

Westminster City Plan 2019-2040

STATEMENT OF COMMON GROUND: Sport England and Westminster City Council

1. Parties involved:

This is a Statement of Common Ground between:

- Westminster City Council (local planning authority)
- Sport England

2. Signatories:

Signed on behalf of **Westminster City Council:**

NAME: Richard Beddoe POSITION Cabinet Member for Place Shaping and Planning

SIGNATURE:  DATE: 28th October 2019

Signed on behalf of **Sport England:**

NAME: MARK FURNISH POSITION PLANNING MANAGER

SIGNATURE:  DATE: 23/10/2019

3. Strategic Geography

The geographic area covered by this Statement of Common Ground is the City of Westminster – i.e. the full strategic planning area which is subject to Westminster's City Plan.

4. Strategic Matters

This Statement of Common Ground is related to the evidence base underpinning Westminster's City Plan specifically related to the provision of sports and leisure facilities.

Sport England's position

Sport England has an established role within the planning system and acts as a statutory consultee on planning applications which affect playing fields. Their aim is to

ensure positive planning for sport, which enables the right facilities in the right places, informed by robust and up to date evidence of need and existing provision.

As part of the Regulation 19 consultation on Westminster's draft City Plan (June 2019), Sport England made an objection about the evidence base utilised in areas of policy relating to sport facilities provision. Sport England delivered their opinion that the draft City Plan was unsound in this respect, citing the NPPF requirement that:

"Planning policies should be based on robust and up-to-date assessments of the needs for open space, sports and recreation facilities and opportunities for new provision. The assessment should identify specific needs and quantitative deficits or surpluses of open space, sports and recreational facilities in the local area."

Sport England stated their position that the city council should have in place specific, robust and up to date evidence (referred to in the relevant policy) to ensure indoor and outdoor sport facilities, including playing fields are properly planned for and where they already exist are protected.

Westminster City Council's position

Westminster City Council have embraced the opportunity to develop a dedicated and informed strategic approach to sports facility provision across the city. The council wants to provide high quality facilities in the right places to meet current and future need, in order to support delivery of the priorities in its ActiveWestminster Strategy 2018-22 and overall City for All vision.

The council has commissioned the development of a Playing Pitches Strategy (PPS) and a Built Facilities Strategy (BFS) for Westminster. Both pieces of work are being undertaken by an objective third party with the relevant subject-specific expertise and are proceeding in a coordinated way as the draft City Plan proceeds towards examination. The new Playing Pitch Strategy and Built Facilities Strategy for Westminster will create clear links to existing local policy, including the aforementioned ActiveWestminster Strategy, and the City Plan itself to ensure provision is adequately planned for.

Area of agreement

The council maintained close communication with Sport England during the commissioning process and have shared the specification documents and agreed project plan. At the time of agreeing this Statement of Common Ground, the PPS and the BFS are in the evidence gathering stages, looking at supply and demand and undertaking quality assessments in relation to existing provision across the city. Work will continue through the winter to analyse these findings and to develop a future picture of provision. Detailed strategy development will follow, with finalisation of the draft new strategies scheduled for the end of March 2020.

Sport England **agree** that the commissioning of these studies is sufficient to remove the soundness objection they raised at Regulation 19 provided these emerging strategies are sufficiently referenced in the relevant policy. Sport England have stated a preference for a dedicated policy on sport and leisure facilities.

Westminster City Council considered that a dedicated policy or policies for indoor and outdoor sports facilities would be too detailed or prescriptive, the council has undertaken amendments to a number of draft policies to reinforce its handling of this topic. Changes to the Policy 18 (Community Infrastructure and Facilities) have made it more specific on the need to plan for community provision of places to take part in physical activity, leisure, sport and play. In so doing the policy now directly draws on evidence from the ActiveWestminster Strategy 2018-22 and the emerging Playing Pitch Strategy and Built Facilities Strategy.

Sport England **agree** that the proposed modifications to the supporting text of draft policy 30 set out below are sufficient to remove their objection.

The proposed minor amendments are as follows:

Paragraph 18.1

Community infrastructure and facilities are integral to supporting people's everyday lives, being used by residents, workers and visitors, and are a vital resource to support successful places and communities. Community infrastructure and facilities consist of:

- Health facilities e.g. hospitals, GP surgeries.
- Education facilities e.g. schools, nurseries, universities and colleges.
- Sports and leisure facilities e.g. leisure centres, swimming pools, outdoor playing pitches and fields, Multi-Use Games Areas and playgrounds.
- Cultural facilities e.g. theatres, museums and art galleries.
- Social facilities e.g. meeting halls, public houses, libraries and places of worship.

Paragraph 18.2

Community facilities and infrastructure can be either publicly or privately owned and/or operated. Wherever possible, they should have shared or extended use to serve the wider community, for example, the use of school sports facilities beyond the school day for the wider community¹. Shared use of facilities can encourage active lifestyles, help ensure the effective use of resources and land, reduce maintenance and management costs, and encourage joined-up and coherent service delivery. To respond to this opportunity the council has developed a new Community Use Agreement (CUA) template, based on Sport England's guidance. This is what we use to secure community use of community facilities of all types, in schools and elsewhere. The CUA is brought in as a planning condition for development to deliver new, upgraded or improved facilities.

Paragraph 18.8

Where a community facility is identified as surplus to requirements via a strategy published by the council* (or alternative needs assessment accepted by the council as more up to date and robust), early marketing of vacant community floorspace to assist in identifying any alternative occupiers who could make a good public service use of the site is strongly encouraged. A comparable market value when undertaking a marketing exercise will be based on the facility being public, regardless of whether it has most recently been occupied by a private social / community occupier.

**New footnote:* Such as the council's Playing Pitch and Built Facilities Strategies

¹ See Sport England guidance on making the best use of school facilities www.sportengland.org/useourschool/

5. Governance Arrangements

There is not a need for specific governance structures to be put in place in order for the agreements within this Statement of Common Ground to be implemented. Westminster City Council has worked, and will continue to work, in close partnership with Sport England as a matter of course. Close dialogue will be maintained on matters relating to the developing PPS and BFS, and more generally as the City Plan proceeds to finalisation.

Specific updates can be communicated at milestone points in the PPS and BFS development work – see below.

6. Timetable for review and ongoing cooperation

As outlined above, work on the Playing Pitches Strategy and Built Facilities Strategy is already underway. The process for taking this work to completion is summarised below. Westminster City Council will ensure open dialogue with Sport England throughout the process, and will provide updates at key dates/stages.

DATE	PROJECT MILESTONE
Aug 2019 – present	<i>Commissioning provider; project initiation Initial meetings of the Steering Group Objectives, deliverables and management arrangements agreed</i>
October 2019	<i>Information gathering ongoing Winter sports consultation gets underway</i>
Nov - Dec 2019	<i>Quantity and quality information gathering Detailed capacity analysis of specific sites Begin developing picture of future provision</i>
End December 2019	<i>Delivery of Draft Assessment Report</i>
January 2020	<i>Review by the Steering Group</i>
February 2020	<i>Scenario testing</i>
End February 2020	<i>Draft Strategies and Action Plans completed</i>
March 2020	<i>Review by the Steering Group</i>
1 April 2020	<i>Strategies finalised</i>