



Office of the
Deputy Prime Minister

Creating sustainable communities

NEWS RELEASE

PLANNING TO SAFEGUARD OPEN SPACES AND PLAYING FIELDS - (ODPM 046)

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New planning guidance to ensure protection of sports pitches

Protection of playing fields and open spaces was further tightened today as the government announced new legislation and a set of strict planning policies to safeguard them.

The new planning guidance for open space, sport and recreation (PPG 17) provides robust guidelines for local planning authorities on the need to protect open spaces and playing fields. It emphasises that local authorities should rigorously ensure that communities needs for open space, playing fields and sports and recreational facilities are met.

New legislation is also to be put in place to protect smaller playing fields. This change brings down the size threshold upon which Sport England must be consulted when a planning application for development is submitted from 0.4ha to 0.2ha (full to half a football pitch) a move that will further boost grassroots sport in schools and clubs.

Figures have also been published today that show that Government policy is already protecting playing fields. The statistics show that the vast majority (92%) of the playing field planning applications submitted to Sport England over the last two years were not detrimental to sport or did not proceed ensuring sport is the winner in the vast majority of cases.

Commenting on his Offices new Planning Policy, The Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott said:

It is crucial that we protect our open spaces and playing fields. We expect local authorities to plan effectively and to protect these valuable resources, delivering new open space, sport and recreational facilities in a sustainable manner.

The policies in PPG17 will play an important part in delivering an urban renewal. They will help ensure that everyone has access to well managed and maintained open spaces, playing fields and sports and recreational facilities, which are an important part of providing high quality places for people to live.

Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport Tessa Jowell welcomed the new planning guidance, saying:

We want this country to go through a sporting revolution. That means we must protect the places where young people can play sport. Playing fields are a vital part of communities and we must have proper safeguards against moves to develop on fields which would be to the detriment of sport.

But we should recognise that the greatest benefits will not always be achieved by preventing change. For example, when an application is made to construct an all-weather pitch on waterlogged playing field land it will increase the opportunities for the local community and schools to use a previously poor quality area. Every case must be carefully considered on its merits. These new regulations should go a long way to ensuring this happens.

The Secretary of State for Education Estelle Morris said:

The Government is committed to protecting school playing fields. School sport has a real impact in raising standards, improving behaviour and increasing attendance.

We are investing more money into school sport than ever before - 750 million to upgrade school and community sports facilities throughout the UK through the New Opportunities Fund and 130m for Space for Sports and Arts delivering new sports halls, changing facilities and all-weather pitches to thousands of school children across the country.

We are determined to give young people every possible chance to fulfil their sporting potential.

Notes to Editors

1. *Playing Fields Monitoring Group*. The Playing Fields Monitoring Group was established by the DCMS in April 2000. The Groups membership comprises representatives from the Department for Education and Skills, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, Sport England, the National Playing Fields Association, the Central Council of Physical Recreation, and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. The Group meets to: monitor figures on planning applications affecting sports pitches and applications to dispose of school playing pitches, and identify and consider any general issues to which the statistics give rise; consider the wider issues affecting playing fields and recreational land which arise from the statistics, as and when appropriate; and facilitate effective co-ordination and communication between the Group members.

2. *Sport England*. In August 1996 under Statutory Instrument No 1817 The Town and Country Planning (General Development Procedure) (Amendment) Order, Sport England was made a statutory consultee for all planning applications affecting the loss of playing fields, land used as playing fields, or land allocated for use as playing fields in a current development plan. This includes being consulted on planning applications affecting any land that has been used as playing fields in the last five years and any replacement of grass pitch with a synthetic surface.

3. *Statistics and leaflet*. The statistics published by the Playing Fields Monitoring Group, together with the accompanying leaflet "Protecting Playing Fields" is available from **the Department of Culture Media and Sport website**

4. *Planning policy Guidance Notes* set out the Governments national policies on different aspects of planning. The original PPG17 dates from 1991. A draft revision was issued for public consultation in March 2001. The draft was subject to an inquiry by the Transport, Local Government, and the Regions Select Committee in October 2001.

5. *Good Practice Guidance* titled Assessing needs and opportunities: a companion guide to PPG17 will be published shortly. This will set out methodologies for undertaking needs assessments, for auditing existing facilities and for setting local standards for the provision of open space, sports and recreation facilities.

6. Statutory Instrument 1996 no 1817 amended The Town and Country Planning (General Development Procedure) Order 1995(b) to require local planning authorities to consult Sport England about the development affecting land used as playing fields above 0.4 hectares in size. It is proposed to change this threshold to 0.2 hectares. Where Sport England has been consulted and objects to the development proposed, the 1998 Playing Fields Direction requires planning authorities to refer applications to the Deputy Prime Minister. Before the planning authority can grant planning permission the DPM will decide if the application should be called in for his own determination rather than being decided by the authority. The Direction applies to applications for the development of a playing field which is owned by a local authority, or which is currently used, or has in the previous 5 years been used, by an educational institution.

7. The Government is proposing to lower from 0.4ha to 0.2ha the threshold for the size of playing field upon which Sport England must be consulted when a planning application for development is submitted. This measure will be implemented through amendments to existing secondary legislation in due course.

8. The *New Opportunities Fund* is the biggest of the National Lottery good cause distributors funding health, education and environment projects across the UK. More details of their 750m project for PE and Sport can be obtained from their press office: 020 7211 1888

9. DfES Guidance 0580/2001: The Protection of School Playing Fields and Land for City Academies is available at **the teachernet wensite**.

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