE LIVE AND WORK.**

**THERE ARE MANY WAYS TO CREATE OUTDOOR SPACES WHICH FEEL SAFE, ARE WELCOMING AND INVITE SOCIAL INTERACTION AND ENJOYMENT. WHILST EVERY COMMUNITY AND NEIGHBOURHOOD IS DIFFERENT, THIS DOCUMENT EXPLORES SOME OF THE WAYS SPACES CAN BE BETTER CONSIDERED AND ADAPTED TO PROMOTE COMMUNITY USE, SPORT, GAMES AND PLAY.**

<sup>1</sup> For example risk assessment considerations, see page 15 of 'Indoor Spaces' document

**IN ENGLAND, C. 85% OF THE POPULATION LIVE IN URBAN AREAS THAT ACCOUNT FOR C. 8% OF THE TOTAL LAND AREA**



Extract from Corine survey<sup>2</sup> 2012, with built-on areas in England shown in red

# 2.0 CLASSIFICATION

## CATEGORIES OF OUTDOOR SPACES

In England, it is estimated that 85% of the population live in urban areas that make up 8% of the total land area. 74% of the land is classified as farmland (fields, orchards etc) and a further 13% as natural (forests, moors, heathland, natural grassland etc). Just under 2% is classified as industry (roads, buildings, airports, quarries etc) and similarly, 2% as green urban areas, parks, gardens, golf courses and sports pitches etc. A full breakdown is available from the Corine Land Cover Studies<sup>2</sup>. However, the table below provides a simplified combination of categories to give an overview of the potential for public access. The following pages then illustrate some examples from the diverse scope of physical activities that can take place in the respective categories.

Combined categories		% area	Physical activity potential		
			Low	Medium	High
Countryside	Agricultural/ pastoral/ cultivated	74.3	●		
	Natural grasslands/ forests/ moors/ marshland	13.5		●	
Built environment	Urban fabric	8.0			●
	Industrial/ commercial/ infrastructure	2.0	●		
Green infrastructure	Sport and leisure facilities	1.6			●
	Green urban areas	0.4			●
Coast	Beaches, dunes, sands	0.1		●	

### Land cover in England (Selected items from Corine survey<sup>2</sup> 2012)

Each can provide opportunities for individuals to be physically active. For example, on an everyday basis to walk, cycle and use urban spaces and parks, and less frequently visit destinations in the countryside or on the coast.

<sup>2</sup> High resolution maps for every local authority in the United Kingdom can be downloaded from: [https://figshare.com/articles/A\\_Land\\_Cover\\_Atlas\\_of\\_the\\_United\\_Kingdom\\_Document\\_/5266495](https://figshare.com/articles/A_Land_Cover_Atlas_of_the_United_Kingdom_Document_/5266495)



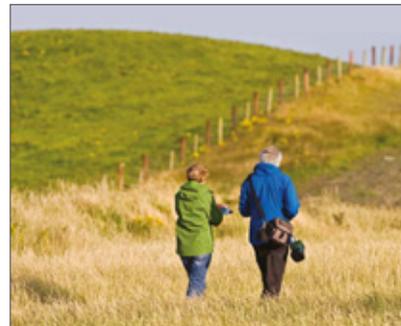
**Tug-of-war contest**



**Farm opened for family-friendly public access**



**Group walking along publicly accessible routes**



**Observing wildlife on farmland**

## COUNTRYSIDE (AGRICULTURAL/ PASTORAL/ CULTIVATED)

These combined categories represent almost 75% of the land cover in England and challenge the notion that England is a particularly urban and crowded country. It may feel like a very densely populated urban nation, but the reality is that the vast majority of the land area is not built on at all. Often these categories of land are served by a limited public road network and there are practical reasons for limiting access to avoid conflicts with the farming processes. However, the land is generally seen from the extensive network of publicly accessible paths, byways and bridleways and represents a greatly appreciated environmental and visual asset.

It is estimated<sup>3</sup> that 50% of farms have diversified to some degree from traditional farming activities and a proportion into the leisure, retail and tourism sectors with open farms, farm shops and visitor attractions. Some might also include features that encourage a range of physical activities such as play and exercise features designed to appeal to a family audience. In some cases, a range of traditional and extreme sports are offered. Examples include riding, trekking, orienteering, golf, paint ball courses, clay pigeon shooting and hang-gliding.

Many such sites have developed into leisure destinations with car parking and catering facilities to cope with a wide market catchment.

<sup>3</sup> See <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/diversifying-farming-businesses>

<http://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN02879/SN02879.pdf>



Group walking along publicly accessible woodlands



Stretching exercises in sheltered spot



Hang gliding enthusiasts in a National Park



Natural features can stimulate physical activities

## COUNTRYSIDE (NATURAL GRASSLANDS/ FORESTS/ MOORS/ MARSHLAND)

These land categories represent 13.5% of the land cover and have significant scope for public access and physical activities. The natural beauty of the English countryside is often promoted as iconic, with sprawling hills, misty moors and winding country lanes leading to traditional villages and historic country houses <sup>4</sup>.

There are many forms of National Parks that have visitor centres with parking and catering together with advisory information and support for cycling, walking, jogging or orientation. The natural character of an area can be supplemented with use of particular features to enhance the user experience.

For more information on National Parks, see: [www.nationalparks.gov.uk/](http://www.nationalparks.gov.uk/)



Family walks in accessible woodland

<sup>4</sup> See <https://www.visitengland.com/>



Dance group



Temporary football area for street football



Managed greenspace with public access



City park with free and open access to space and amenities

## BUILT ENVIRONMENT (URBAN FABRIC)

The 8% land cover categorised as urban fabric can vary greatly with density of building structures, with the pressure on space for physical activity being most acute in inner cities. Those spaces that do exist are often extremely busy with the day-to-day bustle of life, or fenced-off with limited public access or amenity. The patterns can range from virtually continuous development with very limited public amenity space at ground level, to more disperse patterns of development in suburban, rural and new towns. Percentage open space policies are operated by the planning authorities for developments or specific space allocations included in local development frameworks.

See the 'Activity Hubs' and 'Routes and Wayfinding' documents within the Designing for Physical Activity suite for further information.

There are compelling arguments<sup>5</sup> for making roads, cycle routes and pavements safer to user and more conducive to physical activity.

<sup>5</sup> See the official recorded pedestrian and cyclist accident figures:  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/>

See also campaign groups such as Living Street:  
<https://www.livingstreets.org.uk/>



Soft play trampoline area on roof terrace



Public spaces stimulating physical activity



Incidental seating enhancing a public space



Bubble football in recreational area

### BUILT ENVIRONMENT (INDUSTRIAL/ COMMERCIAL/ INFRASTRUCTURE)

Land categorised as industrial, commercial and infrastructure represents only 2% of the land cover in England and from a historical perspective is not generally associated with high levels of recreational or amenity use. This perhaps reflects the harshness of some of the former industrial processes, commercial considerations and attitudes in the past to the working conditions and social welfare.



Analysis<sup>6</sup> of use of park area by office workers

However, within modern redevelopment projects there is potential for a new approach. There are opportunities to create areas that encourage physical activity and an enjoyable local environment to lift the quality of life for customers, employees and people travelling through the area. This is perhaps particularly so in some of the modern high-tech sectors.

<sup>6</sup> See: <https://www.spacesyntax.com>



Soft archery on leisure facility grounds



Temporary play features in the sunshine



Junior park run in local park



Running like the wind

## GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE (GREEN URBAN/ SPORT/ LEISURE SPACES)

Green urban spaces can be in many forms such as municipal parks, recreation and sports grounds, village greens, historic common land or general amenity spaces.

There are various recommendations<sup>7</sup> on the amount of childrens' play space relating to the density of residential dwelling and sizes of gardens and for other open spaces that are accessible by the public. Other guidance<sup>8</sup> covers general design and safety and maintenance considerations and developing a green infrastructure<sup>9</sup>.



Communal outdoor area for gardening and recreation

<sup>7</sup> See: [https://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/fce-design-guidance-for-play-spaces.pdf/\\$FILE/fce-design-guidance-for-play-spaces.pdf](https://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/fce-design-guidance-for-play-spaces.pdf/$FILE/fce-design-guidance-for-play-spaces.pdf)  
<http://www.fieldsintrust.org/guidance>  
<http://www.queenelizabetholympicpark.co.uk/-/media/ldc/local-plan/local-plan-examination-documents/regional-planning-policy-documents/rp11-shaping-neighbourhoods-play-and-informal-recreation-2012-low-res.ashx?la=en>

<sup>8</sup> See: <https://www.rospa.com/play-safety/advice/design/>

<sup>9</sup> See: <http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/35033>



**Organised swimming event**



**Windsurfing**



**Inflatable boating**



**Canoeing for all ages**

## **COAST (BEACHES/ DUNES/ SANDS)**

Coastal and inland water areas are popular public destinations for many people that can also encourage many forms of physical activities. Such area also provide valuable resources for local communities. The range of possibilities is enormous - from swimming, canoeing or sailing to bracing walks along the sea front. The particular local site and weather characteristics often influence what is safe and practicable, with precautionary advice sometimes being provided.



**Kite surfing**

*THE DIVERSE USE OF OUTDOOR SPACES REFLECTS A RICH PATTERN OF LOCATIONAL AND CULTURAL INFLUENCES.*



Folk dance group performing in a civic space

## 3.0 CONSIDERATIONS

### COMMUNITY NEEDS

Local outdoor spaces are essential in providing areas for the community to meet, integrate and enjoy various forms of recreation. Creating landscapes that respond to the 'wants and needs' of communities is key to getting people to use them and being more physically active. Methods of supporting communities to develop outdoor spaces may include:

- Focusing investment on local people with the provision of outdoor environments and the support necessary to embed stronger relationships and involvement in community activities
- Providing support, guidance and resources to volunteers and voluntary groups who encourage and lead the local community
- Helping to maximise local resources by connecting health and sport professionals, with the charitable sector and the local authorities who often own and manage open spaces
- Recognising and rewarding innovation and local initiatives to get people moving who have a history of inactivity due to deprivation, a disability or a lack of awareness or self-confidence.

## STRATEGIC PLANNING

Careful strategic thinking is needed to determine the most suitable location and type of proposed outdoor spaces and the way existing spaces might be enhanced and managed. Engagement with established groups, active promoters of physical activity and potential users will go some way to determining long-term success.

***IT IS IMPORTANT TO ENGAGE LOCAL PEOPLE DURING THE PLANNING AND DESIGN PROCESSES. FOCUSED WORKSHOPS WITH KEY INDIVIDUALS AND SPECIFIC GROUPS HELP TO PROVIDE A CONCISE AND INFORMATIVE OUTCOME***



## ANALYSIS AND CONSULTATION

Much will depend on the particular situation and it is important to understand the physical activities that already take place and the potential for further enhancement and development. A wide community consultation process is recommended across the agencies and stakeholders that may be involved, together with an appropriate level of analysis.

The aim would be to identify where the creation of new outdoor spaces for physical activity can make a significant difference or identify where interventions or small changes would be beneficial.

Observational studies will be useful in assessing how existing spaces are being used by people. There are a range of techniques such as digital tracking, photography and traditional survey methods used in 'Public spaces and public life' surveys <sup>10</sup>.

### Consultation

A typical consultation process would include:

- Consult By survey, evening open meetings or workshops, focussed discussions with key individuals, specific groups or organisations
- Collate Take all feedback, views and comments into account
- Analyse Review all the feedback and identify trends, reoccurring themes
- Prioritise Without leaving anything out, list the findings in priority order
- Confirm Share the findings of the process with the community for their understanding and agreement

<sup>10</sup> See: <https://gehl.institute.org/using-public-life-tools-complete-guide/>

## TYPES OF SPACE

All outdoor spaces, whether informal or specifically designed, have the potential to accommodate and promote many forms of physical activity. The variations of outdoor spaces are extensive and include:

- Private or semi-private residential spaces
- Open amenity spaces within residential areas
- Pocket parks and community gardens
- Playgrounds and formal play provision
- Allotments, public gardens and memorial green spaces
- Open spaces associated with shopping, commerce and industrial processes
- Municipal parks and informal recreation spaces incorporating landscape diversity
- Formal sport and recreational venues
- Civic spaces and urban squares
- Wildlife parks, forests and nature reserves
- Coastal areas, canals and riversides
- Streets and pathways as recreational places.





**PHYSICAL ACTIVITIES IN THE OUTDOORS CAN INVOLVE ALL AGES AND ABILITIES, AND CAN EXTEND BEYOND TRADITIONAL EXERCISE**

## RANGE OF ACTIVITIES

Equally, there is a vast range of physical activities that have developed from tradition or from more recent creations. Some common examples include:

- Sport and formal exercise activities
- Social and leisure activity
- Daily activities such as shopping, seeing family and friends
- Employment-based physical activity including commuting to work or rest breaks
- Part of education
- Walking for leisure, dog walking or as a means to avoiding traffic and noise
- Exploring green spaces for wildlife study, observation or quiet contemplation and reflection
- Play, both formal playgrounds and informal provision
- Cycling for transport or recreation
- Part of rehabilitation process after injury.

See Section 2.0 for further examples.



## USE OF SPACE

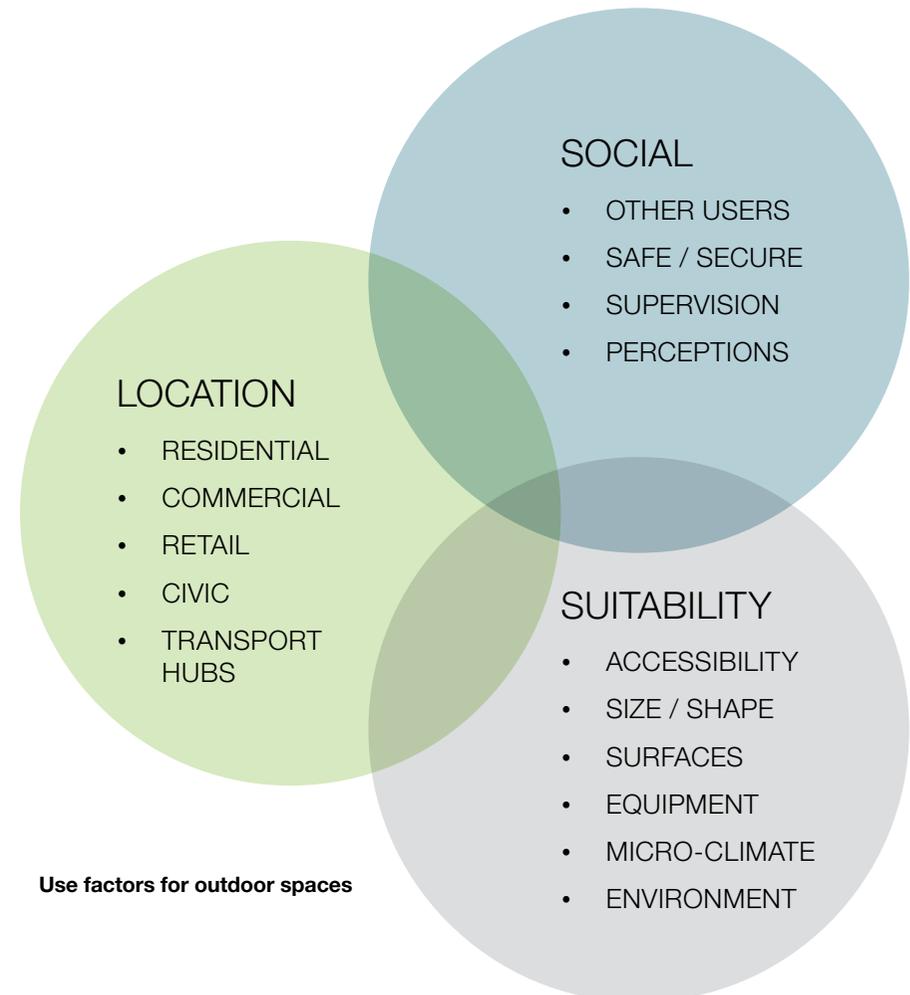
An early understanding should be gained about the way outdoor spaces are used before considering what might be changed. Questions should be asked about how spaces fit into a wider network and their full community value.

Considerations may include:

- Where are the local outdoor spaces?
- Where do people come from to use them?
- How and why are they used?
- Why are some spaces underused?
- Are there local deficiencies?
- Are there alternative facilities in neighbouring districts?
- Are facilities signposted adequately?
- Are they convenient to get to?



Civic space used by a dance group



With an understanding of this wider outdoor space network, it may be possible to establish accessible links to neighbouring spaces. New initiatives could be adopted to organise and facilitate wider access to such places. Improved links will inevitably extend the range of active use and open up new environments for people to explore. Considerations may include:

- How far will people travel to access open space?
- Do local people go further afield to use outdoor spaces?
- What range of open spaces and venues are presently available?
- What range of activities do they presently accommodate and can these spaces be managed to allow greater diversity?
- Are the existing play facilities, sports pitches, recreational parks and games courts, adequate for the needs of the community and managed sufficiently to allow for greater access?
- Are such venues supported by trained coaches, leaders, organised groups or regular programmed activities?
- What is the present level of supervision or policing?
- Are there changing or toilet facilities available near to the active spaces?

For further information, see the 'Activity hubs' and 'Routes and Wayfinding' documents within the Designing for Physical Activity suite.

## QUALITY OF SPACE

Recent research<sup>11</sup> points to the importance of design factors in enhancing the public realm. For example, the ability of outdoor space to:

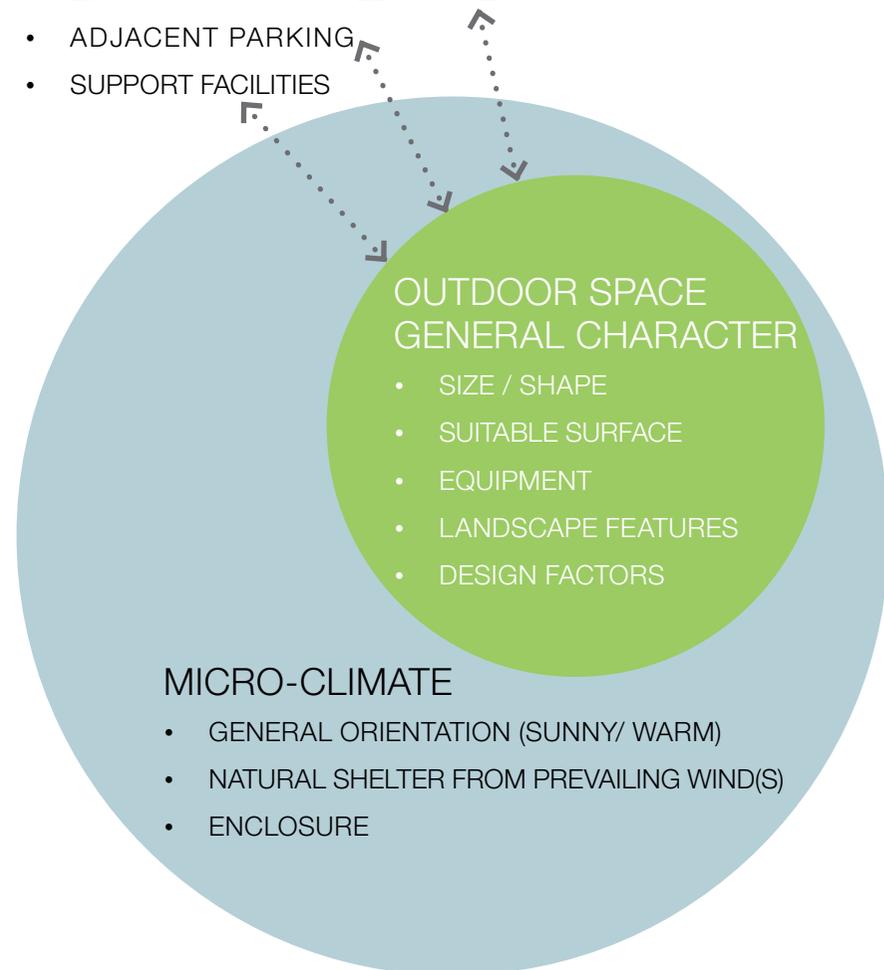
- Be distinctive, recognisable and memorable
- Be defined by surrounding enclosures (buildings, fences, landscape etc.)
- Have human scale in terms of size, texture and articulation of elements
- Have degrees of transparency and visibility
- Contribute visual richness and complexity to the physical environment.

<sup>11</sup> See the Active Living Research Programme: [www.activelivingresearch.org](http://www.activelivingresearch.org)

The diagram below indicates a range of factors (micro-climate, connectivity/ accessibility and general character) that impact on the quality of a particular space to make it activity friendly.

## CONNECTIVITY / ACCESSIBILITY

- LINKS WITH PATH/CYCLE-WAY NETWORK
- ADJACENT PARKING
- SUPPORT FACILITIES



## DESIGNING FOR PHYSICAL ACTIVITY - OUTDOOR SPACES

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The table below indicates further considerations (protection, comfort/enjoyment and sense of place) that can also impact on the quality of user experience.

<b>Protection</b>	Protection against traffic	Protection against harm by others	Protection against unpleasant sensory experiences
<b>Comfort</b>	Options for mobility	Options for standing and lingering	Options for sitting
	Options for seeing	Options for talking and listening and hearing	Options for play exercise and activity
<b>Enjoyment</b>	Scale	Opportunities to enjoy the positive aspects of climate	Experience of aesthetic qualities and positive sensory experiences
<b>Place</b>	Part of public space network	Part of public space hierarchy	Sense of place

Jan Gehl's 15 point quality criteria for public space <sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup> See: <https://gehl.institute.org/using-public-life-tools-complete-guide/> and [https://issuu.com/gehlarchitects/docs/565\\_seattle\\_pspl/49](https://issuu.com/gehlarchitects/docs/565_seattle_pspl/49)



***USE THE DESIGN PROCESS TO  
EXPLORE POTENTIAL IDEAS,  
SEEKING PROFESSIONAL ADVICE  
WHERE APPROPRIATE.***



## 4.0

# EXAMPLE DESIGN FEATURES

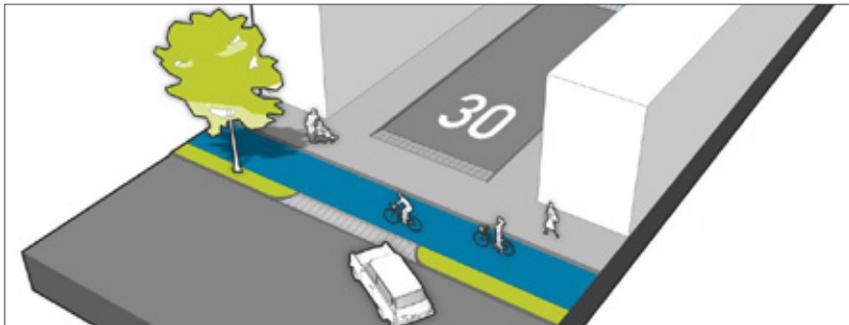
The approach taken in the design process can determine the success of a project. The following are some generic considerations:

- Innovation with an emphasis on local context and diversity can create stimulating, challenging and rewarding spaces
- Realism with regard to anticipated usage and proposed features - the wrong intervention can result in money being wasted
- Evaluation of whether catalogue solutions are cost effective and whether designed solutions are a better alternative for a specific site
- Selection of the most sustainable high-quality materials that will stand the test of time and offer better long-term value
- Championing engagement and user-group involvement
- Seeking local advice, current guidance and best professional practice.

The following pages illustrate a limited selection of example design features that can encourage physical activity in a range of outdoor space categories outlined in Section 2.0. The list is not exhaustive as there are endless possibilities that can equally apply.



Google Map image of typical road crossing in Holland



Example road and cycleway junction

## CONNECTED NEIGHBOURHOODS

Establishing a coherent, joined-up and interesting path network that connects destinations e.g. parks to shops and schools, should ideally also connect into a larger strategic network with other neighbourhoods. The design of networks should be safe, attractive and pollution free, with appropriate levels of space and environmental standards. The benefits of regular exercise and recommendations from various organisations have implications for the design of all neighbourhoods. A 20-minute walk, run or cycle ride can easily encompass a distance of 1, 2 or 3 miles respectively from a person's home and ideally all key local amenities should be within a walkable distance and with additional cycle routes and pathways that link up with other areas. See the associated document 'Routes and Wayfinding'.

Key design issues<sup>13</sup> include the widths, signage, choice of surfacing and the degree of segregation. In some situations, pedestrian, cyclist and slow-moving vehicles can happily share the same spaces, but as volumes of movement increase various degrees of separation become desirable and eventually essential.

- **Widths of pathways and cycle routes:** Inclusive Mobility (2002)<sup>14</sup> advises that ideally the width of the footway should be 2 m to allow two people in wheelchairs to pass each other comfortably. Where this width is not possible, a clear width of 1.5 m should be provided, with an absolute clear minimum width of 1 m in exceptional cases.
- **Cycle lanes:** A number of design guides make reference<sup>15</sup> to a recommended 2 m width for cycle lanes and an absolute minimum of 1.5 m. An increased width of 2.5 m may be appropriate where usage is high or high cycling speeds are likely. In all cases, it should be made clear that sub-standard lane widths are not for general use, and only potentially justifiable where there is insufficient space.

<sup>13</sup> See also Sport England's Active Design document Section 3 Connected walking & cycling routes: hierarchy of travel (p21) at: <https://www.sportengland.org/facilities-planning/active-design/>

<sup>14</sup> [https://www.idgo.ac.uk/design\\_guidance/factsheets/width\\_footways\\_footpaths.htm](https://www.idgo.ac.uk/design_guidance/factsheets/width_footways_footpaths.htm)

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.camcycle.org.uk/resources/cyclenewidths/>



Shared cycle and pedestrian routes



Separated pedestrian, cycle and vehicle routes



Cycle storage unit in residential street



Cycle storage in a civic area

## CONNECTED NEIGHBOURHOODS (CON/T)

- **Cycle storage:** The storage and security of cycles should be considered, particularly in residential areas, transport hubs and commercial centres. Positioning cycle storage towards the front of buildings makes it easy to park, and therefore encourages people to use bikes. In some new residential developments, cycle storage provision might be a planning requirement and in other situations there may be scope for rentable cycle storage facilities to be installed.



Secure storage can encourage family cycling outings along connected pathways between neighbourhoods



Open spaces can encourage a range of informal activities



Informal activity and meeting place



Fitness trail markers in civic park



Fitness trail feature in countryside

**RESEARCH<sup>16</sup> HAS SHOWN THAT RESIDENTS WITH:**

- **ACCESS TO PARKS AND WELL-CONNECTED FOOTPATHS ARE 2.5 TIMES MORE LIKELY TO WALK FOR MORE THAN AN HOUR EACH WEEK**
- **ACCESS TO AT LEAST ONE HIGH-QUALITY PARK WITHIN THEIR NEIGHBOURHOOD ARE 2 TIMES MORE LIKELY TO HAVE BETTER MENTAL HEALTH.**

## INFORMAL ACTIVITY SPACES

There can be multiple opportunities to encourage and promote additional physical activities along pedestrian and cycle routes. A paved area might be marked out for hopscotch. A wall can be used as part of an exercise routine or as a rebound surface for informal ball games. Changes of level can be used for step exercises or a space may become an exercise station on a larger fitness trail. An off-road section along a woodland track may be an appealing alternative for a cyclist returning from work and a local activity area can enhance a retail or business area.

A creative approach is recommended for all open spaces with consideration of the obvious functional uses and the visual amenities value as well as the potential linkages with adjoining areas. The detailed decisions should try and complement the preferences of the local populations and aim to accommodate all the age groups including children, parents or guardians. Parks can offer potential for physical activities e.g. fitness sessions, using what already exists such as railings to balance against, benches to do reverse dips, etc. in lieu of dedicated equipment.

Research<sup>16</sup> suggests that the proximity of parks and open spaces and the convenience for people to access them are important factors in the way that they are used. This suggests that informal activity spaces should be well integrated into pedestrian and cycle routes and there should also be positive connections to larger parks and recreation facilities. Green spaces and parks can become destinations within a path/cycle network, creating a large 'activity system' rather than isolated spaces. Activity spaces should have a direct frontage with pedestrian and cycle routes rather than be hidden away behind housing or other buildings. There should be good visibility into the spaces so that passers-by provide a degree of passive supervision.

Consideration should also be given to the maintenance that open spaces require<sup>17</sup>. There may be scope for partnerships with local organisations or groups to sponsor and maintain a particular area. Outdoor areas that are looked after by volunteers are likely to be more valued and well cared for.

<sup>16</sup> See Active Living Research Programme: <https://www.activelivingresearch.org>

<sup>17</sup> See Sport England's Active Design document Section 9 Management, maintenance, monitoring & evaluation (p46) at: <https://www.sportengland.org/facilities-planning/active-design/>



Slide in public park following landscape topography



Adventure rope bridge course high above forest floor



Cycle trail through woodland



Skateboard and cycle activities in skatepark

## FITNESS FEATURES IN THE LANDSCAPE

There are many situations where features that encourage physical activity can be an integral part of the surrounding landscape, whether in a local amenity space, an urban streetscape or a countryside park. The scale, design and choice of materials can vary considerably to suit the particular location. Features may include swings, slides, sculpture as play elements, trampoline play areas, skateparks and a range of other facilities.

The natural topography of any location can enhance an outdoor space. For example, a gradient across part of a site could provide an exciting place for exercise opportunities.

Retaining walls and changes of level can also give opportunities for exercise features to be added into the landscape. For example, a goal mouth painted on a wall may give a focus to an informal kick-about space or the addition of hand holes may create an attractive climbing wall feature.

Common features already existing in many parks, such as park benches and railings, can also offer opportunities for physical activity without the need for additional fitness features or dedicated equipment. In some cases, modest adjustments to these can also further enhance the range of potential fitness exercises.





Informal football on grass surface



Tarmacadamed-surfaced cycling lanes



Tarmacadamed and concrete paved surfacing



Applied coloured toppings can be used to create visual variations

## FLOORSCAPE

Natural turf can provide an attractive surface for a wide range of physical activities as seen in the countless municipal parks up and down the country. However, it is sensitive to the weather and can deteriorate quickly when subject to heavy use in wet conditions. It will also require periodic mowing, although this can vary with the seed mix. Alternatively, with appropriate planting, some areas can simply be left as natural meadows.

Natural tracks or trails that are created as a result of regular use across grass areas are likely to be muddy in wet weather. Covering these areas with layers of unbound materials, such as crushed stone, can improve their performance.

Tarmacadamed on a stone sub-base is probably the most common surface material for continuous pathways or hard amenity areas. Colour surfaces or applied toppings in recreational areas can create multi-activity floorscape grids (see example adjacent) to provide added interest and amenity.

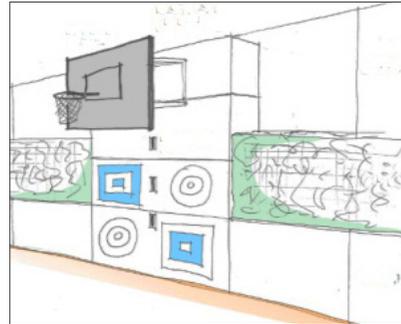
Paved and/ or concrete surfaces with joints can also be used in some locations, where hard-wearing surface treatments are more appropriate.

Rubber-based safety surfaces with energy absorbing properties can be used in areas where people are likely to fall over, such as children's play areas.

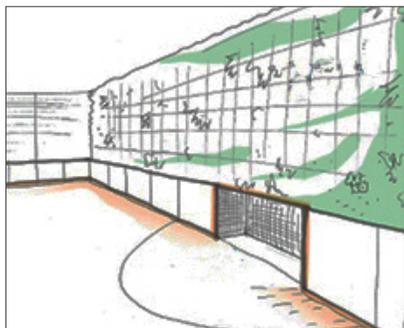




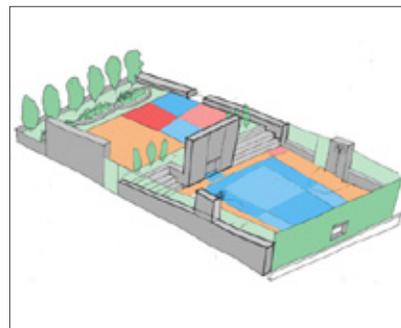
**Gabion wall construction used in combination with traditional fencing**



**Practice basketball hoop and target features incorporated into living wall enclosure**



**Goal feature incorporated into living wall enclosure**



**Example facility with range of wall and patterned floor surfacing features**

## ENCLOSURES

The creation of walls and fences to enclose spaces can have a number of advantages by providing:

- A human scale
- A sense of security and comfort for physical activity
- Partial shelter from the wind
- Rebound surfaces for ball games
- Softer appearance to a rectangular shape
- Noise attenuation
- Separation of activities that may conflict with one another
- Easier management and restriction of use
- Visual stimulation through imaginative use of colour, patterns, textures and mix of local materials

These can also help develop a sense of identity and place, as well as fulfilling a range of functional requirements that might include incorporation of lighting, data or power.

The Fields in Trust publications 'Guidance for Outdoor Sport and Play – Beyond the 6 Acre Standard' gives recommendations for population sizes, walking distance and quality factors for recreational spaces. It emphasises the importance of providing a range of formal and informal outdoor spaces of appropriate dimensions in order to create the foundation stone for an active and healthy nation. See:

<http://www.fieldsintrust.org/Upload/file/guidance/Guidance-for-Outdoor-Sport-and-Play-England-Apr18.pdf>

Other guidance can be found on:

<http://www.playengland.net/parks-and-open-spaces/>

The amount and quality of outdoor spaces is an important factor in quality assessment tools such as HQM ONE:

<http://www.homequalitymark.com/standard>



**Angled overhead lighting in public space**



**Animated lighting scheme enhances night-time atmosphere in public space**



**Playful lighting features**



**Patterns in floor lighting**

## LIGHTING

For outdoor spaces that are likely to be used in hours of low natural lighting or darkness, the provision of artificial lighting can greatly extend the use of the space and increase security and user appeal.

Consider the following:

- Technology  
Innovations in lighting technology offer a wide range of fittings and methods for lighting to be part of an outdoor activity space design
- Renewables  
Investing in the most efficient installations e.g. renewable power sources, are likely to be the most sustainable solutions in the longer term
- Location  
Lighting can be located in a multitude of ways e.g. recessed flush in paving, self supporting on ground or above on columns, and attached to or suspended from a range of existing structures such as adjacent buildings, trees, poles etc.
- Light levels  
How much light needed i.e. minimum lux levels, for the anticipated activities should be established early in the design process as this will be an important factor in determining the viability of its provision
- Colour  
Use of colour and adaptable mood lighting can encourage activities such as informal dancing or organised events
- Maintenance  
Ease of access for maintenance, such as changing bulbs or cleaning fittings, is critical to the life expectancy of any installation.



Range of exercise stations



Wooden obstacles



Wooden bridge feature

## OUTDOOR FITNESS EQUIPMENT

There is a wide choice of outdoor fitness equipment on the market. Often located in public outdoor spaces, they are generally free and intuitive to use to encourage physical activity. They can appeal to individuals who normally struggle to find the time or money to attend leisure or fitness centres.

The equipment can offer low-impact training and various targets, for example, the lower body, upper body or cardiovascular and weight-based strength exercises. Some include wooden obstacles such as parallel bars, hurdles, leapfrog, step-ups, pull-up bars and benches.

The selection of equipment should take into account community consultation, and factors such as:

- Target audience  
Street names, named routes and trails, distinct markings, use of simple and unambiguous signage and visible focal points to reassure users along their journeys
- Ease of access  
They should be accessible to all types of users and have surfaces that are suitable for wheelchair users and parents with pushchairs
- Safety and comfort  
The equipment should be robust and reliable and located in areas that feel safe and with an appropriate level of natural supervision. External lighting will be required for public areas that are used during evenings and night time
- Promotion  
Various communication techniques could be used to encourage use of the equipment, such as adjacent instructional signage, or on community web sites or social media. Some suppliers have a 'closest outdoor gym' search facility on their web site.



Interactive football play wall and courts



Interactive football play wall



Interactive play zone



Public park seating

## INTERACTIVE PLAY EQUIPMENT

Interactive equipment can help stimulate physical activity and give an additional focus to traditional games areas. For example, a football wall with impact-sensitive panels can react to ball contact and give players feedback on their performance. The panels can give personal feedback to mobile phone apps and encourage a level of group competition. Vivid LED lights and audio speakers can also add to the user experience. Alternatively, other designs for interactive play and games sets can encourage other forms of movement and competition along with stimulating light displays and music.

Such equipment will require a power source (as would a street light) and the systems can offer remote monitoring of levels of use and any malfunction that would require a maintenance visit. The equipment can be particularly suited to inner city or urban areas where space is limited.

## IMAGINATIVE STREET FURNITURE

There is also scope for seating and other street furniture to stimulate physical activities in outdoor spaces. This can range from being a comforting and safe transition space, a resting place, a gathering point or act as an informal exercise station. As part of wider landscape design, seating can also be street art, provide separation, define quieter areas or performance areas and serve a many functions in an active environment.



## ALTERNATIVE LANGUAGES AND FORMATS:

This document can be provided in alternative languages, or alternative formats such as large print, Braille, tape and on disk upon request.

Call the Sport England switchboard on 08458 508 508 for more details.

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## PREPARED BY:

Sport England, Robin Wilson Consulting, Williams-Architects Ltd, and Abacus Cost Management Ltd (Design Services).

## USER GUIDE:

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Click here for current '**Design and Cost Guidance**'

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**Sport England**

1st Floor  
21 Bloomsbury Street  
London  
WC1B 3HF

Tel : +44 (0)8458 508 508