

Sport England Planning Changes Shift Decisions on Sports Facilities to Councils

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Proposed changes to the role of Sport England in the planning system could affect how sports and leisure facilities are delivered, according to national planning and development consultancy [Lichfields](#).

The Government is considering reforms to reduce the involvement of statutory consultees in planning decisions, following a consultation that closed earlier this year. The proposals include removing Sport England as a statutory consultee on planning applications, with a more limited role focused on plan-making, guidance and selective input on significant playing field losses.

If implemented, the changes would place greater responsibility on local authorities to appraise the need for sport and leisure provision, whilst potentially increasing the importance of the evidence put forward by applicants, developers, operators and investors.

The planning issues raised by the development proposals would remain relevant even if the changes are amended or withdrawn, with sport and leisure schemes still needing clear evidence on demand, facility need and community benefit.

Owain Nedin, Planning Director, Lichfields, said: “The proposed changes are intended to streamline the planning process, but they also change how decisions around sport and leisure facilities are made. Where there is less specialist consultation at application stage, Local Authorities will have to rely more heavily on the evidence submitted by the applicant, in making their decision - in turn placing greater weight on the quality of that evidence. That applies both to new facilities and to proposals involving the loss or reconfiguration of existing provision.”



Decisions on sport and leisure provision are often based on a range of metrics including local participation, demographic change and the condition and distribution of facilities, rather than a single measure of demand.

This places greater emphasis on clearly demonstrating need, identifying gaps and showing how provision aligns with local authorities and their communities.

Owain continued: “For operators and investors, this places more emphasis on understanding local markets and being able to evidence how a facility will be used over time. For local authorities, it means taking a more direct role in assessing competing demands for land and ensuring provision reflects local needs.”

Lichfields has worked with both developers and local authorities to assess sport and leisure needs across a range of projects, including supporting new provision and the redevelopment of existing sites.

Its ‘Fit for Purpose’ approach combines demographic analysis, participation data and facility mapping to assess supply and demand within defined catchments, helping to inform planning applications, site promotion and local policy development.

Demand for this type of analysis is expected to increase if the proposed reforms are implemented.

For more details,

visit <https://lichfields.uk/blog/2026/june/09/a-sporting-chance-transitioning-to-a-post-consultee-world>