

New Report Reveals How Sports Clubs Could Deliver Modern Facilities Through Relocation

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A new report has revealed how sports clubs with limited space in built-up areas could use relocation to deliver modern facilities and widen community access.

[Planning for Sport: Relocation, Relocation, Relocation?](#), produced by national planning and development consultancy Lichfields, says a move to a larger site can also help clubs broaden their offer and improve long-term finances.

The report has been published at a time when more than 30 million people in England do at least 150 minutes of sport and physical activity each week, while attendance at UK sports events reached more than 77 million in 2024.

For clubs whose existing grounds can no longer meet the needs and demands of participants, supporters and local communities, the report finds that moves to larger greenfield or Green Belt sites could provide new pitches, clubhouses, changing facilities, spectator areas, parking and community space.

It also looks at how the sale or redevelopment of former sites can help fund new, expanded or more varied facilities while creating opportunities for wider objectives such as supporting local needs and delivering new homes in sustainable locations.

Rob Murphy, Associate Director at Lichfields, said: "Many sports clubs are trying to meet modern expectations from sites that were never designed for the way sport is played, watched and supported today.

“Some clubs can improve what they already have, but others simply do not have the space. Relocation can provide a route to better facilities, stronger finances and a broader community offer, but the case must be made carefully in order to capture the opportunities that we have identified within the planning system.

“When considered in this context, relocation has not only the potential to revitalise clubs, but in certain cases, ensure their survival, securing their future for generations to come.”

Sport England research also shows that every £1 spent on community sport and physical activity generates £4.38 in return, strengthening the case for better facilities as part of wider efforts to support healthier, more active communities.

The report is intended to help sports clubs, local authorities and landowners across the UK understand the site selection, planning and community issues that can influence relocation projects.

At Bolton Wyresdale Amateur Football Club, Lichfields supported Westchurch Homes in securing planning permission for 94 homes alongside four new outdoor sports pitches, a clubhouse and parking on Green Belt land.

The club's former pitches suffered from poor drainage and had no clubhouse or parking for players and visitors. The football club now has two new sports pitches, built in accordance with Football Association standards, to replace their original pitches. It also benefits from a new clubhouse with separate changing rooms to foster a more inclusive environment, which it is hoped will encourage more women and girls into sport, as well as those with mixed abilities.

In Bristol, Lichfields advised on the relocation of Dings Crusaders RFC from Lockleaze Recreation Ground to Shaftesbury Park in the South Gloucestershire Green Belt, alongside the redevelopment of the former site for 152 homes, including 52 affordable homes. Since the move, registered junior boys have increased from 40 to 314, junior girls from zero to 96, adult female players from zero to 45 and adult male players from 50 to 130.

Helen Ashby-Ridgway, Planning Director at Lichfields, added: “The strongest projects are not just about finding a larger site. They need clear evidence of why the existing ground no longer works, why the proposed site is suitable and what benefits the move will deliver for the club, the local community and the council.

“Green Belt and countryside sites can be difficult, but they are not closed off to sports and leisure uses. For clubs, councils and landowners, relocation can create options that might not be available on an existing ground, but it needs a clear case behind it.

“That means dealing with the hard questions early, from accessibility and proximity to nearby residents, to biodiversity, flood risk, site choice and the wider benefits a new facility would bring.”

The full report is available to download [here](#).