PROTECTING LONDON'S SPORT AND PHYICAL ACTIVITY ASSETS

Identify, understand and take action.



LONDON SPORT

KNIGHT, KAVANAGH & PAGE

CONTENTS

BACKGROUND 3

WHAT CONSTITUTES A SITE AT RISK? 5

TYPES OF SITE AT RISK 6

COMMON INDICATORS THAT A SITE MAY BE AT RISK 7

STEPS TO FOLLOW WHEN A SITE AT RISK IS IDENTIFIED 8

RESPONDING TO LAND SALES, CLOSURE ANNOUNCEMENTS, CHANGES IN OWNERSHIP AND REDUCED USAGE 11

USEFUL LINKS AND CONTACTS 13



BACKGROUND



Access to the right facilities and environments remains one of the biggest barriers to physical activity in London. Research by London Sport **(June 2026) found that in order to maintain current activity levels, the equivalent of 288 new facilities are needed across the capital over the next decade. This projection assumes no further loss of existing provision, a challenging prospect given growing demand for land to deliver housing and critical infrastructure. In recent years, an increasing number of sports facilities have either been lost or identified as being at risk of future closure, placing additional pressure on an already constrained network of community assets.**

Sport England's Statutory Planning role is in place to support protection of key sport and physical activity infrastructure, and it is a statutory consultee on planning applications that prejudice the use of playing fields. Even with this role in place and the evidence base existing that demonstrate the need for such spaces, spaces have been lost for sport and physical activity use. Given Sport England's statutory role does not stretch to other facility types, the ability to protect these facilities going forwards will become more challenging. The consequences of this are severe, as once a site its lost, it is very hard to replace, especially given the challenge around available Land in London.

Work completed by Knight, Kavanagh and Page to better understand the challenges faced in protecting playing fields in London and the interventions needed to help overcome such challenges. This highlighted that one of the key challenges faced in protecting London's playing fields, is that potential sites at risk are not identified early enough in the process to allow sufficient efforts to be mobilised to support ongoing protection of the asset. It is often the case that first awareness of a "potential site at risk" occurs when a planning application is submitted, meaning there is limited time to mobilise efforts around protection. Subsequent work has identified that this challenge extends beyond playing fields and includes the loss of parks, multi-use games areas, sports hall and community spaces.

To respond to this issue, this guidance note, alongside (form – give a description), have been created to

1. **Allow sites that may be at risk of closure to be identified as early as possible.** This will provide key partners across London with the intelligence required to identify the type of facilities most at risk and the locations across London where the issue is most prominent. This allows partners to collaborate and design more proactive and strategic approaches that support the prevention of further losses.
2. **To support community sport organisations to understand** what action can be taken to help ensure that key local infrastructure remains in place across the capital to support Londoner's ambitions to engage in physical activity.

Points to be aware of

1. Whilst this document covers a wide range of facility types, there needs to be an awareness there are differences around the factors that determine whether a site is a risk and also the steps that may need to be taken to mobilise efforts to support the protection of a site.
2. The form is designed to capture information required to build a more robust pipeline of potential sites at risk of closure in London. Once collated, the information will be reviewed and shared with key strategic partners including NGB's, Sport England to help enable a more proactive approach to protection of assets going forwards.
3. London Sport does not have the resource or expertise to intervene and support all individual cases - this document and the associated resources have been developed to help signpost organisations to information that will enable them to act independently to drive efforts around the protection of local assets. The information collated will be shared with key strategic partners, which may unlock additional support for individual cases.
4. That said, London Sport will use the information collected to support wider influence and advocacy efforts that ensure that all Londoners have access to the right opportunities to engage in sport and physical activity.

WHAT CONSTITUTES A SITE AT RISK?

Complete Loss – Loss of an asset and subsequent cessation of access to the site for sport and physical use.

Partial Loss – Where a section of the asset is lost for sport and physical activity use, but the remainder of the site remains accessible and operational for sport and physical activity use. For example, the building of classrooms on a school playing field or the extension of a car park over sports provision.

Lost Access – In this instance, the asset would remain, however the usage of the asset for sport and physical activity would be impacted. This could include:

- loss of community access to a playing pitch or facility.
- The development of a facility that improves provision for certain activities, however this improvement is at the detriment of other activities.

It is also worth noting in some cases, the loss of areas not primarily used for the main delivery of an activity may impact the use of a site. Ie the loss of sports pavilions at public playing fields, whilst not resulting a loss of the playing space, makes certain sites less attractive for potential users, result in a decrease in the use of this facility and impact future viability of the facility.



TYPES OF SITE AT RISK

The below infographic provides an indication of the types of facilities that are most likely to be at risk. Please note other types of facilities will be used for sport and physical activity and will still be at risk.



Whilst the above gives an indication of the types of facility that may be at risk, it is also worth noting that sites will be at risk across a range of different settings. This includes Education, Community or grass roots facilities, local authority owned assets and also those that fall under private ownership. All these settings should be treated equally, as the type of setting does not make one type of facility less prone to loss than others given there are often extenuating factors linked to each type of ownership type.

COMMON INDICATORS THAT A SITE MAY BE AT RISK

Whilst there are a number of factors that could indicate that a site could be at risk, from reviewing previous examples of sites at risk – it has been possible to identify the most common indicators of a potential risk, which are listed below. The first three examples are more explicit indications that a site may be at risk and will need immediate focus, the latter two are signs that are likely to warrant further monitoring or exploration.

Planning applications or redevelopment proposals

A live planning application for a site is the strongest indicator that changes could be imminent around the make up and future use of a site. The timeframes a decision is made on any planning application mean immediate action is likely to be needed. To check whether a live planning application is in place – visit Planning Applications and Decisions. You will be redirected to the local council site, where you should be able to search using facility details or browse using the maps.

It is worth noting that in some cases a planning application may not be needed for a facility, which could restrict the ability to identify a site is at risk. For example if a playing field remains as a playing field but the community use ceases, this would most probably not require a planning application.

Land sales or disposal notices

Information indicating that a site may be sold, transferred, disposed of or considered for another use may warrant further investigation.

Closure announcements

Public announcements relating to temporary or permanent closure can provide an early indication that provision may change or be lost.

Reduced use or maintenance

A visible decline in site activity, investment or maintenance may be an indication of wider changes affecting the future of a facility. If the standard of a facility decreases, it will be less appealing to potential users, which could lead to the site being classed as surplus to requirements if a strong case for retention can't be made due to limited usage.

Changes in ownership or leases

Changes to ownership arrangements, leases or management responsibilities may affect how a site is operated or its future use.

STEPS TO FOLLOW WHEN A SITE AT RISK IS IDENTIFIED

Submit information on London Sport site at risk register

Once you have completed the information gathering stage, you should hopefully be in a better position to identify whether a site is at risk of closure or the future operation of a site may be changed which has implications around its use for sport and physical activity. At this point we encourage you to submit information via our Early Warning Indicator – ADD LINK. This indicator has been designed to enable London Sport to populate an up-to-date sites at risk register, that enables a more strategic approach to protecting sites at risk with partners across the capital. If there is a live planning application, we can also raise awareness amongst partners so they can pick up action as required.

We appreciate that in some cases it might not be obvious that a site is at risk, or there may not be sufficient information within the public domain to confirm that the site is at risk. If you feel there is evidence that a sight is at risk, we encourage you to submit information, even if this evidence base is minimal. It could be the case that a number of people hold the same view, which when combined demonstrates a greater level of risk, or that by simply adding the information allows us to do more exploration through our networks.

Respond to a live planning application.

Raise awareness locally and Identify Allies.

Contact local stakeholders, organisations, and decision-makers to understand context and motivations and escalate your concerns.

a. Engage with other users of the site and other local organisations who might support you.

- Identify and share your concerns with other users of the site, share the information you have gathered so far, and coordinate next steps.
- Speak to local residents. Utilise posters and social media to coordinate support.

b. Engage your local elected members to ensure they are aware of the potential loss and help understand where they may be able to support.

i. Member of Parliament. Find contact details at Members.Parliament.uk

ii. Local Councillor. Find contact details at gov.uk/find-your-local-councillors

An example letter can be found in the Appendices.

Submit a formal objection to the planning application.

If a planning application could result in the loss of sports provision or compromise future delivery, a formal objection should be submitted through the local authority's planning portal. Once submitted, your objection will be publicly available alongside other responses to the application.

Where time allows, review existing objections before submitting. Aligning key messages and concerns can help present a stronger, more consistent case and increase the visibility of issues for planning officers.

Ensure your objection is submitted before the consultation deadline. For significant or contentious applications, decisions may be referred to the Planning Committee rather than determined by the case officer. In these cases, engaging local ward councillors is critical, as they or another representative may be able to speak at committee and advocate for community concerns.

Key things to consider when submitting an objection.

Understand Local Context

A well prepared planning application will, in most cases, pay strong attention to local plans and policies to ensure that the application has the best chance of success when reviewed by the respective Local Authority. However this is not always the case.

If time and expertise permits, it is worth spending time to explore if there are areas where a planning application does not confirm with local policy, this giving a stronger case for objection.

- Check Local Authority (borough) plans for useful references at GLA Local Plans Status Map. Such local plans will identify a boroughs approach to special development and the policies that underpin this approach.
- When checking the local plan, it would be beneficial to identify policy but also understand the evidence base that has been used to support the development of a policy as this may enable you to build a stronger case for opposing the application. Evidence bases linked to sport and physical activity include Play and Pitch Strategies, Local Football Facility Plans, Open Space assessments, public health strategies.
- Engage with the Council Planning Officer to gather further information about the application and local planning policies.
- If possible, lobby Planning Committee Members (usually found through the 'Your Council' section of the council's website).
- Whilst in most cases, local policy will be used when making decisions, it is worth considering the requirements of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). Specifically provisions relating to the protection of existing sport and recreation facilities and the circumstances in which replacement provision may be required.

Seek additional professional help if needed.

Additional actions may also be appropriate, and you may consider seeking advice from a professional Planner or Planning Solicitor. You can also contact a free voluntary service called Planning Aid.

Monitor the outcome of planning application.

a. **If approved.** There is no right of appeal. A Judicial Review could be applied for within six weeks, but will likely be costly and can only consider whether the Committee took into account material considerations.

b. **If approved with conditions.** Check to ensure that those conditions are followed.

c. **If application refused.** The applicant has the right of appeal within six months, and you can lodge a further objection. Please see below for other options that might be applicable to support protection going forward.



RESPONDING TO LAND SALES, CLOSURE ANNOUNCEMENTS, CHANGES IN OWNERSHIP AND REDUCED USAGE

The below information is relevant when there is no live planning application for a site, but there are other signs that that the site could be at risk going forward. The steps below very much focus on work that can be done to build a better understanding, raise awareness of a problem and be better prepared to act if the potential loss of a site increases.

Check for Planning Applications.

If there is a live application for the site, follow the steps identified earlier in the document.

Check and monitor Information in the public domain.

Review publicly available documents and information sources that may provide further context about the site.

- Search for news and information relating to the site on google.com and the council website. Here is how to find your local council website.
- Understand the recorded facilities within the site, and the other potential activities that could be impacted, using the Sport England Active Places Power interactive tool and pitchfinder.org.uk.
- Use the above to identify clubs and organisations who might use the site. Visit their websites to gather contact information of potential people you may want to engage with to find out more information and also understand potential allies if needed later in the process.
- Visit the London Sport Resource and Data Hub to help identify information about supply demand and other factors that might be impacting the delivery of sport and physical activity in your area.

Identify who owns, manages or leases the site and what restrictions may be on the land.

This may help establish who is responsible for decisions affecting it but also whether there are restrictions that determine what can and cant be done with the land.

- Visit pitchfinder.org.uk to find out specific information around ownership and management of pitches in London.
- Get a Property Summary via Search for land and property information - GOV.UK. It should contain the property's address, the property description, the type of ownership the property has, whether there are any 'restrictive covenants' (promises not to do certain things with the land, like not building), whether there are any 'easements' (like a right of way). To get details of any 'restrictive covenants' or 'easements', you'll need to buy the title register (£7 each in 2026).
- If desired, Buy a Title Register (Title Deeds). This should include the title number, who owns the property, how much the property was last sold for, whether the property has a mortgage, details of any 'restrictive covenants' and 'easements'. In some cases, the Title Register will not include the details of the restrictive covenants or easements, but will say which documents do.

- If desired, buy a Title Plan. This includes the property's location and confirmation of the boundaries.
- Check local information that may indicate that a site is available for purchase, the lease may be subject to change etc.

Explore a Deed of Dedication

Fields in Trust is an independent charity dedicated to protecting parks, playing fields, playgrounds and other outdoor recreational spaces so they can be enjoyed by communities now and in the future.

Legal protection is secured through a legally binding agreement with the landowner (known as a Deed of Dedication in England and Wales). This agreement safeguards the land, so it remains available for public outdoor recreation for current and future generations. The landowner continues to own, manage and maintain the site, while Fields in Trust is there to help ensure the land remains protected in accordance with the agreement – this includes enabling many improvements, such as new outdoor play equipment, sports facilities, paths and landscaping. More significant proposals may require the landowner to formally check with Fields in Trust who then assess against their policies to ensure the long-term public recreational use of the site is maintained and that any changes continue to benefit the community.

More information on securing a deed of dedication can be found via the following link Protect your park | Fields in Trust

Explore Asset of Community Value Designation.

In England, when a facility is listed as an Asset of Community Value (ACV) under the Localism Act 2011, it is formally recognised as having an important role in supporting the social wellbeing or social interests of the local community, including cultural, recreational and sporting activities.

For sports facilities, an ACV designation can be a useful mechanism for highlighting community value, providing early warning of potential disposal, and creating time for partners and community organisations to explore options to retain community access.

Once a facility is designated as an asset of community value.

1. The asset is placed on the local authorities ACV register for five years.
2. If the owner of the land decides to sell the asset, they must notify the local authority of their intention to sell.
3. Local community groups are then given the opportunity to express an interest in purchasing the site. If a community group comes forward, a moratorium period of up to six months can be triggered, delaying the sale of the land and allowing time to develop a bid and secure funding to complete the purchase.
4. The listing does not prevent the owner from selling the asset, nor does it require them to sell to a community group.

More information on Assets of Community value can be found via the following link - What are Assets of Community Value (ACV)? - MyCommunity

USEFUL LINKS AND CONTACTS

A number of other organisations may be able to offer targeted advice – including:

- Sport England - Sport England Planning for Sport guidance
- National Governing Bodies – Find details for the relevant NGB
- Fields in Trust - a charity focussed on protecting parks, playgrounds and fields
- London Playing Fields Foundation - a charity protecting playing fields in London.
- Sport and Recreation Alliance - representing the voice of grassroot sports
- Greater London Authority Culture and community spaces at risk - support guidance and resources to support places of community value in London



LONDON SPORT

FOR MORE INFORMATION

visit **londonsport.org**
or email **info@londonsport.org**

Join us on Social Media:

London Sport
@Ldn_Sport