

Local Football Facility Plans

Improved grass pitches



Guidance note



— FUNDING PARTNERS —

Introduction

Currently the general condition of natural grass pitches in England is considered to be of a poor standard (63% of pitches) and research indicates that this is the number one facility issue cited by players, coaches and leagues.

The priority for the national funding partners is, therefore, to deliver an improvement programme that sustainably increases grass pitch quality across all main pitch owners (Local Authorities, education establishments and clubs). To achieve this, a step change will be required at a local, regional and national level using a variety of solutions.

During the LFFP process we will work with local stakeholders to identify priority grass sites for potential investment. Due to the scale of the challenge, we will prioritise sites that will have the biggest impact on local football. Therefore, priority sites must have high levels of usage and provide three or more full-size pitch equivalents* or have high outcome potential.**

In most LFFPs we expect to see a mixture of priority projects across all main pitch owners such as Local Authorities, education establishments and clubs. However, each portfolio should reflect the composition of the local area. For example, some LFFPs in urban areas may have more Local Authority projects because they are the main pitch owner in that area. Conversely, some LFFPs in rural areas may have higher proportions of projects at sites managed by clubs.

**while sites may contain various pitch sizes (e.g. 5v5, 7v7, 9v9), they should contain the total 'equivalent' size of three full-sized 11v11 pitches e.g. four 5v5 pitches = one 11v11 'equivalent' pitch*

***slightly smaller sites can be considered when in prime locations and have significant usage levels*





Quality

Research shows that people who have access to good quality pitches will play a third more often than the average, while those playing on poor pitches play 21% less.

The level of maintenance required to obtain good quality standards is adversely affected by restricted budgets and limited knowledge/training. Compaction, low grass coverage and the unevenness of the playing surface are three of the main causes of poor pitch quality. All can be commonly treated by an improved maintenance programme and not always via costly pitch drainage schemes.

To support quality improvements, an easy to measure and understand 'Community Pitch Standard' will be developed by the FA to recognise appropriate standards for the grassroots game.

Engagement

While grass pitches mainly serve community teams and leagues, for many local areas they also act as an important location for informal football. In these situations we encourage open-access sites. However, we also understand this must be carefully balanced with the requirement to provide quality pitches and problems such as dog fouling and vandalism means that pitches must be protected by mitigation measures such as fencing.

Equally, wider community engagement is also encouraged, such as a summer cricket club or a local scouts group. However, activities and events that negatively impact pitch quality must be avoided. This typically includes activities that involve bringing vehicles on to pitches, such as car boot sales or fun fairs.

Sustainability

Grass pitches are one of the most important resources for sport in England. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) protects playing fields and Sport England works in partnership with the FA, County FAs and the Football Foundation to ensure they are protected and enhanced.

LFFPs focus on identifying priority projects for potential investment only, and it remains the role of a Playing Pitch Strategy (PPS) to provide a full evidence base of the supply and demand for all sites, across all pitch sports.

One of the key challenges for local stakeholders during the LFFP process will be to ensure that the portfolio of priority projects will improve grass pitch quality in a sustainable way for the long-term. To achieve this, a step change will be required, using a variety of solutions. Some will be delivered through national initiatives but many improvements can be made by site owners working in partnership with County Football Associations, leagues and clubs at a local level.

Examples and case studies

The following pages provide examples and case studies of the most popular location and facility types.



Example

Strategic hubs

This facility type directs effort and resource to improve grass pitch quality at the largest and most important local sites. Typically, a strategic hub will include a significant number of grass pitches, floodlit 3G FTPs and a changing room pavilion / clubhouse to create a destination venue for local football.

While strategic hubs may not be appropriate for all areas, they should be strongly considered at sizeable strategic sites. This could mean single or multiple hub sites across a local area. All strategic hubs must have extremely high participation levels across all formats of football (structured clubs and leagues and small-sided) and multi-sport environments are also encouraged. As part of the LFFP process, local stakeholders will be asked to identify these key local sites.

Following the LFFP process, and when a project is ready to proceed, support will be given to applicants to review the best solutions for grass pitch improvement at each site. This may include reviewing management arrangements, maintenance programmes, maintenance equipment and site protection.

Support will also be provided to ensure that an appropriate maintenance programme is in place. A business plan will be developed to ensure that the costs of the grass pitch improvements are sustainable and this may often involve surplus reinvestment from 3G FTPs.

Case study



50+
football, rugby
and crickets pitches



100+
games played
per week



30+
changing rooms



Social
facilities, café, events
rooms, public terrace



Example

Education

Many education sites provide excellent facilities to both pupils and local grassroots clubs and leagues. Such arrangements are strongly encouraged but should be supported by an appropriate maintenance programme to improve pitch capacity and quality.

To achieve this, a network of priority education sites should be identified for potential investment. Local stakeholders should consider a variety of maintenance options including in-house maintenance, the use of external contractors or a mixture of the two. Whichever solution is best, when a project is ready to proceed, it will be important to implement an appropriate maintenance programme and take professional advice.

Most education /community arrangements have a 'key partner' in the form of a multi-team club or league. This can help build a strong and trusted relationship where each partner can benefit from having improved grass pitch quality. For example, a school may partner with a large 20-team club to host all training and match play.

Financially, the additional income from community lettings can enhance education budgets allowing a school to deliver the improved maintenance programme. Equally, if the school has a 3G FTP, surplus should be reinvested into improving the quality of the grass pitches.

Case study



Refurbishment

of whole school to significantly improve environment



Sports village

approach involving multiple sports



Community

access to all sports facilities



Surplus

reinvested from 3G to improve grass pitches



Example

Asset transfer

When identifying priority grass sites for potential investment, we encourage local stakeholders to consider who will be the best operator to run the site. Financial pressures on the public sector, combined with strong growth in the number of well-organised large multi-team clubs and leagues, has created an environment where asset transfers are increasingly popular.

However, successful transfers involving grass pitches must consider many factors such as workforce, equipment and finances. Having taken professional advice to establish a maintenance programme, a club / league must determine how this will be implemented. While external contractor options are popular for occasional seasonal work such as de-compaction or re-seeding, regular work such as cutting and line-marking is commonly undertaken by volunteers.

Clubs will usually require appropriate grounds maintenance equipment, along with education/training and pitch care products, to implement the maintenance programme identified and have a sufficient budget to cover annual costs. All of these detailed considerations will be reviewed following the LFFP process and when a project is ready to proceed.

Case study



Asset transfer

to provide the club with a home



Protection

fencing to stop problems



Equipment

to do the job
(machinery and pitch care products)



Surplus

reinvested from 3G
FTP to improve grass
pitches



Example

Maintenance

Priority sites require the appropriate tools to deliver a maintenance programme efficiently and effectively. This could be through the provision of additional specialist equipment or via an enhanced maintenance programme.

During the LFFP process, local stakeholders will be asked to identify priority local sites and, to do so, should have an awareness of current pitch quality and maintenance programmes.

The equipment required for each key site will vary depending on a number of site and operational factors. Typically, vital equipment includes a core set of machinery (tractor and cutter) that is used on a regular basis. These are supplemented by occasional equipment to seed, slit, rake, roll or brush. All equipment must be insured and stored safely and securely.

Clubs will commonly require their own regular equipment. They will use volunteers to deliver the maintenance programme and training and support can be provided. Clubs at key grass pitch sites should be identified during the LFFP process.

We also encourage Local Authorities and education sites to strategically consider how maintenance programmes and management arrangements can be improved. Those wanting to improve grass pitch quality will be considered as a priority project for potential investment.

Case study



Professional

advice to identify
solutions to
improve pitches



Maintenance

programme adopted and
implemented



Equipment

to do the job
(machinery and pitch
care products)



Volunteers

dedicated to
improving pitches







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