

SportsNation

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1/2022

People, Places, Policy - Building Active Communities

**FIRST
ISSUE**

FOCUS ON

MUGAs

How to turn a court
into a hub for the
community

NEW OPENING

Harpenden Leisure Centre

MINISTER FOR SPORT

NIGEL HUDDLESTON

**"Sport will play a huge
part in the government's
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quarter of a century

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Crowd restrictions on sports events have been lifted in all parts of the UK, just in time for this year's Six Nations



People, places and policies

Welcome to the first edition of *SportsNation* - the magazine for those involved in the sports and physical activity sector. In every issue, we'll be looking at the people, places and policies that build active communities

As we start to move away from pandemic lockdowns and other protective measures, the case for promoting the value of sport and physical activity within the broader health agenda is more compelling than ever. It will come as no surprise that healthier, more active people have been less affected by COVID.

A study led by Glasgow Caledonian University revealed that regular physical activity cuts the risk of dying from infectious diseases, such as COVID-19, by 37% and reduces the chance of catching the virus by 31%. Another finding was that physical activity can boost the effectiveness of vaccines by up to 40%. Such compelling evidence can only strengthen the demand



for further financial investment in and support for sports facilities and initiatives - not only to enable more people to lead healthier lives, but also to reduce the strain on health and public services. The sports minister, Nigel Huddleston, gives his thoughts on this matter in this issue (page 22).

This year will see the UK hosting a range of major events, including the Commonwealth Games and the Rugby League World Cup. Allied to the recent announcements of significant new funding for sports facilities - and the forthcoming publication of the government's new sports strategy - there is much to be positive about as we emerge from the shadows of COVID-19.

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SportsNation

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Exercise should play bigger role in helping NHS

Public health initiatives must help raise awareness of social prescribing at sport clubs, gyms, pools and leisure centres in order to reduce the pressure on the NHS, according to a new report published by ukactive. The report, *Leading the Change: social prescribing within the fitness and leisure sector*, calls for the government and its agencies to help unlock the



The report calls for physical activity facilities to be used as part of the health care service

© JANEBR/PHOTACAP



Huw Edwards, CEO, ukactive

© UKACTIVE

potential of sport and active leisure facilities to serve more people through social prescribing.

The report makes four key recommendations to develop and grow social prescribing within the leisure sector so it can play its “fullest role in improving the health and wellbeing of the nation”. ukactive will share the findings

and recommendations from the report with the government and key stakeholders in the wider network, to drive action and support.

Huw Edwards, ukactive CEO, said: “As the NHS comes under even greater pressures, we must look differently at how healthcare-related physical activity could be delivered in facilities.”

New £5m activity fund launched to help clubs

Sport England has launched a new £5 million fund to mark the Queen’s Platinum Jubilee that aims to use sport and physical activity to bring communities together and tackle inequalities.

Using money from the National Lottery, the fund will make awards of between £300 and £10,000 to community organisations in support of new projects providing opportunities to become more physically active.

The funds could be used for things such as facility hire and coaching costs, or even small capital improvements.

The fund is open for applications now and will make awards to not-for-profit organisations helping inactive people to get active.

The fund is available to all community organisations



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Measures to protect pitches “are working”

Sport England has revealed that between April 2019 and March 2020, 94% (1,028 out of 1,093) of concluded planning applications affecting playing fields resulted in improved or protected sports provision. The high success figure has been credited to the current planning system, in which councils are required to refer cases to Sport England when any proposed development would affect or lead to the loss of a sports playing field.

Sport England will object to all applications unless the developer can prove it will improve or protect community sports provision.

Releasing its figures, Sport England said that in 34% of the cases where it originally objected to an application, further negotiations led to an overall improvement in



sports provision. Additionally, of the 127 applications where the grassroots sports body maintained its objection, 62 were either withdrawn by the applicants or refused planning permission.

Sport England’s head of planning, Nick Evans, said: “The figures once again highlight Sport England’s commitment to protecting and enhancing playing fields which help people get active.”

The funding will be used to create a grassroots legacy from the Games



Funding to help secure Birmingham 2022 legacy

A new £6.5m funding package has been launched to improve facilities and level up access to community sport across the West Midlands. The investment is part of legacy plans for this year’s Commonwealth Games in Birmingham.

The investment is made up of two funds – the Places and Spaces Fund and the Commonwealth Active Communities Fund. Both aim to tackle inactivity in local communities and engage under-represented groups, such as people on lower incomes and disabled people. The National Lottery money is part of a wider £30m investment for the legacy plans from Birmingham 2022.

Nicola Turner, head of legacy at Birmingham 2022, said: “If the Games can inspire people to lead a more active lifestyle, then we think that’s a valuable legacy from the Games.”

2021 was a 'significant milestone' for padel in UK

The Lawn Tennis Association (LTA) has described 2021 as a “significant milestone year” for padel in the UK, in terms of new courts being built around the country.

Considered one of the world's fastest growing sports, padel has been played in pockets up and down the country for decades, but has only really started to make its mark on the sporting landscape in recent years.

In 2019, when there were just over 50 padel courts in Britain, the LTA announced it would integrate British Padel into the organisation's day-to-day operations, and in November 2020 it became the national governing body for padel.

Since then, the number of courts and players in Britain has grown at a pace. There are now around 150 padel courts in Britain, spread across 66 venues including tennis clubs, as well as leisure partners and padel-only operators. The latest participation data shows there are now 89,000 active players, with monthly participation around 15,000.

LTA head of Padel, Tom Murray, said: “This past year has been about building the game, with a primary focus on developing the overall infrastructure of the sport – the number of courts, a workforce, and a structured player pathway.”

The LTA became the governing body of sport for padel in 2019

Queen's Club looks forward to bumper year

The historic Queen's Club in London is the UK headquarters for Real Tennis and Rackets and the stage for the annual cinch Championships. The event was cancelled in 2020 and was forced to downscale activities in 2021 due to social distancing regulations. The venue will, however, resume normal operations for the 2022 competition.

Taking place shortly before the Wimbledon Championships, this year's event will be the 118th edition of the tournament and British fans will hope that Cameron Norrie will go one step further than last year, when he was beaten in the final of the men's tournament by Italy's Matteo Berrettini.

The return to normality will see Queen's Club put in place a



The double-deck pavilion will provide the backdrop for many of the courts

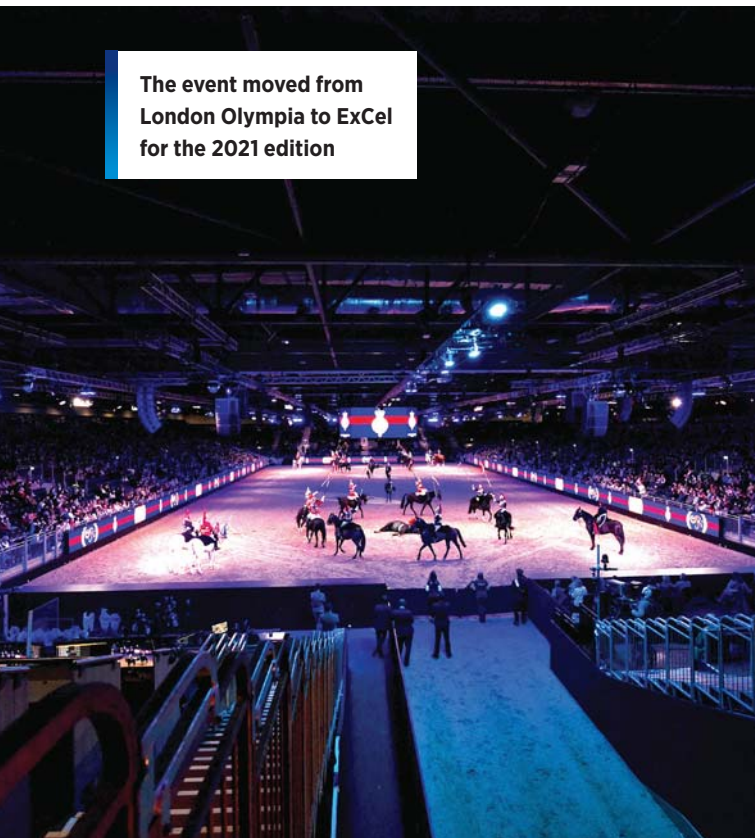
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number of plans initially intended for the cancelled 2020 edition – including an impressive pavilion for hospitality, provided by Neptunus.

“We were appointed, in 2019, by the LTA to create a new-look

double-deck pavilion that was due to make its debut in 2020,” said Ben Keast, MD of Neptunus. “In 2021 we reconfigured it to incorporate facilities for officials – but it will resume normal service in 2022.”

The event moved from London Olympia to ExCel for the 2021 edition



Expanded capacity for International Horse Show

Some events have already made a spectacular return – with many expanding their temporary infrastructure. These include The London International Horse Show, which moved from its previous home at London Olympia to ExCel.

Seating specialist Arena designed and installed a 9,000-capacity audience arena for the event, which took place in December 2021. The new venue enabled the show to expand its capacity by 1,500 seats. The design was based on the mezzanine layout of Olympia, accommodating VIP hospitality boxes and a Royal Box above the rear of the grandstand audience seats.

Nick Brooks-Ward, operations director of HPower Group, which runs the event, said: “Arena delivered an unbelievable seating and dining experience for our new home.”

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Temporary beach for Birmingham

One of the quirkiest temporary facilities set to be built this year will see thousands of tonnes of golden sand being shipped into Birmingham to build the beach volleyball venue for the 2022 Commonwealth Games.

The backdrop for the Smithfield site, at the heart of the landlocked city, will be rather different to the one enjoyed by fans when the sport made its debut at the 2018 Games held on the Gold Coast in Australia.

The Smithfield venue will host all of the beach volleyball games over nine days.

Each 16m x 8m sand court is required to have at least 40cm of sand underfoot.

Sue Storey, CEO of England Volleyball, said: “We will look to capitalise on this huge opportunity to enhance the sport’s profile and inspire future generations to pick up a volleyball.

“With an impressive group of rising stars, I’m also excited about what we can achieve in 2022. England came so close to a medal at the 2018 Games and we’ll be doing everything we can to reach the podium on home soil this time around.”

The Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games will take place from Thursday 28 July 2022 to Monday 8 Aug 2022. The Smithfield site will also host the basketball and wheelchair basketball competitions.



The temporary venue will host beach volleyball games

© BIRMINGHAM 2022

Black Swimming Association expands to Wales

The Black Swimming Association (BSA) and Sport Wales have announced a new partnership, which aims to make swimming and other aquatic sports more ethnically diverse in Wales.

The partnership is considered a milestone for both organisations and represents a “significant commitment” to tackle the existing inequalities in the aquatics sector. It’s also the first time the BSA will have a presence in Wales.

The announcement also comes a year after Sport Wales and the other UK sports councils commissioned the Tackling Racism and Racial Inequalities in Sport Review (TRARIIS), acknowledging that more needs to be done ‘to make sport welcoming, inclusive, and diverse’ at all levels.



The partnership will look to tackle inequalities in the aquatics sector in Wales

© SPORT WALES/BSA

BSA co-founder, Seren Jones, said: “Working in Wales means our research and programmes that are already underway in England will be transferred, implemented and developed here. As we

grow, so will our partnerships with the Welsh aquatics sector, as well as our relationships with communities in Wales.”

The BSA was officially launched in early 2020.

Sports clubs encouraged to be more sustainable

The Environment Agency has published new guidance which encourages community sports clubs to kick plastics out of sport.

The guidance is aimed at getting clubs – and anyone working in sport – to sign up to the Big Plastic Pledge, a global campaign founded by Olympic gold medallist Hannah Mills. The campaign calls on sport representatives to ramp up efforts to tackle plastic waste.

Hannah Amor, Environment Agency’s sustainability team project lead, said: “The new guidance is ideal for clubs that want to step up their green credentials. They can discover tips on sustainable kits swaps, reusable products, new sustainable club measures, and how to influence the adaptation of bathroom, kitchen and waste facilities to help reduce avoidable plastic consumption.”

The guidance aims to help clubs to become more environmentally sustainable

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ReTrain to ReTain

A new skills, funding and support programme will help up to 50,000 professionals and volunteers working in sport and physical activity, as Tara Dillon, CEO of CIMSPA explains.



It's been an incredibly challenging time for the sports and physical activity sector, particularly for its workforce. The lockdowns have seen many people leave the sector, which has left operators with staff shortages.

This is why CIMSPA launched the ReTrain to ReTain programme. The job retention scheme will support up to 50,000 sport and physical activity professionals and volunteers in England who have had to find work outside the sector during the pandemic. The programme provides training, resources and tools to help people return to work and remain in the sector.

Launched in November 2021, thousands of fitness professionals, group exercise instructors, sports coaches and volunteers have already signed up to scheme, which is part of an ambitious £5m job retention and support package to help the sector recover from the pandemic. Funded by Sport England, it is being delivered by CIMSPA, alongside UK Coaching and EMD UK.

ReTrain to ReTain is now being opened up to professionals whose working hours weren't affected by the pandemic but who deliver sessions that tackle inequalities, such as working with people from culturally diverse communities, those with disabilities or people with long term health conditions. Sport professionals are also invited to apply for the scheme where they can take advantage of the wealth of resources based on individual roles and personal circumstances.

Benefits of the programme include access to:

- The Digital Marketing Hub, a free hub of on demand training, webinars and mentorship to help people upskill.
- 20 pieces of digital learning and 30 webinars to help professionals get back

The scheme will help people return to work in sport

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into work or increase their working hours - covering job applications, interview techniques and managing finances.

- A job matching service to support people in gaining new employment or additional hours.
- Discounted endorsed training from CIMSPA education partners.
- Discounted training from a range of providers
- Regular bulletins from CIMSPA to keep in touch with the latest developments in the sector.
- Sports coaches who live in areas of socioeconomic deprivation will receive 12 months unlimited access to more than 500 learning resources provided by UK Coaching.

The sport and physical activity workforce has a critical role to play in supporting the health of the nation. By upskilling staff and funding essential training, ReTrain to ReTain will help to plug significant skills deficits so employers can return to full capacity, community sport has the volunteers needed to return to play and the sector can tackle the inequalities that have been exacerbated by the pandemic to help those who benefit most from sport and physical activity. ●

For more info: <https://retrain.cimspa.co.uk>



Our commitment to communities

While it feels like we've lived with it forever, it's been less than two years since we entered the first COVID-19 lockdown. As we enter 2022 with some uncertainty, there's one thing that'll never be uncertain – the undeniable importance of physical activity to our health.

The fitness and leisure sector represents the biggest drivers of physical activity in the UK, with fitness activities and swimming coming second only to walking (*Active Lives Survey*, Sport England). Our latest modelling for the potential for growth in the numbers participating over the next decade stands to have a major impact on the nation's health and wellbeing. However, there are several factors standing in the way of this growth being realised and, crucially, within the communities that need it most.

Over the past year ukactive has undertaken significant consultation with consumers, operators, suppliers and partners, and the results have given us valuable insight as to the experience particular communities have in relation to our sector. Much of this insight relates to facility design and location, and how this can create negative experiences and barriers to participation. If we are to create

WE MUST BREAK AWAY FROM THE TRADITIONAL ONE-SIZE-FITS-ALL APPROACH TO LEISURE FACILITIES

spaces and places that are welcoming to all we must break away from the traditional one-size-fits-all approach to leisure facilities and ensure that we put the community of that place at the heart of the design and offering.

The state of our public sector leisure stock is well documented and there is no denying the urgent need for investment to not only save failing facilities but to create efficient, sustainable facilities that are fit for purpose. For example, GT3 Architects has applied several of these principles to its work on Spelthorne Leisure Centre, designing a facility based on the needs and aspirations of the local community while also moving away from traditional design conventions to support zero-carbon objectives.

As we look to the future of leisure, we must not become complacent and believe that 'if we build it they will come', but rather that 'if we build with them, they will come'. We must fight the urge, at every step, to put our heads down and develop and design to completion. Instead, we must continually question why we are doing what we are – and most importantly, for whom.

If we are serious about our commitment to 'Build Active Communities', those communities must be central to every decision we make. At ukactive, we are making it a priority to provide the high-quality data and insight that will support a new approach to the provision of public leisure facilities, whether that be through accessibility, digital effectiveness or sustainability. ●



Communities must be central to every decision made on leisure

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The importance of inclusive spaces

We know there's still much work to do to achieve our vision – fairness for disabled people in sport and activity.

The pandemic has severely exacerbated issues that have existed for a long time. This is simply not fair or right.

Prior to the pandemic, we were beginning to see encouraging signs, with more disabled people recorded being active than ever before. However, we are now seriously concerned about the pandemic's impact on disabled people. Our second *Annual Disability and Activity Survey (2020-21)* revealed that twice as many disabled people felt that coronavirus had greatly reduced their ability to do sport or physical activity, when compared to non-disabled people.

This is wholly unacceptable, especially when we consider that there are 14 million disabled people in the UK – that's one in five. Every one of us deserves the right to reap the physical and mental health benefits of being active. We cannot allow disabled people to feel forgotten as we strive to recover.

Our research shows there is a demand for greater choice and opportunities to be active. That's why we urge those in the leisure sector to do everything they can to remove barriers to a healthier, happier nation.

Our insight shows there are three main barriers to disabled people being active:

- **Physical** – Is the access into and inside your facility accessible? Are you making the adaptations or changes needed to support everyone taking part?
- **Logistical** – are there accessible transport links to and from your facility? Are sessions available at convenient times? Is it affordable?
- **Psychological** – are your frontline leisure staff confident in providing

Activity levels among disabled people have declined during the pandemic

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“WE CANNOT ALLOW DISABLED PEOPLE TO FEEL FORGOTTEN AS WE STRIVE TO RECOVER”

inclusive and welcoming activities and customer service, so disabled people feel welcomed in your environment?

Activity Alliance is here to help you to break down these barriers. Our resources and training is readily available on our website.

Our *Achieving Fairness* strategy, published in 2021, has two clear goals. That is to change attitudes towards disabled people in sport and activity, and to embed inclusive practice. Making spaces and places inviting and accessible will all help the vision for greater fairness.

We want our places and spaces to genuinely improve. Disabled people must be at the forefront of decision making. The best informed solutions must always involve disabled people.

The pandemic has given us an opportunity to rebuild. We need to take this opportunity to rethink and reinvent. We ask people to champion inclusion and work with us to make better active environments that benefit everyone. ●

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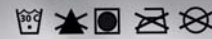
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Designing spaces for everyone

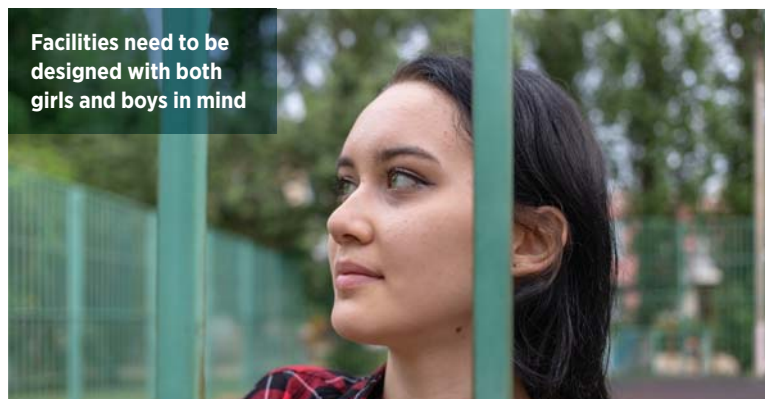
Facilities and public spaces for teenagers is a key area of focus for Women in Sport. This is because the vast majority of parks, play facilities and public spaces for teenagers are currently designed with boys in mind.

Local authorities tend to create skateparks, football pitches, BMX tracks and MUGAs; and they're used almost entirely by boys. The driver for provision is often an anti-crime initiative. Unfortunately, a desire to provide activities that keep boys occupied inadvertently excludes girls. And while the boys are being active, girls are spending time in and around shopping centres. But here's the thing. The girls aren't spending money there. They're just finding a safe space to meet friends.

So why aren't they using sports facilities? A big reason is simply the way they are designed. Think of a typical MUGA. It's got high fences, with one entrance and exit point and a group of teenage boys at the entrance.

And now think of being a teenage girl wanting to enter that cage. Girls are

Facilities need to be designed with both girls and boys in mind



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“RESEARCH SO FAR INDICATES THAT GIRLS PREFER OPEN SPACES WITH DIFFERENT LEVELS AND A RANGE OF ACTIVITIES”

simply walking away. But where facilities have been co-designed with teenage girls, the spaces are radically different and usage by girls increases dramatically.

Research so far indicates that girls prefer open spaces with a range of activities available to them. Our work with Yorkshire Sport, for example, asks girls just that: what do they want in relation to local recreational space?

We should all care about this. Making provision for girls is a legal requirement under the Equality Act (2010). Local authorities are more aware of their obligations than ever before, so will be looking to commission projects that help them achieve parity. More importantly, a failure to cater for girls has an impact on their physical and mental health both now and in later life.

More girls are now using skateparks. Why? Because Sky Brown is inspiring a new generation. Let's make sure girls feel safe and welcomed in our spaces so they can experience the joy and benefits of healthy outdoor exercise. ●



About Women in Sport

The charity Women in Sport was founded in 1984 and its vision is that no-one is excluded from the joy, fulfilment and lifelong benefits of sport and exercise. Recognising that gender stereotypes and institutional bias are holding women back in life and in sport, the charity's purpose is to give every woman and girl the opportunity to take part and inspire them to do so.

The charity has a track record of success in securing change, based on its deep understanding of the needs and aspirations of women and girls at each life stage and its determination to break down gender inequalities through its work within the sports sector and beyond. Find out more about Women in Sport here: www.womeninsport.org

Volatility continues in sports construction market

There seems to be no immediate relief from the ongoing issue of disruptions in the supply of products for the construction sector

Throughout 2021, construction projects of all kinds – not just those within the sports and physical activity sector – were affected by constant changes in the availability and cost of a range of products and materials essential to building projects.

The spikes in building material costs – and unforeseen delays in delivery times – were some of the unexpected consequences of the pandemic and will likely continue for some time. The volatility is caused by a “perfect storm” of various factors and issues. These include the increased costs and scarcity of raw materials – from oil to steel – and fluctuations in exchange rates. Added pressures have also been created by a surge in energy prices, particularly gas, which mean that as

Sports projects of all kinds could be affected by price increases and the short supply of materials

PHOTO: © JEAN-DANIEL FRANCOIS/REUTERS

well as raw materials, the cost bases have increased for everyday operations too.

Unfortunately, these same pressures remain and there is no alleviation in sight for the short to medium term in 2022. In fact, the situation has been exacerbated during the year by the marketplace being “overheated” with exceptional demand, and the labour shortages relating to the pandemic and people needing to self-isolate.

While these issues are global, the UK has been particularly badly hit due to the shortage of drivers as a result of Brexit complications, increased oil prices and competing demands for materials (particularly aggregates) as a result of HS2. There is now also the impact of higher inflation and, from April 2022, the withdrawal of the red diesel rebate.

This volatility, and the consequent impact on the time frames and delivery costs of projects, is likely to continue for some time. This is particularly true for the sports and play construction industry, as many projects need to fit within specific time frames – such as school holidays and other quieter periods when facilities are not in peak use.

According to Chris Trickey, CEO of the Sports and Play Construction

Association (SAPCA), those looking to develop facilities during 2022 need to account for the disruption.

“While there may be little that our industry can do to influence any of these economy-wide factors, SAPCA members are certainly doing their best to mitigate any disruption,” Trickey said.

“Contractors will always seek to secure the supply of products and materials for contracts that they have been awarded as early as possible. However, in many cases these will of course be supplied on a ‘first come, first served’ basis.

“Our members are working hard to deliver projects with the minimum of delay, but where there are unavoidable delays, clients may need to be patient and to be flexible in scheduling the use of their completed facilities. All those involved in the development of sports and play facilities may find it helpful to take this situation into consideration when planning and managing their projects for the coming year.

“For example, contractors and suppliers may be forced to review the periods of time that they are able to hold prices when giving quotations, and the timescales for project delivery may also be affected.”

Projects could be hit by a hike in the cost of fuel and increased demand for aggregates



PHOTO: © PIXAB.COM/YREKEE



Huddleston was appointed sports minister in February 2020

NIGEL HUDDLESTON

In an exclusive interview with *SportsNation*, sports minister Nigel Huddleston speaks to Tom Walker about the government's pandemic response and the new sports strategy, set to be published early this year



Nigel Huddleston was appointed sports minister as part of Prime Minister Boris Johnson's first significant reshuffle of his government, back in February 2020. The MP for Mid Worcestershire replaced Nigel Adams and, at the time, became the fourth sports minister to take up office in just 16 months. The timing of his appointment, just weeks before the first COVID-19 lockdowns, resulted in his tenure getting off to a slightly more hectic start than he might have first expected.

"There were a lot of new ministers appointed on that same day and within a month we were all reacting and responding to the COVID-19 pandemic," Huddleston tells *SportsNation*.

"Dealing with COVID-19 has dominated a huge chunk of my time and activities ever since, but I, alongside colleagues, have tried to balance the demands of responding to the pandemic with other work. We've been keen to keep pushing things forward, especially when it comes to items where the clock is ticking – such as preparing for the Commonwealth Games in Birmingham, the Review of Football Governance and the bid for the 2030 FIFA World Cup.

"We've also managed to drive a lot of progress on work which will directly impact the sport construction sector – such as our manifesto commitment to build more



football pitches, multi-use games areas and other sports facilities around the country."

BUILDING BACK BETTER

Huddleston says he's proud of the way the government has continued to invest in the UK's sports infrastructure, despite the budgetary pressures and constraints caused by the pandemic. In the summer of 2021, the government earmarked £50m towards grassroots football pitches across the UK. This was followed by £235m being pledged for new and refurbished community sports facilities in the 2021 October Spending Review.

"We're now working on the details of those funding announcements – where the money will go and how it will be rolled out," Huddleston says. "We all know that

- facilities play a crucial role in getting people physically active. And it's important to do so, as encouraging people to lead active, healthy lives eases the pressures on the NHS. We saw that during the pandemic too, with all the data suggesting that being more active and healthy could help you fight off the worst elements of COVID-19.

"We also know, however, that physical activity levels have fallen during the pandemic. So it's absolutely key that we try and get fitness and exercise levels back up. Therefore, our investments in sport and physical activity facilities are part and parcel of the overall recovery plan and our approach to 'build back better' following COVID-19."

RAPID RESPONSE

Huddleston is hugely positive about the future of the sports and physical activity sector and is confident it will recover from the effects of the pandemic. Much of this he puts down to the relationships his department, the DCMS, now has with governing bodies of sport and other sector stakeholders. He sees this, a strengthened sense of collaboration between sports bodies and the government, as one of the few direct benefits of the pandemic.

"As soon as we went into the first lockdown, we launched a sports working group which includes representatives from across the sector – the private sector, the public sector, governing bodies of sport and other institutions," he says.

"We wanted to make sure we were working together to understand what the immediate problems were and also to be ready to begin work on the recovery as soon as we could.

"As a result, the relationship between government and sports – and the physical

The government looks to make sport more inclusive for all

© SPORT ENGLAND



activity sector as a whole – has probably never been stronger. We've been working together, day in, day out and been having regular meetings in order to ensure that sport is prioritised in our COVID-19 response.

"So if there's a silver lining to the pandemic and its impact, it's probably the relationships the government has formed with the sports industry. I'm not saying we've been able to deliver everything that the sector wanted – in terms of the pandemic response – but we have done a lot in terms of sector-specific support.

"You only have to look at the £300m sports winter survival package we announced in late 2020 and the way it evolved into a broader, overall package. Or the £100m National Leisure Recovery Fund, which supported local authority leisure centres. There's also a number of other, wider funding initiatives which are still ongoing and which I know have helped sports and sports facilities. In total, we've seen more than £1bn going into supporting the sector through COVID-19.

"So there's been a fair bit of money flowing in – and it was made possible because we had that strong relationship with the sector. We understood the circumstances and difficulties

Huddleston says sport is part and parcel of the government's plans to "build back better"

© SPORT ENGLAND



“SAPCA and its members play a really important part in the sports ecosystem and without them, we in government wouldn’t be able to get on with our job of getting the nation more physically active



The government is looking to secure a number of major sports events for the UK

© SHUTTERSTOCK_ABOUL RAZAK LATIF

the sector faced, because the representatives were open and honest about the issues they faced. That enabled me and my colleagues to go to the Treasury and say ‘look, this sector needs some help and support’. And the momentum of that relationship is something I want to keep going, as we move forward.”

STRATEGIC MOVES

When it comes to improving the UK’s sports infrastructure, Huddleston reveals that the government is currently working towards identifying the types of facilities which are in particular need of investment.

“We’re looking to find out exactly where the gaps are,” he says. “And we’re working with the individual governing bodies of sport on that. The FA, for example, has been fantastic in helping us identify where

there’s most need for football pitches. Also, our recent investment of £22m into tennis – which will see thousands of public park tennis courts that are in poor or unplayable condition being brought back to life – was helped hugely by the work the LTA did in terms of identifying the state and condition of courts around the country. We’re also doing similar work with the swimming bodies in relation to swimming pools.”

Linked to this process is the government’s new sports strategy, due to be launched in early 2022. The current strategy – called *Sporting Future* – was published in 2015 under then sports minister Tracey Crouch. Huddleston says it is now time to “refresh” the document, which will outline the government’s direction of travel regarding sport – from grassroots to high performance. ►



Huddleston has had a love of cross-country running since his childhood

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- “As we come out of this pandemic, we have a prime opportunity to build on the foundations laid,” he says. “Our primary focus remains helping the sector recover from the pandemic. But as we look to the future and our refreshed sporting strategy, we will be working closely with the sector for its input in terms of levelling up facilities and improving the sport infrastructure, as we seek to build the active and healthy nation we want to see.”

While he can't reveal too much of what the strategy will include – and which areas will be deemed priorities – he does hint that inclusivity, equality and increasing opportunities for all to take part in activities will be at the very heart of it.

“When I started in this role back in February 2020, I wanted to focus on improving activity levels and inclusivity within sport – especially when it comes to getting more women and people from BAME communities involved and engaged in sport and physical activity,” he says. “That goal is very much still there.

“When the new secretary of state, Nadine Dorries, came in, one of her instructions to ministers within the department was that everything we do should be based on the theme of inclusivity and accessibility. That was music to my ears.

“Our new strategy will look to further strengthen the role of physical activity and sport and use it as a driving force to improve the wellbeing of people. This will be combined with efforts to target the under-represented. We will also look to refresh the *School Sport*

and *Activity Action Plan* – because let's not forget that more than a third of all sports and leisure facilities are behind school gates.”

A MINISTER FOR ALL SPORTS

Huddleston says he has thoroughly enjoyed his tenure as sports minister. He has certainly brought stability back to the role, after the somewhat short stints of his two predecessors, Mims Davies and Nigel Adams. His success could be something to do with the fact that he is a genuine sports fan and passionate about the sector.

“I love sport and was a keen athlete at school,” he reveals. “I played football, rugby and cricket, but I also loved athletics and cross-country running. When I lived and worked in the US, I also became an avid follower of baseball and American football.

“At times, the role of sports minister has been criticised as being one of “minister for football”. I think it's important to stress that's not the case. I'm very conscious that football shouldn't consume all of the time and attention.”

He also has a warm message for those delivering the UK's sports facilities, with a special nod to the Sports and Play Construction Association (SAPCA). “Those responsible for building the country's physical activity facilities – the members of SAPCA, for example – play a really important part in the sports ecosystem. Without them we simply wouldn't be able to get on with our job of getting the nation more active.” ●



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THE FUTURE IS MULTI-USE

MUGAs are becoming an increasingly popular choice for those wanting to provide sports facilities that cater for a wide variety of users.

For the past 20 years, multi-use games areas (MUGAs) have grown in popularity as a cost-effective solution for community sports facilities, especially when the brief is to offer a range of sports in a limited space. It is their flexibility – the ability to cater for a number of activities – in particular which makes them so attractive to those looking to add a new element to their outdoor sports provision. In many cases, there is also a business case for MUGAs. Up and down the country, venue operators have turned them into revenue generators.

Due to their variable size – ranging from smaller, single-court areas to larger, multi-court ones – they are a great option when it comes to converting small spaces into dedicated, durable sporting areas. Their smaller size also means that the cost-base is less than that of a full-size 3G football or rugby pitch.

CHANGING TIDES

The opportunity offered by MUGAs to create vibrant hubs of activity where people play a variety of sports has not

gone unnoticed when it comes to those looking to fund sports facilities, either. The Football Foundation, for example, is looking to provide dedicated funding for small-sided sports facilities in 2022. While each project receiving investment will need to cater for football, the focus is on creating facilities for multi-sport use.

The reason why the Football Foundation plans to spend money on facilities which will cater for non-football activities too, is that it is looking to engage disadvantaged communities and to provide facilities in areas that need them the most.

Separately, speaking to *SportsNation*, sports minister Nigel Huddleston (for full interview, see pp. 22-26), hinted that MUGAs could feature in the government's forthcoming sports strategy, which is





© MARY TAYLOR / PEXELS

MUGAs can become vibrant hubs of activity where people play a variety of sports and take part in activities



© ETC SPORTS SURFACES



© PLAININNOVATION

set to be published in early 2022. This could be significant, as the strategy will point out the direction of travel for all future government funding of sports.

“When it comes to investing in new facilities, our focus is to try and make sure the funding supports venues that are multi-use,” Huddleston said.

“We know there are areas which have relatively poor provision of sporting facilities – and there is a strong correlation between facilities and people playing sports and being active. Our overall strategy is to level up and sport is very much part of that. We want people in more deprived areas to have the same opportunities and facilities as the rest of the country.

“We all know that football is really important, as it drives so much passion

and participation - it’s one of our key national sports. But I’m really keen that we focus on multi-sports as it can help engage groups, such as girls and those from BAME backgrounds, for whom football might not be the number one interest.”

DESIGN FIRST

While MUGAs can be great assets and can help activate communities, there are sometimes, however, compromises over their design. Primarily, this compromise will be over the type of playing surface and which sports the MUGA can (and should) accommodate. There is seldom a simple solution that will satisfy every possible sport and, therefore, each facility must be carefully planned.

To help with this, the Sports and Play Construction Association (SAPCA) recently

►



MUGAs can cater for a wide range of sports and activities

© PLAYINNOVATION



YOU NEED TO FIGURE OUT THE EXACT SPORTING, PLAY AND NON-SPORTING NEEDS

LISTEN TO YOUR CUSTOMER

In addition to getting the technical details and features right, there are other aspects to consider. Marco Boi – founder of Playinnovation, a company which specialises in MUGA design and construction – says the key to creating a facility which has a chance of becoming a community asset is to engage with the groups who will use it at the design phase or pre-consultation. The key is to involve a diverse membership of the community that the facility will serve.

“You need to figure out the exact sporting, play and non-sporting requirements,” Boi says. “But when doing so, the most crucial bit is to engage with your partners to ensure it will cater for their needs when it opens. And by partners, I mean the end-users. The children, the young people and the mums and the dads – and other carers, of course.

“They are, as facility users, your ‘consumers’. What would they want to see included? Which sports would they like to play? While it’s impossible to please everyone, a well-managed consultation will give you an overview of what the surrounding community requires – and what it wants.” ●

- (September 2021) published its new code of practice for the design and construction of MUGAs. It sets out the basic construction requirements and specifications currently employed in building MUGAs and can be used by facility owners and operators as a guide when designing their MUGA. For example, it offers guidance on how to choose the all-important playing surface and how the decision should be guided by the types of sports and activities the facility will need to cater for.

SAPCA project manager, Colin Corline, says: “MUGAs offer a cost-effective solution for communities, schools and facility providers faced with a wide range of sporting demands and limited space – or budgets. The most commonly played sports on MUGAs are tennis, netball, basketball, hockey and football – including small-sided and walking football and futsal. They can also cater for rounders, volleyball and other recreational activities. In addition, MUGAs can be used as training pitches for many sports.

“When correctly designed, MUGAs can provide an asset that enhances the local sport and physical activity provision.”

■ To find out more about the *SAPCA Code of Practice for the Construction of Outdoor Multi Use Games Areas* – and other codes of practice relating to facility projects – visit the dedicated section on the SAPCA website: <https://sapca.org.uk/guide/codes-of-practice/>

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CHRIS MILLARD

He is responsible for one of the most famous and popular supporters' organisations in world sport – the Barmy Army. Here, Chris Millard offers *SportsNation* an insight into the world of the organisation which helps cricket-mad men and women to follow the England team around the world.



Set up by former British Airways employee Paul Burnham and his two friends, with a vision to make watching cricket more fun, The Barmy Army was formed during the 1994-95 Ashes Tour to Australia. Ironically, it was the Aussie media who first came up with the label Barmy Army, to describe the “completely mad” English fans who travelled to the other side of the world despite the near-certain knowledge their team would get beaten – and then carried on loudly cheering their heroes even when losing.

In 2018, Chris Millard, boyhood friend of England cricket captain Joe Root, was appointed the Barmy Army's managing director. It was just three years since he had joined the group on a work placement, after completing a university degree in sports development. Millard spoke to *SportsNation* about how Barmy Army now looks to grow and expand as a company.



Formed during the Ashes tour of 1994-95, the Barmy Army concept has developed into a business

Barmy Army's plans to grow the business include expanding the concept into other sports



© ALL PHOTOS: BARMY ARMY/PAUL SMITH ASSOCIATES

Tell us about the concept – and your recent rebrand

“The Barmy Army is a brilliant concept and very successful, but in 2018 Paul Burnham and the board decided they wanted to take the brand to a new level, to modernise and appeal to a younger demographic. Fortunately, I was in the right place at the right time and was given the responsibility to take on that challenge.

“We developed a road map on how to reach our goals. Pivotal was the need to come up with an inclusive brand, with broader appeal. In 2018 we ditched the old Barmy Army cross of St George flag symbol and introduced a new modern Barmy Army logo which is more appropriate for our growing organisation and the digital era.

It's been a massive success. The

BARMY ARMY

“

**OUR TOP PRIORITY
IS TO GROW CRICKET
THROUGH OUR IDEAS
AND INNOVATIONS
AND PROMOTE THIS
WONDERFUL SPORT**

- brand is far stronger both online and through traditional marketing and merchandising channels and has helped us to dramatically grow the business.

“Importantly, the new brand, while being clean and striking, is also adaptable. We believe it can transcend cricket to other sports such as rugby, golf and even football. Who’s to say that in five, 10 or 15 years’ time we won’t see the Barmy Army in other countries, and a fixture in other sports? We’ve created a brand we want to see grow.”

But for now, the emphasis is still firmly on cricket?

“Our top priority is to nail cricket, to grow cricket through our ideas and innovations and promote this wonderful sport that we operate in. We’ll always be there to support the England team through thick and thin.

If there’s one positive thing to come out of the pandemic, it’s the realisation that we need to diversify.

“We are a business; we employ people and peoples’ livelihoods depend upon us. We can’t be too reliant on one singular activity.

“We have tentatively dipped our



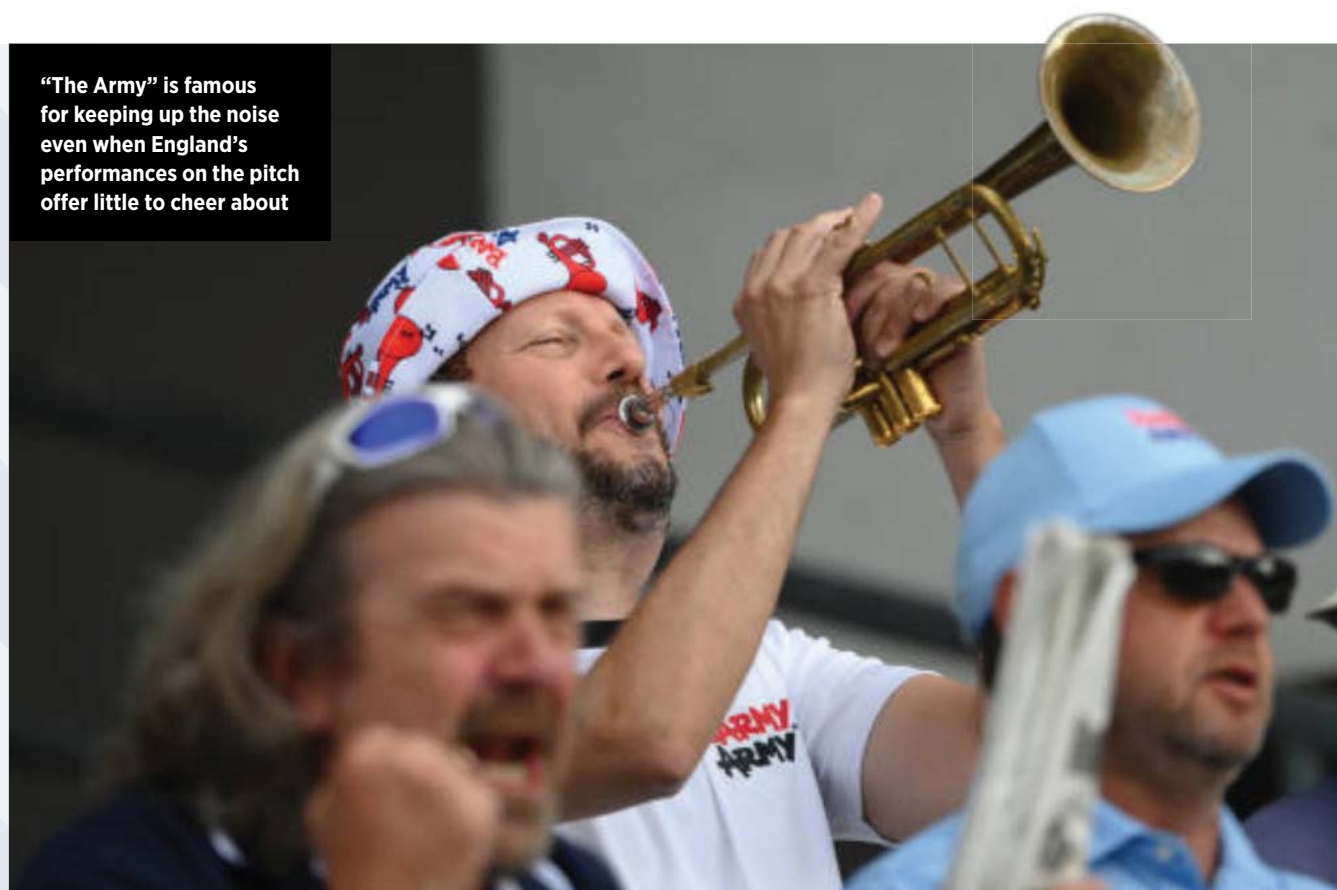
toe in operating across other sports and, looking forward, we are going to professionalise our approach to engage with other major sports. The plan is, initially, to look at rugby and golf.”

There’s also a focus on inclusivity?

“Our goal is to give supporters the best possible experience. Our mission statement is ‘maximising the sport for all’. We want to be the most inclusive fans’ group in the world.

Yes, we do teeter on the edge at times with our songs and with the banter that we dish out to players, but we never take it

“The Army” is famous for keeping up the noise even when England’s performances on the pitch offer little to cheer about





too far. That's something that we are really proud of. Respect is critical and the Barmy Army has clearly defined lines on what is and isn't acceptable behaviour. Over the past 27 years we've only had nine people kicked out of cricket stadiums, which is incredible when you think of the huge numbers we have taken overseas during this time.

"Up to 20 per cent of our database is female and during the busy overseas tour periods it increases. Up to 30 per cent of our merchandising is geared towards sales of products for women. We're actively looking at developing our partnership with England's Women's Cricket team and organising Barmy Army trips for their tours in the future." ►

THREE THINGS YOU DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT THE BARMY ARMY

- 1 Barmy Army Trumpeter Simon Finch has headlined Glastonbury, backing superstars such as Liam Gallagher, Adele, Florence and the Machine and Blur. 'Finchy' replaced the Barmy Army's previous trumpeter Billy Cooper, who retired in 2019.
- 2 After the 2017-18 Ashes series, The Barmy Army received letters of praise from the Mayors of Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane for the way in which fans conducted themselves inside and outside the ground at each Test Match. The mayors thanked the fans' sportsmanship, how they engaged with their hosts and for raising money for local good causes.
- 3 The Barmy Army's South African Tour on Christmas Day 2019 was supposed to kick off with a traditional Christmas lunch at Hard Rock Café in Johannesburg for 200 fans. The Barmy Army had been planning the special lunch for more than a year, but the chef miscalculated the number of turkeys needed to feed the multitude. There was hardly any turkey with the veg and the Yorkshire puddings were served as a dessert! In true Barmy Army style, the setback didn't deter anyone from enjoying themselves.



Millard is a childhood friend of current England Test captain Joe Root



► **People might not always realise that the Barmy Army is a business?**

“True. People not familiar with the Barmy Army are very surprised about the depth and expertise of our organisation. We handle travel services overseas, ticket services in the UK, merchandising worldwide and commercial partnerships and media services.

“I head up a small but dedicated team which includes a commercial director overseeing brand partnerships and leveraging social media and podcasts. The Barmy Army podcasts, which have featured more than 50-star names from world cricket, have been downloaded by over 1 million viewers and topped the UK cricket podcasts for 25 weeks.

“We have a media manager and a membership secretary responsible for communications with 750,000 social media followers, 4,500 first class members and more than 40,000 members who subscribe to the Barmy Army newsletter. Our operations director handles up to 7,000 ticket applications a year in the UK, with thousands more for busy overseas tours, while the merchandising operation handles 3,000 transactions in a quiet year – but up to 15,000 in tour years.”

How has the pandemic and the past two years been for you?

“Like many businesses and organisations, the pandemic halted progress and slowed us down. In 2019 we were on the crest of a wave. We had come off the South African tour, England had just won the World Cup, there had just been an Ashes tour in the UK, Ben Stokes was Sports Personality of the Year,

Some of the Barmy Army regulars have been with the group since its very beginning

“

PEOPLE NOT FAMILIAR WITH THE BARMY ARMY ARE VERY SURPRISED ABOUT THE DEPTH AND EXPERTISE OF OUR ORGANISATION

the Barmy Army were in South Africa with our biggest numbers ever (we even chartered an aircraft from Heathrow to South Africa) and things were going incredibly well for us.

“Sky Sports also produced a documentary to mark our 25th anniversary – and then COVID-19 hit. However, the time we have lost as a result of the pandemic has been put to good use. We’ve had time to put our plans in place in order to make the Barmy Army better for everyone and to spread our appeal to other sports.” ●



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BUILDING BACK STRONG

Leisure contractor 1Life has defied the pandemic and its effects by opening a new multi-million pound leisure centre to improve local community provision

Harpenden Leisure Centre

Building work on the site began in 2019 and the centre opened to the public in late 2021





Olympic gold-winning gymnast, Max Whitlock, opened the centre

During a time of significant financial and social implications for businesses and organisations across the sector, leisure management company

1Life has emerged from the pandemic lockdowns in a positive and confident mood.

As well as getting its nationwide network of venues – comprising leisure centres, swimming pools, golf courses and theatres – back up and running, 1Life recently opened the impressive Harpenden Leisure Centre, in a joint partnership project with St Albans City and District Council.

The project was first conceived in 2016, when St Albans City and District Council identified a need to upgrade, modernise and improve the previous leisure provision at the facility, which had served the local community for decades.

“Leisure facilities and services are at the heart of every community,” says Mark Braithwaite, 1Life managing director,



adding: “Children learn to swim in them, we celebrate birthdays and play sport in them and, as we grow older, we socialise and maintain our health in them.”

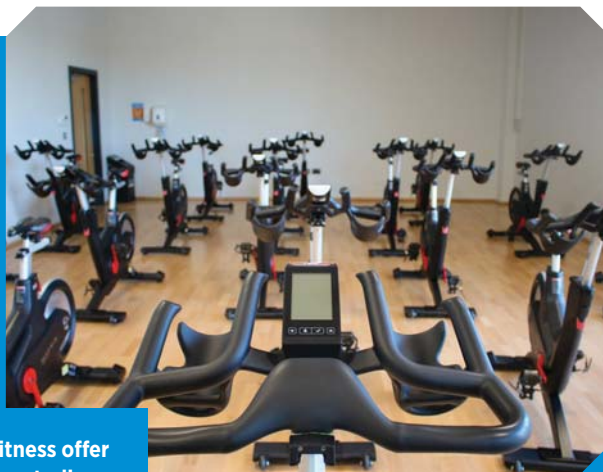
“There was a great need to update and improve the services on offer in Harpenden. ▶

Launched in late 2021, the facility has become a hub for community activity

© ALL PHOTOS: 1LIFE/AM CONTENT MARKETING



The centre's fitness offer includes three studios and a gym floor kitted out with modern equipment



IN A POST-PANDEMIC WORLD, IT'S ESSENTIAL TO CONTINUE TO EVOLVE AND PREPARE FOR NEW

- With such an impressive space at the site of the former sports centre in Rothamsted Park, it was a no-brainer for us and the local authority to combine our expertise and to enhance the space for the local community."

Construction on the new facility began in 2019 and the centre opened in September 2021. It offers the local community a 25-metre main pool, training pool with moveable floor, three fitness studios – including indoor cycling – a sports hall, outdoors courts, multi-use games area (MUGA) and an impressive 120-station gym with a bespoke rig.

Principal contractors of the project, Willmott Dixon, were joined by Space

& Place Architects, structural and civil engineers Furness Partnerships and installers Cunnington Clarke, while Turner & Townsend acted as principal designers. Pulse Fitness supplied the fitness equipment for the health club, which now offers more than 60 group exercise classes per week.

Braithwaite says: "The project was a major success thanks to the hard work, dedication and co-ordination of all our technical partners and supply chain providers – and all in the midst of a pandemic. Their expertise has already gone a long way to improving the health and lives of thousands of our members and public users within the local community."





In addition to the 25m main swimming pool, there is also a training pool with moveable floor



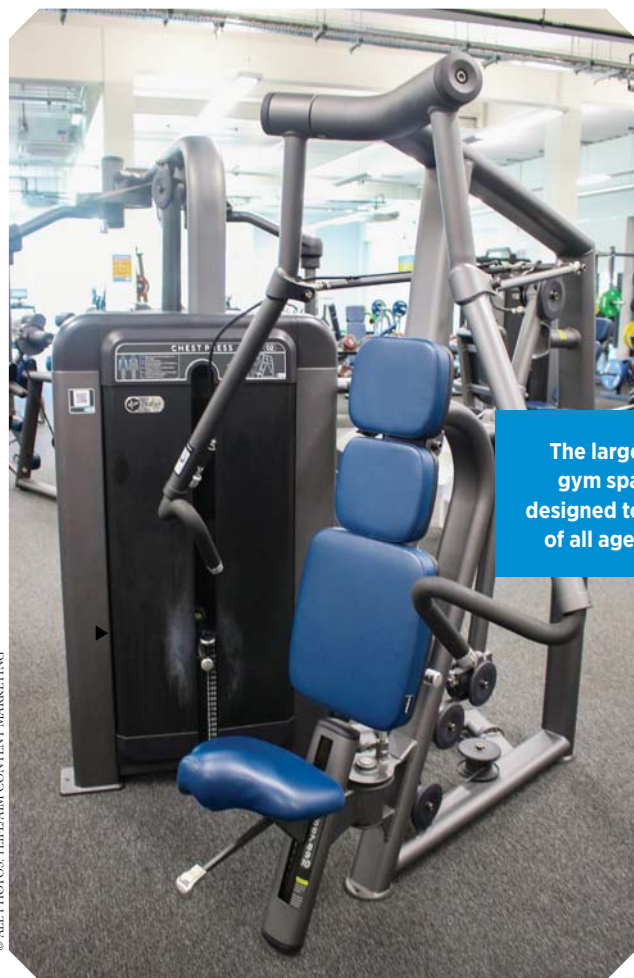
Owned by St Albans City and District Council and managed by 1Life, the centre now has around 4,100 fitness members, while more than 1,500 local children are on the swimming lesson programme. This showcases how public sector facilities are able to compete with private sector rivals through first-class service and premium offerings.

“A special mention must go to St Albans City and District Council for its passion,

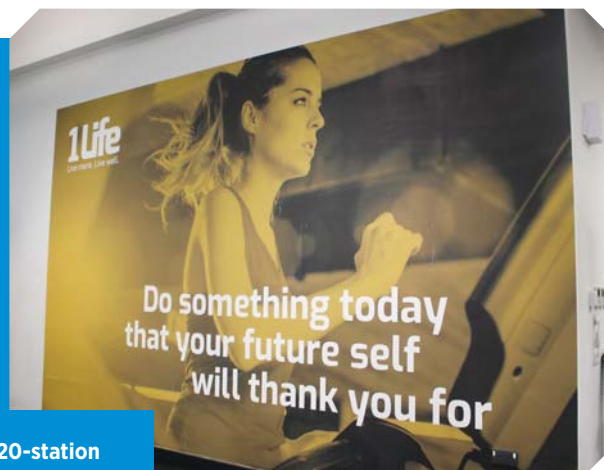
support and innovative-thinking to help make this project a reality,” Braithwaite adds.

“We manage leisure facilities up and down the country, serving around 10 million customer visits per year, and our role is made easier when partnering with forward-thinking local authorities.

“In the post-pandemic world, it’s essential for us to continue to evolve, develop and prepare as an organisation to ensure that we ►



The large, 120-station gym space has been designed to cater for users of all ages and abilities



- ▶ are ready for new challenges and strategic directions. Working alongside the team at St Albans City and District Council, we revisited the playbook for how local leisure provision has been traditionally done.

“Between us, we want to employ the right formula to effectively market, motivate and encourage more people into facilities than ever before. The goal is to make a genuine impact on the health and wellbeing of the local community.”

Braithwaite says 1Life’s approach is to be “collaborative, thoughtful, and focused on creating tailored solutions”, in order to help partners achieve results.

POST-PANDEMIC CHALLENGES

There’s no doubt that the pandemic has been a test for organisations across the sector. Some operators, trusts and local authorities face challenging circumstances and the traditional commercial models may not be dynamic, adaptable or suitable enough for the post-COVID-19

world; and an innovative and flexible approach will be needed for the future.

As a result of timely and effective management during the pandemic, however, 1Life says it has emerged stronger than ever, both financially and operationally.

“We can’t escape the impact that Covid-19 has had on both businesses and consumers,” Braithwaite says.

“It’s become obvious that we need effective programming to better manage the issues which still affect society and have been magnified over the past couple of years. These include rising obesity and inactivity rates, long COVID, mental health issues, isolation and social health, accessibility and inclusivity for disabled people and sporting participation; to name but a few.

“A strong leisure provision which stems from the heart of the community can create a successful health legacy today, tomorrow and in years to come. That is central to what we hope and expect the new Harpenden Leisure Centre will do for the local community.”

SUPPLIERS

PROJECT DIRECTORY

- **Principal Contractor:**
Willmott Dixon
- **Architect:** Space & Place Architects
- **Structural & Civil Engineers:** Furness Partnerships
- **Services Designers and Installers:**
Cunnington Clarke
- **Principal Designer:**
Turner & Townsend

SUPPLY CHAIN PARTNERS

- **Tarmac:** Aggregate Industries UK Ltd
- **Groundworks:**
Newtownstewart Construction Ltd
- **Roofing:** Deane Roofing & Cladding Cltd
- **Electrical:** Wady's Electrical Ltd
- **Exercise and Fitness Equipment:** Pulse Fitness
- **Pool Filtration:**
Buckingham Swimming Pools Ltd
- **Pool Drains:** Poly Advisory Ltd
- **Pool Ceiling:** Stretch Ceilings Ltd
- **Sports Hall Netting:**
Continental Sports Ltd
- **Sauna:** Dalesauna Ltd
- **Soft Flooring:**
Horizontal Ltd
- **Curtain Walling:** JPJ Installations Ltd
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- **Lifts:** Stannah Lifts Ltd
- **Mirrors:** Stevenage Glass Company Ltd
- **Roller Shutters:** Syston Rolling Shutters Ltd

A STRONG LEISURE PROVISION CAN CREATE AN EFFECTIVE HEALTH LEGACY

With the official opening held in September, led by Olympic gold medal-winning gymnast Max Whitlock MBE and former Olympic silver-medalist, Gail Emms MBE, the centre was rebuilt as part of a £20m project, which also included the creation of a new culture centre, called The Eric Morecambe Centre (EMC) - named after the comedy legend.

The EMC is also managed by 1Life and was officially opened in October 2021. It includes a 511-seat theatre with state-of-the-art production equipment to allow major touring shows to be staged as well as those put on by local groups. ●



Max Whitlock (centre) with Steve Bambury, 1Life operations director (right) and Stuart Foster, leisure services manager (left)

More details about 1Life and Harpenden Leisure Centre are available at: www.1life.co.uk

The annual SAPCA Technical Meeting is among the sports construction industry's main educational events. The 2021 edition, held at Loughborough University, saw more than 150 delegates from 75 different organisations take part

EVENT REVIEW:

SAPCA TECHNICAL MEETING

Having been held as an online event in 2020, the SAPCA Technical Meeting returned to a face-to-face format for 2021. Held at Loughborough University's Holywell Park in December, the event featured a full day's programme of sessions, followed by a networking dinner. There was also a small exhibition floor with companies showcasing their products and services. More than 150 people from 75 different organisations took part on the day. As some

of the speakers were unable to attend in person – due to COVID-19 restrictions – it was the first Technical Meeting in which speakers presented both on-site and online.

SUSTAINABLE MATTERS

The keynote session focused on environmental sustainability. During it, SAPCA board member Dr. Kathryn Severn presented the objectives of SAPCA's Environmental Sustainability Working Group and outlined the plans ahead – including the group's priorities and timelines for action.

"The group will support the delivery of SAPCA's technical programme by providing advice, recommendations, and best practice guidance," Dr Severn said. "The overall aim is to influence the design and construction of sport and play facilities, in order to improve environmental sustainability, enhance quality and durability – and reduce and prevent pollution."

Eric O'Donnell from Sports Labs then highlighted how sustainable practices can, at times, be expensive for companies and brands – but how a commitment to sustainability is necessary in all areas of business. He also posed the question whether the sports and play industry could come up with a way of highlighting how it offsets some of the carbon footprint of construction

Delegates were given the opportunity to ask questions and engage with the speakers throughout the day



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Speakers from left: Kathryn Severn (Football Foundation), Owain Davis (Level Playing Field) Francesca D'Andrea (Sheffield Hallam) and Eric O'Donnell (Sports Labs)

with the healthy outcomes achieved by those using the facilities the sector helps create.

"There are 30,000 full-size, synthetic pitches in Europe, which support hundreds of millions of hours of sporting activity," O'Donnell said. "By getting people physically active, the pitches could, potentially, be saving billions on health spending across the continent. We all need to promote the good things we're doing, as an industry, in supporting health and wellbeing."

Jo Gilroy from the Kier Group then provided delegates with a thought-provoking talk, in which she outlined how the UK's construction sector is responsible for around 50 per cent of UK carbon emissions and a third of UK waste. This presents the industry with a huge opportunity to change and improve – and as a result, make a real difference.

THIS YEAR'S EVENT HAD A VERY STRONG PROGRAMME OF SESSIONS

BETTER FACILITIES

Throughout the day, the focus of the sessions was very much on the drive to deliver better facilities. Topics – among others – covered in the talks included the evolution of (and innovation within) synthetic turf systems and indoor sports flooring.

One of the highlights was a session which looked at the importance of diversity in sports facility design. Owain Davies, CEO





(From left): Professor David James, SAPCA technical chair, leading a panel discussion featuring Phil Keeley, Labosport; Paul Barker, SIS Pitches; David Hook, TigerTurf; and Colin Corline, SAPCA

- of Level Playing Field – a charity which campaigns and advises sports organisations to improve access to disabled people – highlighted how 21 per cent of the UK population has a disability, equating to 14.1 million people. Of those, half have never attended a live entertainment or sports event.

“On average, life costs you £583 per month more if you are disabled,” Davies said. “Disabled people face a number of barriers to taking part in – and spectating – sport, such as the environments, attitudes and, at times, the sports organisations themselves.

“What we’re driving for is for disabled people to have a fair and equal experience at sports facilities. When it comes to facility design, the emphasis should be on integration, not segregation.”

The day then culminated in a well-attended panel discussion on “Meeting the Quality Challenge”. The session was expertly chaired by SAPCA technical chair, professor David James. The panel – which included Paul Barker from SIS Pitches, David Hook from TigerTurf, Phil Keeley from Labosport and SAPCA Project Manager Colin Corline – offered its candid views on a wide range of topics affecting the industry. These included a conversation about the continuing volatility in the supply chain – and how companies are likely to be affected by it for some time.

The annual SAPCA Technical Meeting is one of the sport



and play construction industry’s most popular events of the year, providing an unparalleled programme of seminars and workshops on the most important technical topics of the day. It also offers industry professionals an invaluable opportunity for networking with colleagues from across the sector.

The event is open to everyone in the sports and play construction industry, whether SAPCA members or not, and also attracts a number of delegates from national governing bodies of sports, sports councils and other organisations involved in grassroots sports and play.

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BEST EVENT YET

Commenting on the day, Professor David James, said: “The key to the success of this year’s Technical Meeting was the very strong programme, which focused on the big issues of the day for the industry, particularly the current challenges over environmental sustainability.

“The diverse range of expert speakers – many of whom spoke at the event for the first time – was exceptional, and no doubt the main reason we had such a large and highly engaged audience for the day.” ●

The dates for the 2022 SAPCA Technical Meeting are set to be confirmed soon. For more information on SAPCA events, visit: <http://sapca.org.uk/events/>



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SAPCA TURNS 25

The Sports and Play Construction Association was founded in 1997 by a group of specialist sports builders. CEO Chris Trickey outlines how the organisation has grown over the past quarter of a century into a thriving industry body, representing the companies that design, build and equip the UK's sports facilities.

The 25th anniversary of the Sports and Play Construction Association (SAPCA) this year is a reminder of how quickly the last quarter of a century has passed by. In 1997, when SAPCA was launched, Tony Blair replaced John Major as PM, the first Harry Potter book was published and Titanic hit our cinema screens. In sport, Pete Sampras won at Wimbledon, Paul Gascoigne was still scoring goals for fun and Mike Tyson decided to snack on Evander Holyfield's ear during their heavyweight title fight. The internet was a relatively new thing and it would be another decade until social media really took off.

CEO Chris Trickey joined SAPCA as its first employee in 1997

Setting up

The foundations of SAPCA were laid when a small group of specialist sports builders joined forces to create a new trade organisation for the industry. It came about through the amalgamation of two separate, smaller associations that had been running since 1986; the Tennis Court Constructors' Federation and the Synthetic Sports Surfaces Association, the latter mainly comprising builders of pitches and tracks.

The rationale for launching SAPCA was to create an organisation through which specialist companies could collaborate to promote high standards for the design and construction of sports and play facilities and to work more closely

together. While the association has evolved and expanded, this same core purpose remains the same today – 25 years later.

The founding members were mainly specialists in outdoor synthetic sports surfaces. While surfacing remains at the core of SAPCA, that core has evolved as the range of companies and specialisms represented by SAPCA has grown. Today, it also includes natural sports turf, indoor sports floors and play surfaces.

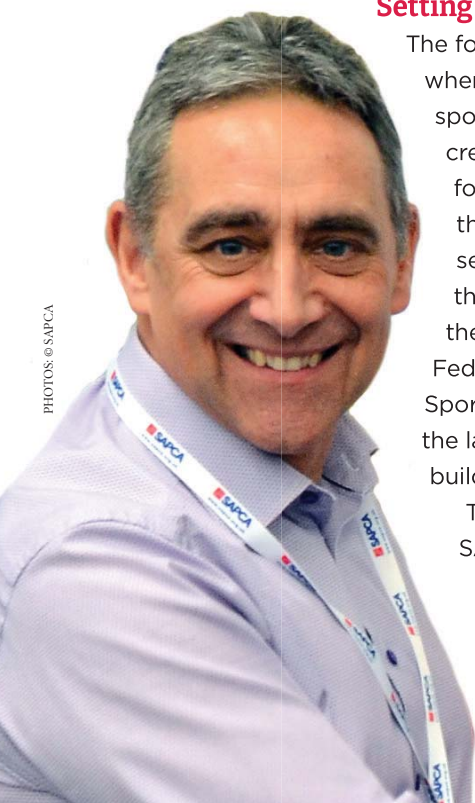
In its early years, the initiative was driven by people from across the industry – such as Charles Lawrence, SAPCA's first chair. The organisation was formed as a non-profit company, with a board of directors elected by the first member companies.

I joined as SAPCA's first employee – my first task being to register the company – having previously worked for 10 years at the Lawn Tennis Association (LTA). I had helped deliver the LTA's facility programme, through which I had worked with many founding members of SAPCA.

The early expansion of SAPCA's membership base saw a much wider range of companies join, including a diverse range of contractors, such as specialists in maintenance, lighting, fencing and indoor structures. A new group was also created for manufacturers and suppliers, as well as a Professional Services Group to represent consultants and test laboratories. Sports councils and sports governing bodies also joined as affiliate members.

Growing strong

SAPCA's expansion led to a subtle but significant name change, to the Sports and Play Construction Association. This greater



PHOTOS: © SAPCA



SAPCA organises a number of industry events throughout the year



SAPCA'S CODES OF PRACTICE AND RANGE OF GUIDES HAVE MADE A SIGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTION TO THE IMPROVEMENTS IN SPORTS AND PLAY FACILITIES IN THE UK

breadth of interests and activities brought with it important benefits, such as a wider range of technical expertise to draw on. It also improved opportunities for developing working relationships between members.

The combined membership of SAPCA now stands at more than 200 companies and organisations. It underlines that, throughout the last 25 years, the association has maintained its original approach of being inclusive, rather than an exclusive "club". However, while any relevant company may apply for membership, admission – and continued membership – has always been based on an ability to meet strict membership criteria. The fundamental prerequisites for membership are a company's expertise and experience, in-house knowledge and an ability to maintain high standards of performance and conduct.

These criteria underpin the credibility of the "SAPCA Member" badge as a stamp of approval in the sports and play marketplace. ►



SAPCA members specialise in the design and construction of sports and play facilities



PHOTOS © SAPCA

SAPCA'S ACTIVITIES HAVE GROWN SIGNIFICANTLY OVER THE LAST 25 YEARS

- One of our most important current projects this year is the relaunch of the SAPCA Quality System, which embraces all key aspects of what it means to be a SAPCA member and reinforces the benefits of choosing SAPCA member companies for projects. This ranges from the membership criteria to compliance with the industry's standards, and from the association's annual inspection programme to our technical mediation service.

Continued growth

SAPCA's activities have grown significantly over the last 25 years, whether it is the work of the technical programme and the creation of impartial guidance, the delivery of industry events, or the collaboration with stakeholders and partners and representing members as the unified voice of the industry.

There can be no doubt that SAPCA's many Codes of Practice – for the design, construction and maintenance of different types of facility – together with the ever-expanding range of guidance, have made a significant contribution to the improvements in sports and play facilities over the past 25 years. While there will always be an important need to create standards and to produce helpful guidance – in order to support those who are developing facilities and delivering projects – the industry is also now playing an important role in driving innovation and change, such as in response to the needs for environmental sustainability.

This is very much top of the agenda for SAPCA's new environmental sustainability working group, as we work towards new solutions and share best practice in key areas such as facility design, recycling processes and maintenance techniques.



Networking opportunities are among the benefits of being a SAPCA member



SAPCA THROUGH THE YEARS

A number of chairs have served the association throughout the years: top left - Charles Lawrence (middle); top right - Peter Wellington (left) and Tim Freeman; bottom left - Eric Page; bottom right - Andy Reed (right)



Resilience

Since the pandemic began last year we have often spoken of being in a period of change, whether that is the change taking place in the marketplace, the industry, or within SAPCA itself. Reaching the milestone of the 25th anniversary gives a reason to reflect on what SAPCA has achieved in that time, but more importantly it is an opportunity to plan how the association can build on these foundations and create a stronger organisation for the years ahead.

When the industry meets for the SAPCA Conference and Annual Dinner at St George's Park national football centre in May, as well as celebrating SAPCA's anniversary it will be the occasion to present the new strategy for how the association will change and progress over the next five years. This will

include developing the benefits and services for SAPCA members, supporting those working across the SAPCA community and strengthening the association's important role within the sports and play facility marketplace.

With the prospect of significant new funding for sports facilities in 2022, there is much to look forward to. There may be challenges and frustrations, but it's important always to remember that what the industry provides in high quality sports and play facilities is of enormous value – as an essential part of so much sporting enjoyment and success, at all levels, and as a vital contribution to society and the health of the country as a whole. ●



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IN CONVERSATION

DAVID KILBY

**Secretary, Shropshire
Playing Fields Association**

What is the SPFA?

SPFA is a lobby group which offers an independent voice, seeking to protect against the loss of outdoor sport, play and recreation facilities and public open spaces. We support the enhancement of existing outdoor facilities through improving their quality, accessibility, and management. We also support the provision of new sport, play and recreation facilities that are fit for purpose to meet the demand for participation.

What does its work entail?

We're often approached by communities and members of the public seeking advice on problems they're encountering in their local community. Often, we're a last option, as the other routes available to them have not provided the outcome they're seeking.

As well as being approached directly, we look for areas where we believe an independent voice is needed, or where we believe we can make a difference. We investigate and follow our instincts, values and beliefs. This does not necessarily influence and win friends, but does earn us a certain amount of respect within the local community.

Some issues we take on can be resolved in a morning. Others can take several months and some will likely run forever!

You've been SPFA secretary for 20 years – which is the most challenging aspect of the role?

There is no specific role and no job description. The role is voluntary leaving one to follow one's own instincts. The

Kilby has been
SPFA secretary for
more than 20 years

most challenging aspect is sourcing reliable information, getting "invited to the party" and then conveying outcomes in an acceptable way to the local community and decision makers.

SPFA describes play as the essence of sport – what does that mean?

We believe passionately that play can be utilised fully in social intervention and to positively benefit individuals, families, communities and cultures. Play can help to create social cohesiveness, social bonding, social transmission and positive learning and evolution.

SPFA put forward the original view that play is the "engine" that provides the foundation for culture to prosper. We describe culture as the "vehicle" of activity (such as sport) that can be driven using play. The individuals are the drivers who then choose which vehicles to drive, where to drive, when to drive and with whom.

We believe everyone is born with the instinct to play. It is accessible to all and an innate part of each individual, rather than a learnt mechanism, or learnt activity. It



enables each individual to interact naturally with the differing environments in which they find themselves. Play is motivated or driven by pleasure; therefore, we engage in play for hedonistic reasons – to pleasure our senses, leading to complex cognitive thinking as a result of purposeful activity.

Collectively, it can produce culturally diverse communities that help to create a sense of place, a sense of identity, a sense of purpose and a sense of belonging in each and every one of us. Without play, cultural activities are meaningless.

The challenge is to incorporate and apply and entwine these ideas of play into everything we design, plan and do in our local communities. Our latest strategy document, *Freedom to move strategy*, attempts to do this by promoting safe off-road cycle and pedestrian routes to sport, play and recreation facilities. The concept is to not only design how to get safely from point A to point B, but also to provide and promote a number of meaningful, playful activities along the journey. ●

HIS WORK, IN HIS WORDS:

We were invited to the AGM of a local bowls club threatened by a developer wanting to build houses on their bowling green. With 20 or so ageing members present, the first item was to read out a long list of those who'd passed away in the previous 12 months. The list was quite long.

Talk then focused on the proposed development. Options included moving the bowling green to another site a mile away. Someone asked how long the replacement green would take to install. "Eight years", was the response. A voice from the back piped in – "by then, most of us will be dead".

Happily, the proposal didn't go ahead in that format, after considerable negotiating by SPFA, club members, local residents, town and county councillors, as well as the developers. We put forward a more acceptable solution on the existing site, which now provides members with a much-improved playing surface and a new pavilion.

The SPFA looks to protect against the loss of outdoor sport and recreation facilities

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WHY USE A SAPCA MEMBER?

There are a number of reasons why you should choose a SAPCA member for your project:

- All SAPCA members are vetted and approved by SAPCA
- Each member must meet strict membership criteria
- Members have proven and extensive expertise and experience in their fields of work
- Members are committed to the SAPCA Code of Professional Conduct

All members must also comply with the requirements with the various SAPCA Codes of Practice, which set out the standards for design and construction of all types of sports facilities.

Having a "SAPCA Member" badge is a stamp of approval – so always look out for it when planning a sports or play project.

WHY BECOME A SAPCA MEMBER?

Companies join SAPCA for a variety of reasons:

- Enhanced status and recognition as a member of the UK trade association for the sports and play facility construction industry
- Liaison through SAPCA with key organisations, including: sports governing bodies; funding agencies and other sports bodies and trade organisations
- Opportunities to contribute to the development of relevant standards for the design, construction and performance of sports and play facilities

By successfully joining, you get to use the "SAPCA Member" badge – a stamp of approval which provides valuable reassurance to the diverse range of clients across the sports and play marketplace.

It demonstrates to potential customers that your company has the requisite expertise and experience of working to a high standard of construction