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# FIELDS OF DREAMS:

UNDERSTANDING THE PURPOSE  
AND VALUE OF DOUGLAS EYRE  
SPORTS CENTRE AND URBAN  
PLAYING FIELDS



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## FOREWORD — FROM THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Over the last 125 years Trustees and staff of London Playing Fields Foundation have always known that playing fields could improve lives through sport. Our mission to provide a place to play sport forever recognises that without a pitch to play on there is no sport. So for sport to shape, define and ultimately transform lives we need to protect, provide and promote those places where sport is played.

The charity has survived the last 125 years because it has stayed faithful to its founding principles whilst at the same time adapting to the changing needs of its beneficiaries – schools, universities, clubs and disadvantaged groups. By identifying the barriers to participation and taking steps to overcome them, it has succeeded in ensuring that the full effects of well managed playing fields extend well beyond sport.

To be in a position at last to reliably measure the impact of a playing field on the communities it serves feels like a line in the sand moment and I hope that the research findings will inspire others to follow suit. I would like to place on record my thanks to Substance for believing in us and for making this groundbreaking piece of research such a rewarding experience.



ALEX WELSH  
CHIEF EXECUTIVE

**'WE NEED TO PROTECT,  
PROVIDE AND PROMOTE  
THOSE PLACES WHERE  
SPORT IS PLAYED...'**

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## SECTION 1 — EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**The London Playing Fields Foundation (formerly Society) has a longstanding commitment, dating back 125 years, to protect green space in London and promote participation in sport. Formed by an illustrious group of visionary Victorians its vision of creating a happier, healthier, more cohesive capital city by encouraging more people to play sport on affordable, accessible and attractive playing fields, has changed very little since the 1890s.**

As an organisation that prides itself on being 'ahead of the curve' it has long recognised the pressure to build new houses and commercial property in London and the impact this may have on playing fields. It was critical therefore to be able to attract and justify further investment, not only for its own facilities but other playing fields across London and the rest of the country.

As importantly, where playing fields have entered what LPFF terms a 'cycle of decay', it believes that a similar assessment of impact and value should motivate local agencies and communities to mobilise their efforts and save them for future generations. It was for these reasons that it commissioned Substance to provide an impact assessment of activities at Douglas Eyre Sports Centre in Walthamstow.

In the 12 month research period, between April 2014 and March 2015 a total of 38,843 people used the facilities at Douglas Eyre Sports Centre; over 18,000 people used the full sized grass football pitches, over 16,000 the artificial turf pitch and nearly 1,000 used the cricket pitch. Sixteen football clubs with 32 teams and a number of local schools played over 600 football matches at the centre. In addition, 59 cricket matches were played during the research period. The artificial turf pitch was utilised during 93% of available slots at peak times during the football season. This demonstrates that Douglas Eyre Sports Centre is a vibrant community facility and is fulfilling its aim of ensuring more people are playing sport.

In the same period, a number of projects aimed at widening participation and social inclusion were delivered, most notably Coping Through Football, Tottenham Hotspur Foundation Kicks project, London Communities Football League and the East London Leisure Trust.

In addition, 32 separate Football Association coaching courses were delivered which attracted over 638 individuals from 20 countries across the world. This would suggest that Douglas Eyre Sports Centre is the most prolific coach education centre in the country, outside of St George's Park National Football Centre.

Although these coaching courses did attract participants from countries as far away as Russia, India and Japan, the majority of participants were from Greater London. The vast majority of people, and particularly young people engaged in social inclusion programmes, lived within walking distance or a short drive from the centre, confirmed by respondents to our survey that location being the most cited attribute of Douglas Eyre Sports Centre. However, equally important to users was their customer focused approach, facilities and quality of pitches, things that the staff at LPFF prided themselves on and which they believed often differentiated them from other playing field providers.

It is clear that the approach adopted by LPFF of supporting and encouraging the development of local sports clubs, particularly football and cricket, and its championing of sport for development work, remains attractive to a wide range of funders and other stakeholders. In particular, the Coping Through Football programme, designed and managed in partnership with NELFT is an exemplar project which has been nationally recognised and has the potential to be replicated throughout the UK. It is also clear that LPFF has attracted significant external investment into the borough of Waltham Forest through its management of Douglas Eyre Sports Centre.

At Douglas Eyre Sports Centre it was calculated that the organisations using the facility delivered an annual minimum cost saving to the public purse of £4,805,928. The biggest cost savings were attributed to the outcome of reducing crime and anti-social behaviour, the majority of these savings being attributed to the Tottenham Hotspur Kicks programme, initiated and managed jointly by the Premier League and Metropolitan Police. These sessions which ran consecutively on Friday evenings throughout the research period attracted an average of 60 young men. These sessions and work carried out by the London Communities Football League, Coping Through Football, East London Leisure Trust and Leyton Orient Advanced Soccer School delivered 50% of the social cost savings over the period.

These estimates are likely to represent an underestimation of the full cost savings achieved and the assessment has confined itself to those participants under the age of 25. Of the seven outcome areas which focused on community safety, physical health and well-being, educational attainment and economic regeneration, only reducing obesity in girls had an impact score below 10% which was mainly attributable to the East London Leisure Trust, an organisation with a specific commitment to working with females.

It is clear that LPFF has continued the ideals of its Victorian founders; ensuring those that need access to good quality sport at accessible and attractive facilities are well served. The benefits that are accrued through an approach of supporting and encouraging club and sport for development work suggests that LPFF remains an attractive organisation for funders and commissioners to invest in. Perhaps more significantly this impact report, the first of its kind commissioned by a playing fields provider, demonstrates the social impact and cost savings attributed to the work of organisations using Douglas Eyre Sports Centre throughout 2014 and 2015. The hope is that other playing field providers will be able to adopt this approach to make their own case and fend off the pressure to develop on and erode the vital contribution made by these precious community assets.

*This impact report, the first of its kind commissioned by a playing fields provider, demonstrates the social impact and cost savings attributed to the wide cross section of clubs and organisations that used Douglas Eyre Sports Centre between 1st April 2014 and 31st March 2015.*

**'AT DOUGLAS EYRE SPORTS CENTRE IT WAS CALCULATED THAT THE ORGANISATIONS USING THE FACILITY DELIVERED AN ANNUAL MINIMUM COST SAVING TO THE PUBLIC PURSE OF £4,805,928.'**

## SECTION 2 — INTRODUCTION & METHODOLOGY

**The playing fields on the Douglas Eyre Sports Centre site date back to the nineteenth century and have been owned and managed by the London Playing Fields Foundation (LPFF) for over a century. Whilst well maintained and used, like many other playing fields in London and across the country, they remain under threat. The pressure to develop land for housing and commercial purposes in urban areas leaves such facilities vulnerable and with a perpetual need to justify their existence.**

As such LPFF that maintains these and other similar pitches throughout the capital also acts as a guardian, arguing that they should be protected because they are more than just expanses of open space but are places where lives can be improved. It was in this context that the research report was commissioned, for whilst the Foundation has never doubted their value, it and other providers lacked the ability to demonstrate it in a way that might convince policy makers, planning authorities, funders and developers.

Whilst there has been research that demonstrates the wider benefits of open spaces and their potential to improve and transform lives and communities, there was a desire to establish the impact and value of the Foundation's own grounds and, more particularly, their use for *sporting* purposes. To date there is limited evidence of this type. What does exist tends to be largely anecdotal, isolated and non comparable. In this respect, the research and the production of this impact report is breaking new ground as it seeks to attribute the specific cost savings associated with the work of each of the sports clubs and sport for development organisations that work with young people aged up to 25.

Importantly, as well as providing an account of the value of Douglas Eyre Sports Centre the approach will also provide a sustainable basis for LPFF and other playing field providers to benchmark the impact and value of their sports grounds against one another and their own historical performance. In turn this will provide a means to ensure providers are able to articulate their value to funders and other stakeholders. Adoption of this 'shared measurement' approach to the social and financial value of the usage of playing fields will also provide strategic intelligence and guidance for local authorities and other guardians in terms of shaping future usage particularly when playing fields come under threat.

The methodology we adopted to understand the impact and value of the Douglas Eyre Sports Centre, an exemplar facility within LPFF's estate, and which could be applied in other contexts, involved a number of stages. It began with a generic review of the literature on the social and economic benefits of open spaces and the wider health benefits of physical activity as well as a review of relevant planning legislation and guidance. We also conducted primary research involving analysis of participation and booking data over a 12-month period to March 2015; the distribution of questionnaire surveys to adult and youth organisations making use of the facility and follow up telephone interviews with a sample of those users; further face-to-face interviews with LPFF's Chief Executive, Development Manager and Projects Manager as well as representatives from the London Football Association, Tottenham Hotspur Foundation, Hackney Schools and Leyton Orient Trust (Appendices 1). Finally we used the Sportworks impact assessment and social valuing tool to determine the Centre's relative impact on a range of key social outcomes and the cost savings they deliver to the public purse, as discussed in section 6 of this report.

Ultimately it is hoped that the evidence that emerged from this work will help:

- Funders understand the purpose and value of investing in playing fields
- Policy makers and planners recognise the importance of protecting playing fields and the social costs of acceding to development pressures
- Other playing field associations and providers to assess their own impact and value and develop strategies to protect, develop and enhance their facilities
- Sports governing bodies refine their own facilities strategies
- Potential users to access and increase their usage of this and other facilities.

## SECTION 3 — MARKING OUT THE PITCH: THE EMERGENCE OF LONDON PLAYING FIELDS FOUNDATION (LPFF) AND DOUGLAS EYRE SPORTS CENTRE

**Following its formation in 1890 the then London Playing Fields Society acquired the playing field in Walthamstow in 1909. The Society (now Foundation) had been established by a group of sports loving Victorian civic leaders and dignitaries who were keen to take positive steps to protect the dwindling stock of green space in London, having recognised the necessity of maintaining playing fields in order to realise the positive benefits of sports participation.**

These visionary pioneers of sport for development included both the incoming and outgoing FA President's Lord Kinnaird and Major Francis Marindin; Sir Edward Chandos Leigh, the first President of LPFF and President of the MCC; and the conservationist and verderer of Epping Forest, Edward North Buxton. Buxton, a Liberal MP and the first Treasurer of LPFF played a major part in saving Epping Forest and Hainault Forest for public use as well as buying Hatfield Forest for the National Trust shortly before his death. Despite their own social standing, from the outset these visionaries saw the wider outcomes that could be achieved through sport and were particularly concerned to reach out and engage the disadvantaged.

LPFF's mission has changed very little over the following century and a quarter. With a rising population and increasing demand for housing and commercial property the pressure to build on green space is as intense as ever whilst the social problems that accompany urbanisation ensure the Foundation remains equally vigilant in its determination to protect the city's recreational facilities.

LPFF's vision is to create a happier, healthier, more cohesive London by encouraging more people to play sport on affordable, accessible and attractive playing fields; 85% of which are owned by the local authorities. The scale of the task becomes clear when you consider that London is currently home to 14% of the country's population but only 8% of its playing fields. Furthermore these fields are distributed unevenly so whilst suburban Barnet has 97 different sites, Kensington and Chelsea, in the heart of London, has only 4. This adds to the pressure as the apparent abundance of facilities in one locality ignores the point that people travel to them from other more central locations in a reversal of the leisure pathways that take people into the entertainment districts of central London. In this sense LPFF has taken on a pan London view of playing fields and associated participation trends.

It should be noted that LPFF, which formed around the same time as local government arrangements were developing as a result of wider municipal reforms in the nineteenth century, has never benefited from any form of public subsidy. Instead, the Foundation has existed on a mix of philanthropic, charitable and sports governing bodies support, such as from organisations as diverse as the City Parochial Foundation and Marylebone Cricket Club.

Douglas Eyre Sports Centre is a prime example of the ways in which playing fields in London can take on the form of a 'destination' facility. It is the largest of the Foundation's grounds, occupying a 33 acre site in Walthamstow, north east London. It was renovated in 1989 as a regional football centre with a full size artificial turf pitch and was selected as the main base for the London Football Association's coach education programme attracting aspiring coaches from across the capital. At that time the current Chief Executive of LPFF, Alex Welsh, who had acquired the UEFA A license qualification and had a professional background in education, was appointed to develop both football and educational programmes to reinvigorate the facility.

There was no specific blueprint to work to and so, armed with a blank canvas, he set out to ensure that usage reflected the whole football playing spectrum. This embraced professional football training and youth development facilities for Leyton Orient Football Club; a hub of activity for Leyton Orient Trust (previously Leyton Orient Community Sports Programme); the pioneering of mini soccer with schools; and the recruitment and development of girls' football and links to established women's clubs. Out of this organic development emerged a cradle to the grave sporting experience which linked school and club activities before school-club links became a mainstay of sport development policy. In the Chief Executive's words:

*"It's just been one thing after another trying to ensure that usage was as reflective as possible of people playing football, and it didn't happen by accident."*

Development continued from these early foundations and over the past three years the Foundation has invested nearly £700,000 in the facilities at Douglas Eyre Sports Centre. With funding from Football Foundation, Sport England Inspired Facilities Fund and Biffa the pavilion was refurbished and with further funding from the London Marathon Charitable Trust, the Mayor's Legacy Fund, Football Foundation and money raised from LPFF's annual gala dinner the artificial turf pitch was upgraded from a

sand filled surface to 3G to meet the contemporary needs of football.

As importantly, LPFF has developed expertise in working with organisations that fund, manage and deliver 'social inclusion' programmes across London. This has the dual benefit of opening up access to sport and other activities for people, particularly young people, who would otherwise be denied opportunities as well as increasing the profile and reputation of Douglas Eyre Sports Centre as an open and accessible venue. Over the last ten years in particular, LPFF has delivered and worked in partnership with organisations supporting young people living in the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods in north east London, adults with mental health problems, refugees and asylum seekers and minority ethnic communities.

LPFF through its continued commitment to the twin track approach of understanding and supporting traditional sports development through the organised and affiliated club structure and its championing of sport for development approaches is often able to see participation trends earlier than most others. For example, the decline in participation of men's Sunday morning football, the changing nature of football in the community schemes and girls' and women's participation was spotted early and acted on accordingly. This insight, and desire to inform and inspire others, including County Sports Partnerships, National Governing Bodies of Sport and Public Health Authorities has ensured it remains a 'Go To' organisation for many seeking advice in participation trends.

Much of this work has been recognised over the last twenty five years, including:

Pro Active London awards; Best Sport, Physical Activity and Health project in London for Coping Through Football (2010)

UEFA Grassroots Day Award 2014; Best Grassroots Project Silver Award for Coping Through Football (2014)

Health Business Awards; Commended for Innovation in Mental Health Award for Coping Through Football (2014)

County Playing Fields Association Awards; Community Sports Development (2009 and 2010)

FA Football development awards; Minority Ethnic Communities for All Nations Football Festival (2002)

Champion Coaching Scheme of the Year (1991)

### CASE STUDY ONE: LONDON COMMUNITIES FOOTBALL LEAGUE

In 2001, in response to the MacPherson Report and newly arriving refugee populations, LPFF established the All Nations Football Programme as a means of helping groups of casual footballers to play in affiliated leagues. It was clear that there was an increasing demand from refugee communities in London for competitive football but many did not know how to access mainstream provision and were unable to financially sustain their involvement. Following a series of free summer tournaments, which were staged to provide an introduction to competitive football, the teams were encouraged to join affiliated leagues. However the strict administrative rules and fines were problematic and caused a number of teams to withdraw from their competitions. In order to remove these barriers, LPFF created the London Communities Football League in 2004 to provide free pitch hire, referees fees and affiliation costs and significantly reduced paperwork.

Initially teams were encouraged to book playing fields in their local community for their home venue, but it became apparent that cost and travel times to sites were prohibitive for some teams. Subsequently in 2009 Douglas Eyre Sports Centre became the league's home venue and this provided a number of benefits, including:

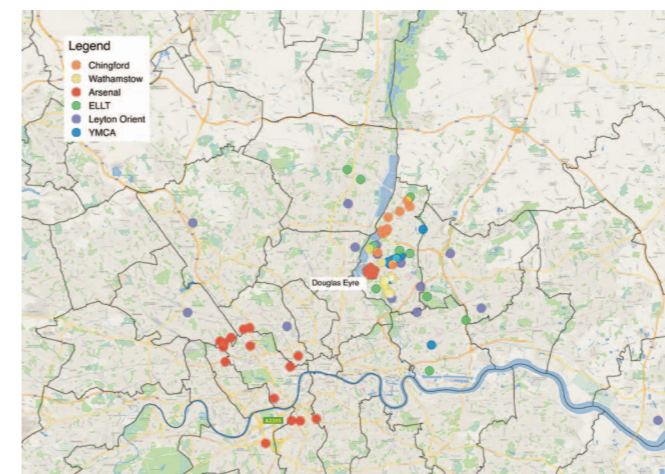
- The use of a central venue, which reduced travelling time and cost for players
- A site which was easily accessible by public transport and had good ancillary facilities
- Ground staff that were welcoming and understood that this group of players might require additional support
- A Match Day Supervisor, employed to oversee all matches and support teams on the day

As a result of this change the player retention rate improved and teams were able to sustain their participation through to the end of each season.

One hundred and thirty teams have played in this league to date and a number of them have used this project as a stepping-stone to make the move into mainstream leagues. Interviews with the players and coaches revealed that the league is of great value as it provides a competitive outlet for the weekly

coaching sessions that take place within their local communities. The project emphasises the importance of creating teams to engender a sense of identity and develop responsible behaviour. The league now includes teams from Tottenham Hotspur Kicks, Leyton Orient, Arsenal and East London Leisure Trust and seeks to improve community cohesion and reduce gang membership, as people from different backgrounds across north and north east London come together and participate in structured sport.

### Distribution of London Communities Football League participants



**'LPFF HAS DEVELOPED EXPERTISE  
IN WORKING WITH ORGANISATIONS  
THAT FUND, MANAGE AND DELIVER  
'SOCIAL INCLUSION' PROGRAMMES  
ACROSS LONDON.'**

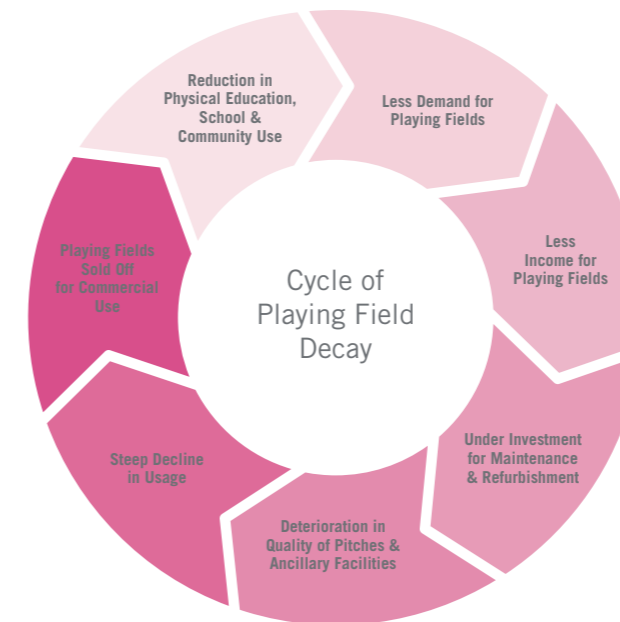
**SECTION 4 —  
USE IT OR LOSE IT:  
WHY PLAYING FIELDS ARE  
UNDER THREAT AND WHY  
IT MATTERS**

**It is clear that playing fields continue to be under threat, particularly in London where there is additional pressure to build new houses and commercial property. Defra has identified a marked decline in urban green space with 10,000 playing fields sold off between 1979 and 1997. Whilst this mass sell off was subsequently arrested and there are still 1,500 playing fields in London (albeit unevenly spread) the numbers are still in decline. In 1990 there were 1,128 grass cricket wickets in the city, but 25 years later this figure has fallen by 41% coupled with a 20% reduction in the number of grass football pitches over the same period.**

In a context where even LPFF has calculated that it only gets 37p back from pitch hire revenues for every £1 spent on managing and maintaining pitches, the continuing threat is driven by what LPFF's Chief Executive has referred to as a 'cycle of playing field decay'. As he explains:

*"I think a lot of fields are lost because of neglect, and what happens is they fall into what we call, 'A cycle of playing field decay'. As they become neglected so they're underused, and because they're underused there's no investment, neither for maintenance or improvements, and the under investment leads to undervalue, and eventually that undervalue leads to under threat, and they're gone."*

**Cycle of Playing Field Decay**



This process of decay and decline is more intense in urban areas and has implications beyond a change in the physical environment as a Defra sponsored report highlights:

*"in metropolitan areas, per capita greenspace provision has... declined, particularly in the most deprived areas, adversely affecting health by reducing childhood development, mental and physical well-being, for example through less exercise, less community cohesion, and a diminished sense of security, and by causing the loss of a sense of place. In particular, the sale of playing fields and loss of associated wildlife has reduced opportunities for young people to participate in sporting activities and to study nature. This has affected their education, ecological knowledge and understanding of the natural environment and its importance to them, and risks long-term detriment."*<sup>1</sup>

Indeed this report argued that just the health benefits of living with a view of a green space are worth up to £300 per person per year, in part through provision of spaces to engage in exercise but also because simply being in a natural environment can lift people's spirits.

**CASE STUDY TWO:  
COPING THROUGH FOOTBALL**

With an estimated one in four people experiencing a diagnosable mental health condition every year LPFF recognised that there was a real need to make suitable provision for this user group. In 2007, in partnership NELFT and Leyton Orient Trust, the charity set up 'Coping Through Football' to engage with and improve the lives of people experiencing mental health issues. The project's outcomes were to increase the physical activity levels of the client group, raise their confidence and self-esteem, improve their interactive skills, reduce their dependency on alcohol, cigarettes and substance misuse and to help them to re-engage with mainstream society in meaningful ways.

Initially, two sessions were established in Waltham Forest led by qualified and experienced coaches from Leyton Orient Trust and supported by NELFT staff, including Barbara Armstrong, Waltham Forest Joint

<sup>1</sup> UK National Ecosystem Assessment (2011) The UK National Ecosystem Assessment: Synthesis of the Key Findings. UNEP-WCMC, Cambridge



Lead for Occupational Therapy and Social Inclusion Lead. In 2013 one of these sessions was relocated from the north of the borough to the artificial turf pitch at Douglas Eyre Sports Centre. It was thought that this venue would support the development and expansion of the project as:

- The group would be the sole users of the venue, and therefore provide them with a private, safe and secure environment in which to meet
- It is a community space used by other sports organisations and not perceived as an NHS facility
- The playing field provides a green and peaceful space in which to exercise
- The ground staff were welcoming and willing to accommodate the needs of the group
- The use of the artificial pitch would enable sessions to take place throughout the year without threat of cancellation due to poor weather conditions.

Barbara described the service users as being particularly difficult to engage as a result of their often chaotic lifestyles and the need for staff to have the knowledge and skills to manage difficult behaviour and ensure all participants feel valued. She emphasised the importance of the participants working towards objectives in their individual action plans and how the environment in which work was carried out needed to support this process.

Over the year there were 67 participants attending sessions at the venue and a total of 565 visits. The activity sessions provided positive health and social benefits to the service users, improving their physical fitness, building their confidence and self-esteem and providing an environment in which they were able to socialise.

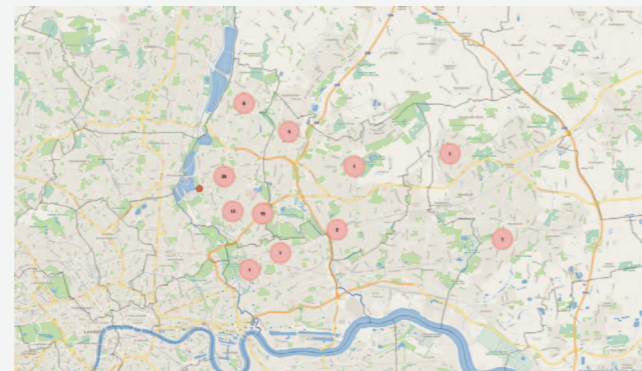
Approximately 60% of the service users were from BAME backgrounds which demonstrates the project has been successful in engaging with a group that is statistically more likely to be diagnosed with mental health problems and is more likely to disengage from mainstream mental health services.

Furthermore, through the ongoing partnership with NELFT, LPFF has also been able to achieve other outcomes that had a wider impact on the service users, including helping them to gain access to training and education courses, begin formal volunteering roles and obtain part and full time

employment. Furthermore, there was anecdotal evidence that the participants made less visits to accident and emergency and there was less reliance on acute care.

This project has been widely acknowledged as being at the cutting edge of sport for development and received awards such as the UEFA Grassroots Award (2014), the London Football Awards Community Project of the Year (2015) and the Mental Health Hero Award presented to LPFF's Chief Executive.

#### Distribution of Coping Through Football participants



#### SERVICE USER CASE STUDY:

I suffered from schizophrenia and would stay indoors all day because I was reluctant to go outside during daylight hours. I had low esteem and so for many years my social life was non-existent. When it was suggested that I attend Coping Through Football I was quite nervous as I find it difficult to talk to others. By attending the group sessions, I found myself making progress by being able to talk to other members, my confidence levels increased and I began to get a real enjoyment from playing football.

Prior to Coping Through Football I was abusing drugs and alcohol, which stopped me from achieving anything as I would sit inside all day. I feel attending the sessions has helped me to resist the urge to drink, as my mind is occupied by being part of pleasant activities. When drinking I felt depressed, yet when playing football I feel better within myself, which has made me realise that I do not need to drink.

I used to occasionally attend the gym but the amount of exercise I performed was minimal. When I did exercise, I would tire very easily, yet now I have noticed an improvement in my fitness levels. I still attend the gym but now take part in other activities

such as Badminton.

I had not worked for a number of years and found that I needed some sort of challenge. Since attending the group sessions I have secured a voluntary role working at a printing company, which gives me great responsibility. I also volunteered for the British Heart Foundation, which made me feel important. Performing voluntary work has motivated me to eventually begin part or full time employment.

Coping Through Football gives me enjoyment, as I like having activities to participate in. I have noticed a great change in my confidence levels as I am now able to engage in a conversation with others, which at one point seemed impossible. I feel that my life has improved by attending the sessions and drinking is no longer an option for me.

*(Reprinted from the Coping Through Football Evaluation report, 2015).*

Furthermore, whilst playing fields cannot cure life threatening disease, the activities they generate can help to prevent them. Indeed physical inactivity is the fourth highest cause of global mortality and in developed countries such as the UK it has been established that rates of coronary heart disease, cancer and type 2 diabetes could all be reduced with an increase in activity levels.<sup>2</sup>

In addition to the health benefits, playing fields can also bring groups and communities together, reducing social isolation and creating a shared sense of identity and purpose. It has even been demonstrated that playing fields can have an impact on climate change as they absorb more carbon dioxide and produce more oxygen than equivalent expanses of forestry.

It is these broad ranging benefits and the fear of the removal of disadvantaged groups' access to them that drives LPFF's innovative approach to sports development and inclusive community engagement, which also underpins its strategic contribution to playing field protection throughout the capital. The Foundation emphasises the mantra 'use it, or lose it', recognising that once a playing field is lost it is lost forever and that the best form of protection is full usage.

<sup>2</sup> World Health Organisation (2010) Global recommendations on physical activity for health. Geneva, Switzerland: WHO Press

This assessment is underscored by Department for Communities and Local Government Planning Policy Guidance<sup>3</sup> which states that existing open space, sports and recreational buildings and land should not be built on unless an assessment has been undertaken which has clearly shown the open space or the buildings and land to be 'surplus to requirements'. It further states that in the absence of a robust and up-to-date assessment by a local authority, an applicant for planning permission may seek to demonstrate through an independent assessment that the land or buildings are surplus to requirements.

In recognition of the wider benefits of such facilities the guidance does also advise that open space and sports and recreational facilities that are of high quality, or of particular value to a local community, should be recognised and given protection by local authorities through appropriate policies in plans.

More specifically in relation to playing fields the guidance states that in the absence of a robust assessment of need planning permission for developments should not be allowed unless:

- the proposed development is ancillary to the use of the site as a playing field (e.g. new changing rooms) and does not adversely affect the quantity or quality of pitches and their use;
- the proposed development only affects land which is incapable of forming a playing pitch (or part of one);
- the playing fields that would be lost as a result of the proposed development would be replaced by a playing field or fields of equivalent or better quantity and quality and in a suitable location; or
- the proposed development is for an outdoor or indoor sports facility of sufficient benefit to the development of sport to outweigh the loss of the playing field

Further protection has emerged in the context of the Localism Act. This Act allows local community groups to nominate land or buildings in their area as valuable assets and to ask their local authority to place them on a register. Listing a local sports facility as an 'Asset of Community Value' (ACV) can:

- Mean that a local authority must inform stakeholders if the facility is to be sold or disposed of, whether it is owned by the local authority, a private company, private

<sup>3</sup> National Planning Policy Framework Paragraph 74



individual or another community organisation.

- Give any community group a 6-month moratorium from the date of notification of sale to put together a bid for the facility.
- Help a community group celebrate and get support for the value of the facility to their locality.
- Potentially help prevent a change of use by citing the ACV listing to a Planning Authority.

If a sports facility is successfully listed as an ACV and then put up for sale, any community group, such as a sports club, can trigger a Community Right to Bid. This provides a 6 month 'window' or moratorium for the group to put a bid together, and, if it beats other bids, conclude a deal to purchase the asset.

According to Jeff Neslen, LPFF Development Manager:

*"The sites which are most at risk are those with a single facility or which service a single sport given the economies of scale and increased footfall that can be achieved at multi facility/sport sites with shared back office roles and systems."*

This perspective is in some ways aligned with the FA's developing Parklife project which, recognising that both the quantity and quality of facilities are in decline and that there is a link between poor facility experience and participation, is looking to achieve more efficient use of facilities through city wide demand and supply models built around strategic Hub Sites.

**'IN ADDITION TO THE HEALTH BENEFITS, PLAYING FIELDS CAN ALSO BRING GROUPS AND COMMUNITIES TOGETHER, REDUCING SOCIAL ISOLATION AND CREATING A SHARED SENSE OF IDENTITY AND PURPOSE.'**

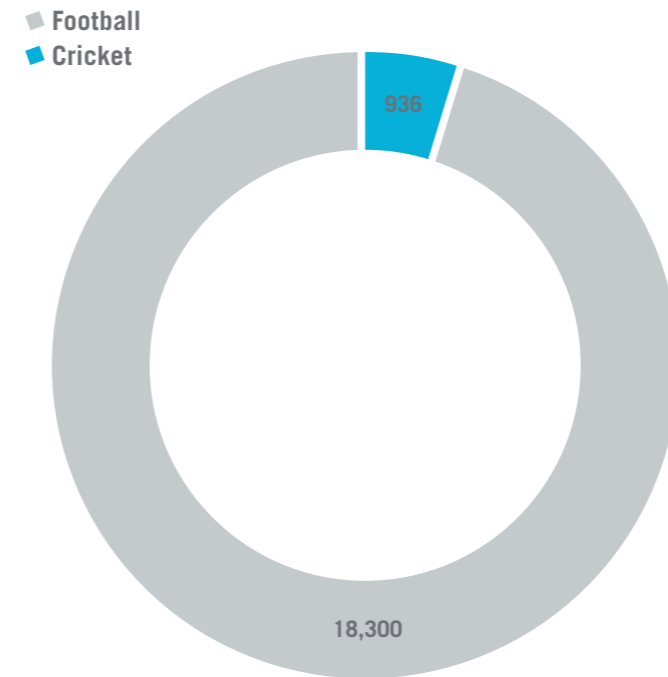
**SECTION 5 —**  
**PLAYING AT HOME:**  
**UNDERSTANDING THE ROLE OF**  
**DOUGLAS EYRE SPORTS CENTRE**

In many respects Douglas Eyre Sports Centre embodies the characteristics associated with the most progressive playing field facilities. Following the recent investments the centre now includes a range of facilities suitable for different sports including:

- 9x9 (junior) football pitch
- 7x7 (mini-soccer pitch)
- Adult football pitches
- Cricket pitch
- 3G artificial turf pitch (ATP) includes 2 x 9v9 and 4 x 7v7 pitches
- Grass athletics track (during school summer term)

In 2014/15 a total of 38,843 people used the facilities with over 18,000 using the full size grass football pitches and over 16,000 the ATP. Nearly 1,000 people used the cricket pitch and 3,050 school pupils made use of the mini soccer pitches.

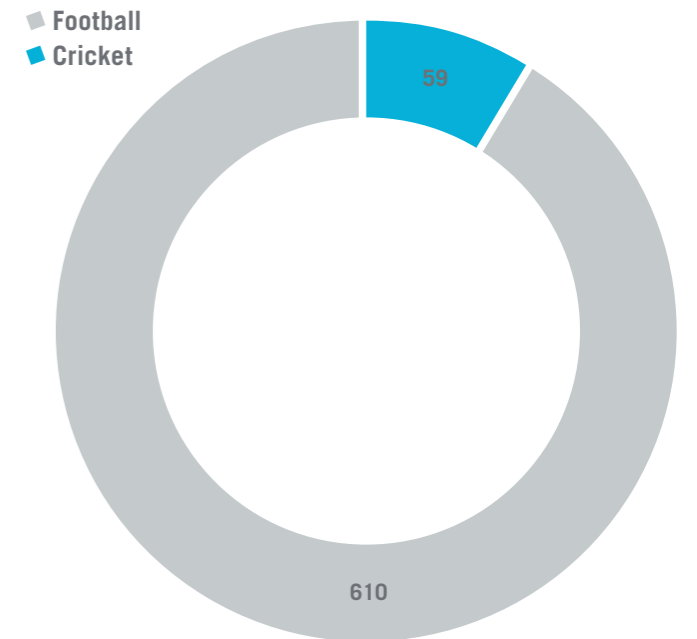
**FULL SIZE GRASS PITCHES:**  
**NUMBERS OF PLAYERS**  
Total 19,236



Twelve adult football clubs with 21 teams used Douglas Eyre Sports Centre as their base with a total of 420 matches being played, more than any other LPFF facility. In addition four youth football clubs with 11 teams used the facility with 78 schools football matches being played and 112 junior football matches. Four adult cricket clubs used the cricket pitch at Douglas Eyre Sports Centre playing 38 matches between them and a further 21 youth and schools cricket matches were played there. The ATP was utilised during 93% of available slots at peak times during the football season and provided a training venue for Clapham Ultimate Frisbee Team.

The fields were also extensively used during the day for curricular purposes, particularly by Willowfield a mixed gender secondary school which does not have its own on-site facilities.

**FULL SIZE GRASS PITCHES:**  
**MATCHES PLAYED**  
Total 669



Alongside these sports participation opportunities the London FA has used Douglas Eyre Sports Centre as its main Coach Education Centre where it delivered 32 coaching courses during the twelve-month research period. It had full use of the facility with access to the classroom which meant that it could deliver workshop elements of the coaching courses on site. The facility itself is off the main road with a large car park and good transport links and provides a high quality learning

environment, the importance of which is understood by LPFF's Chief Executive who was the part-time FA County Coaching Representative for London for 12 years.

The array of provision, some driven by pitch hire and some through club and school links as well as some through the delivery of social programmes, attracts a diverse range of participants. As LPFF's Chief Executive put it:

*"We have four main audiences: one, schools where the love for sport begins [and then] clubs where it continues. Those are the low hanging fruit, and you don't have to do a lot of sports development as the clubs are doing it; they're giving the kids what they want: somewhere to play and practice. Then there are the other two audiences. The disadvantaged and the inactive, and historically we've reached them through our projects."*

### CASE STUDY THREE: THE TOTTENHAM HOTSPUR FOUNDATION KICKS PROGRAMME

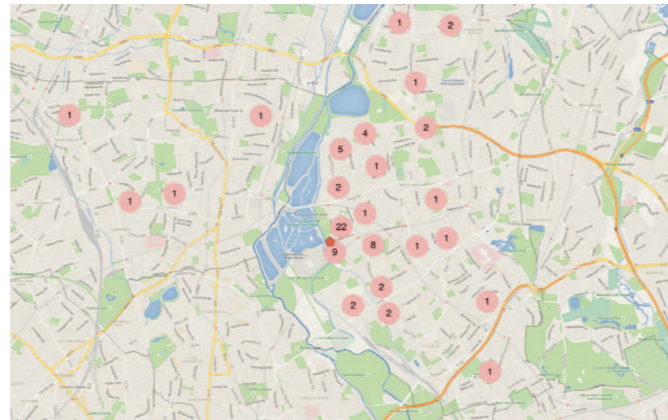
The Tottenham Hotspur Foundation (THF) has delivered football and sport based social inclusion programmes across north east London for over 15 years. It works in particular in areas with significant socio-economic challenges such as high unemployment and high levels of crime and anti-social behaviour.

THF was responsible for piloting the national Kicks programme in 2006 as a partnership between the Premier League and Metropolitan Police with the aim of building safer, stronger and more respectful communities through the development of young people's potential. Since then, and with further support from Sport England, Kicks has grown to include 42 Premier League and Football League clubs running a combined 112 projects across England.

The Waltham Forest Kicks programme was delivered at the Douglas Eyre Sports Centre and during the research period delivered over 80 sessions of sport and educational workshops on consecutive Friday evenings throughout the year. On average over 50 young people aged 14 – 19 turned up to each Kicks session, many of these representing THF in more formal football competitions, including in the London Communities Football League held at the same venue.

Research published by the Premier League suggests that nationally 75% of participants live in the top 30% most deprived neighbourhoods of England, with one-third living in the top 10% most deprived areas. As a result of Kicks, it is claimed that there has been a 60% reduction in anti-social behaviour in areas where it is delivered, up to a 20% reduction in crimes most associated with young people and over 50,000 positive individual outcomes attributable to participants as a result of their involvement in the programme.

#### Distribution of THF Kicks participants using Douglas Eyre Sports Centre



This is possibly what marks LPFF out from other County Playing Fields Associations in that it develops sport and delivers projects rather than just provides advice. Over the last 25 years the London Playing Fields Foundation has designed and developed projects targeted at specific cohorts of people as well as worked in partnership with other local organisations doing the same.

Regardless of whether participants are engaged through their desire to hire a pitch or their involvement in one or other of the more structured programmes delivered out of Douglas Eyre Sports Centre there is a desire that they are able to consider the ground as their home. This is borne of a human and commercial realisation that they are the people who will recruit new members so should have the best possible experience themselves. In this sense there is a desire to set the Centre apart from the competition and the stereotypical experience of local authority provision.

*"If someone rings a local authority about a pitch*



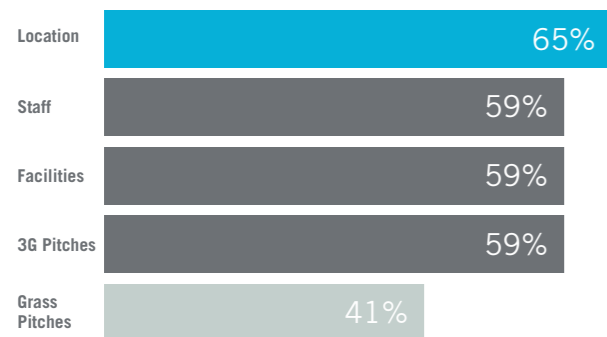
enquiry [it's] an automated answer machine, they go through all the options and eventually its option six.

You're not sure whether that person's going to answer or not, and when you do speak to them, they're uninformed; they can't really give you what you want. You ring here and a lovely lady called Jenna answers the phone and she's extremely helpful and well informed and you go away thinking, 'That is service, I love that. They care about us.' And I often tell the clubs that we exist for their benefit, not the other way around, whereas a local authority, they might not have that kind of customer focused attitude. We really school our groundsmen that they are the first... person, the first symbol, if you like, of LPFF when people arrive, and what they want to see is a warm, hospitable person, rather than the archetypal cantankerous groundsman/caretaker."

"We're more expensive, in terms of our pricing policy than councils, although we have a much more comprehensive concessionary policy, so we do help schools and clubs, and women, and disabled in accessing our facilities."

This sense of the personal touch was confirmed by respondents to our stakeholder surveys. The adult survey was sent to eighteen organisations with ten responses whilst the youth survey was sent to seventeen organisations with thirteen responses, representing a 56% and 76% response rate respectively. Overall users of Douglas Eyre Sports Centre confirmed the importance of practical aspects and good management as well as the quality of facilities when asked to list the best three things about the centre.

**Response to Stakeholder Survey**



Whilst location was the most cited attribute of Douglas Eyre Sports Centre respondents travelled from as far away as Romford in the East, Holloway to the West and even Parsons Green to the South. Eight respondents indicated

that they travelled for over an hour to reach the facility with three indicating over 100 minutes including one who travels for over two hours in both directions.

Interestingly, and in line with LPFF's customer focused approach, over half of the respondents indicated that they used the facility now as a result of previous positive experiences as well as emphasising the excellence, friendliness and helpfulness of the staff. As one respondent commented:

"[The] biggest thing they've got is you can ring up and talk to someone if there's a problem. Council pitches - people don't care."

This may well be a key contributor to the fact that organisations and people that use Douglas Eyre Sports Centre tend to keep using it as reflected in the length of time some respondents have been visiting. In one case this goes back over thirty years to 1983 but over two thirds have been using the facility for more than five years.

Paul Cox, Head Groundsman at Douglas Eyre Sports Centre emphasised the point that the quality of grass football pitches and the cricket square were extremely important and that many teams made the obvious comparison with council maintained facilities. He contended that on-site ground staff, having better equipment and users not having to put up their own nets were reasons why there was more use of the Douglas Eyre Sports Centre pitches.

He believed local authority ground staff were more likely to pick up maintenance issues once users had become aware and started complaining, rather than seeing them early and rectifying them.

**CASE STUDY FOUR: LONDON FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION**

The fact that Douglas Eyre Sports Centre has arguably become the most prolific coach education centre in the country, outside of the St. George's Park National Football Centre has not happened by accident. LPFF's belief was that in order for clubs to flourish three things were required; somewhere to play the game, somewhere to practice and a volunteer workforce that was properly qualified and trained. LPFF has delivered a long term strategy to create a regional football development centre and over the past twenty five years thousands of coaches have started their journey at the Douglas Eyre Sports Centre, attending, often returning and eventually achieving nationally recognised

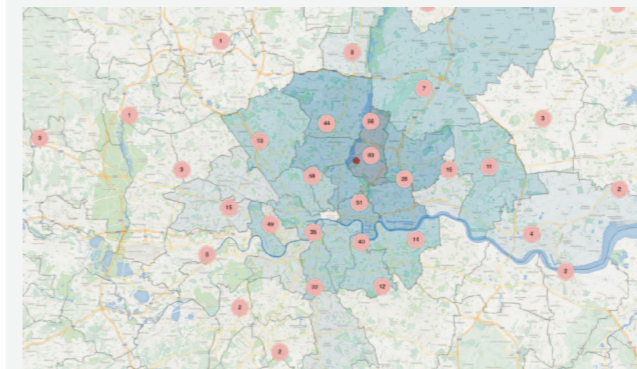
qualifications which support the infrastructure of the game.

Over the twelve month research period the Football Association, Professional Footballers' Association and London Football Association delivered a range of courses at Douglas Eyre Sports Centre including, Level 1 and 2 awards in coaching football, UEFA B, FA Youth Modules, referees and goalkeeping Level 1 and Level 2 coaching awards.

The London Football Association themselves delivered 32 separate coaching courses attracting 638 individuals. While the vast majority were resident in Greater London, these courses attracted individuals from over 20 countries across the world, including Russia, Japan, India and Malaysia.

Neil Fowkes, Coach Education Coordinator at the London FA, recognises the huge contribution that LPFF had made over the last quarter of a century and how through this period it had created a conducive environment for learning. This commitment to supporting the coach education process at a venue which was accessible but located in a relatively quiet part of east London was cited as the main reason why it will continue to use the facility. For LPFF it helps maintain its overview of football development in the capital and ensures a continuous process of improvement for all user groups, including those whose job it is to improve the quality of the national game.

**Distribution of LFA Coaching Course participants**



**KEVIN'S STORY:**

Kevin, a keen amateur footballer, began his coaching career not long after asking a local football coach to recommend a club for his seven year old son in early 2006. A self-confessed 'complete novice', he was easily persuaded to start up his own team and after discovering the London Football Association's website he enrolled on a Level 1 course at Douglas Eyre Sports

Centre. Within a few months he was in charge of an Under 8's team and able to provide a safe and secure environment for the children he was responsible for. A lawyer by profession, Kevin was fully committed to obtaining the qualifications required to be the type of coach who could command the respect of other parents and supporters, watching and commenting from the side lines.

Over the next six years he became a fixture at Douglas Eyre Sports Centre, obtaining the Level 2 Coaching Award in 2007, Level 2 Goalkeeping Award in 2008 and Level 3 in 2010. Douglas Eyre Sports Centre was also the venue for the newly launched FA Youth Award and Kevin attended the Introductory Course in 2009, Youth Module's 1 and 2 in 2011 and 2012 respectively. The Level 3 award was a personal goal for Kevin and "as important as any other qualification I had achieved". It was particularly cherished as it was passed at the fifth attempt.

The journey for Kevin to obtain his coaching qualifications, become Chairman of Enfield Town Youth Football Club and Manager of the Under 16's team required a huge commitment of time and energy. He acknowledges the support, encouragement and individual mentoring offered by the London Football Association's team. While the location was only 20 minutes away, he suggested it was the camaraderie he encountered each time and the mutual support and respect which made the experience special. A 'frequent flyer' at Douglas Eyre Sports Centre, who got to know many of the staff well during the time he spent there, he believes the centre offers good facilities and has created the right environment for ensuring aspiring coaches have the best possible chance of obtaining nationally recognised qualifications.

Kevin is now a respected, enthusiastic and knowledgeable youth football coach ensuring that those who don't make the professional grade have the best possible experiences both now and in the future. Keen to keep the family tradition going, his son Thomas now aged 16, has recently passed his Level 1 Coaching qualification. Another volunteer beginning his football coaching career at Douglas Eyre Sports Centre and playing a part in ensuring youth football remains alive and kicking across London.

## SECTION 6 — THROUGH THE TURNSTILES: ASSESSING THE VALUE OF DOUGLAS EYRE SPORTS CENTRE

**Despite the good customer relations it remains a challenge to run the Centre in an economical and socially inclusive fashion with grass pitch income only covering 23% of the centre's £130,152 running costs in 2013/14. This compares to an average across LPFF's full estate of 37%. However, when other income streams are factored in, such as the hosting of coaching courses and ancillary income then, Douglas Eyre Sports Centre does cover its own running costs with a total income of £130,831.**

The ability to cover costs is however a misleading measure of the value and viability of such facilities when the wider social benefits of playing fields discussed in section 3 and the social improvement work discussed in section 4 are considered. In order to assess the wider social impact and value that usage of Douglas Eyre Sports Centre delivers we adopted an approach based on use of the Sportworks model developed by Substance for the Sported Foundation.

In 2010 Substance was commissioned by Sported, to conduct a comprehensive piece of research, creating the business case for investing in sport for development work for disadvantaged young people in the UK.

A full explanation of the approach and the research that underpins it is provided in the Sportworks research report<sup>4</sup>. However, in broad terms, based on the demographic profile of participants, the model generates a risk score (or assessment of the likelihood of participants facing a range of social problems) and an impact score (or assessment of the likely effectiveness of project activity in reducing that risk). It then calculates the likely financial cost savings to society associated with the reduced likelihood of participants facing negative outcomes relating to:

- Involvement in crime and anti-social behaviour
- Educational attainment
- Educational attendance
- Well-being
- Substance misuse
- Fitness and obesity
- NEET status

The development of the data valuing model that underpins the Sportworks valuing application was based on the use of a triangulated approach that drew on three principal sources:

- High quality social policy research relating to risk and protection factors in each of the specific social policy areas.
- Personal outcome data collected by Substance on 160,000 young people aged 14 – 25 over a five year period.
- Case study process evaluations with ten projects across the UK supported by the Sported Foundation.

In order to produce a consistent assessment of the cost savings delivered we identified estimates of the costs faced by society in each of the target outcome areas if no action were taken, often referred to as the counterfactual. Taking each of the social policy outcomes it was clear that the potential savings were huge. For example, the average cost per crime in 2009 was estimated to be just under £7,000 and the financial cost to government agencies responding to reports of anti-social behaviour in England and Wales has been estimated at approximately £3.4 billion each year. In terms of health, the health and social care cost of obesity levels are estimated at £2,715 for each obese young person per annum. Similarly, the weekly cost of youth unemployment has been estimated at £155 million and the net present cost to the Treasury, over the next ten years estimated at £28 billion. Using these and other estimates for educational performance, substance misuse, and emotional well-being alongside the impact measurement model it is possible to generate a basis for calculating the financial cost savings to society associated with the delivery of a series of linked activities of a defined time period.

The Sportworks application was launched by Sported's founder, Sir Keith Mills, at a high profile event in May 2013. It is now being used by several hundred sport for development projects in the UK including a number of professional football clubs. These include Brentford FC who used Sportworks to assess the likely social cost savings associated with the football club's proposed move from Griffin Park to a new community stadium at Lionel Road, in support of their successful planning application to the London Borough of Hounslow. Whilst it has not previously been used to assess the impact and value of sports facilities or playing fields it has been designed to make these assessments in relation to activity taking place at such facilities. As such we limited our analysis to activities that engaged young people up to the age of 25 and delivered at Douglas Eyre Sports Centre from 1st April 2014 to 31st March 2015.

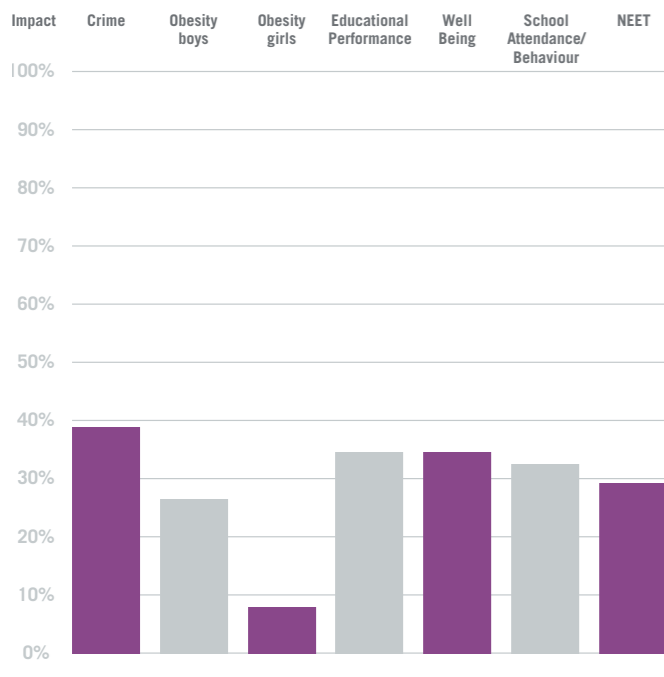
<sup>4</sup> Crabbe, T (2013) Sportworks: Investing in sport for development - creating the business case to help change the lives of disadvantaged young people in the UK, London: Sported which can be accessed at <http://sported.org.uk/our-impact/sportworks/the-research/>

Using participant attendance data entered into a dedicated Sportworks account and based on an assessment of 4,666 participant records with valid postcodes and other demographic data (taking account of the effect of any data gaps on our confidence in the results) we determined that **the minimum value of activity involving young people at Douglas Eyre Sports Centre was £4,805,928 over the year in question.** The overall value relates to the impact scores and related cost savings attributed to each of the outcome areas presented in Table 1 below and illustrated in Figure 1. In the absence of any projects specifically addressing issues of substance misuse we omitted this outcome from our calculations.

**Table 1: Impact and Value of Activity at Douglas Eyre Sports Centre**

Outcome area	Impact score %	Social cost saving
Crime	39.01	£1,393,533
Boys fitness & obesity	26.54	£589,785
Girls fitness & obesity	8.00	£102,670
Educational performance	34.70	£274,599
Well Being	34.67	£898,560
School attendance/behaviour	32.55	£700,928
NEET	29.40	£845,853
<b>Total</b>		<b>£4,805,928</b>

**Figure 1: Impact of Activity at Douglas Eyre on Distinct Outcomes**



The relative contribution from each of these outcome areas to the overall cost savings relates both to the level of impact in each area but also to the cost associated with different social problems. So whilst for example the impact on educational performance (34.7%) is greater than the impact on NEET status (29.4%), the social cost savings associated with more people being in employment, education or training (£845,853) is greater than the saving associated with improved educational performance (£274,599). The relatively low impact and cost savings associated with girls' fitness and obesity is unsurprising given the relatively low proportion of female participants in the activities considered and the predominantly male user group of the facility as a whole. This imbalance became more pronounced when Waltham Forest Hockey Club left in 2011 following the installation of the 3G ATP.

It should also be noted that these estimates are likely to represent an underestimation of the full cost savings achieved, given that we have factored in the full range of confidence limitations relating to data quantity and quality. Furthermore, our assessment has confined itself to those participants under the age of 25 with no consideration being given to the value of the work done with participants who are over 25.

What is important to note here is that playing fields in and of themselves do not necessarily deliver these sort of returns (although the emotional and aesthetic value of green spaces should not be underestimated). However, when they are managed in a sustainable fashion, engage with disadvantaged communities and are used to support personal development through coach education and social improvement programmes as at Douglas Eyre Sports Centre, huge returns on investment can be achieved. This point is borne out by the fact that five projects, Tottenham Kicks, London Communities Football League, East London Leisure Trust, Leyton Orient Advanced Soccer School and Coping Through Football, each of which has a specific commitment to driving social development through sport, delivered 50% of the social cost savings over the period. Indeed Tottenham Kicks delivered 24% of the overall savings on its own and the East London Leisure Trust, which has a specific commitment to working with girls, delivered over 87% of the savings related to girls' fitness and obesity.

## SECTION 7 — SOWING THE SEEDS FOR SUCCESS: CELEBRATING AND BUILDING THE ROLE OF PLAYING FIELDS IN 21ST CENTURY PUBLIC POLICY

## 7.1 Summary Findings

In the simplest terms and true to the traditions of LPFF's founding fathers and guardians, Douglas Eyre Sports Centre provides a space for people living in London to play sport. As we have shown, in the 12 month period from April 2014 to March 2015 a total of 38,843 people used the facilities playing over 600 football matches and 59 cricket matches.

Additionally, with 32 separate FA coaching courses being delivered to over 600 individuals from 20 countries, outside of St George's Park National Football Centre, Douglas Eyre Sports Centre is the most prolific coach education centre in the country.

Beyond this facilitation of sports participation and coach education, over the same period some of the most innovative sport for development and sport based social inclusion projects were delivered. Partly because of these organisations' capacity to reach into the capital's most disadvantaged communities we have calculated that the activities delivered at Douglas Eyre Sports Centre will save the public purse a minimum of **£4,805,928 per annum** due to their impact on crime, education, employment and health outcomes.

In many ways Douglas Eyre Sports Centre is a beacon of good practice and a torchbearer for the sustainable maintenance of publically accessible playing fields. Despite its featureless appearance and inauspicious location between a former scrap yard, a reservoir and ubiquitous housing developments it has flourished and become an important resource for both local people and institutional users in London.

In this context it is interesting to consider the FA's emergent Parklife project and support for Hub Sites that are characterised by:

- Provision of a focal point for playing, training and programmes
- ATP and multiple grass pitches
- Coach education and social space
- Programmed use to meet local demand
- Delivery of new participation opportunities
- Shared links to professional club and community programmes

Through its embodiment of these features Douglas Eyre Sports Centre might be regarded as the first football Hub Site in the country as evidenced by its:

- Longstanding relationship with Leyton Orient as a training / community venue
- Hosting of Community Programme activity and development of women's, club, schools and community football projects
- Hosting of sport for development projects
- Status as the leading football coach education centre for London
- Provision of a home for schools, youth, university and adult football teams
- Social facilities and space.

## 7.2 Conclusions and Recommendations

The concern is that whilst Douglas Eyre Sports Centre has demonstrated its impact and value and its fit with the emergent Hub Site model, many other playing fields do not and therefore run the risk of being sold off to fund the development of a smaller number of new Hub Sites. LPFF believes that facilities like Douglas Eyre Sports Centre can not only thrive as dual or multi sport hub sites but that they can co-exist with smaller and less versatile playing fields which also need to be protected for a whole variety of environmental, social and sporting reasons. **It is in this context that LPFF seeks to use the Douglas Eyre Sports Centre example and this report to inspire, inform, and influence others, and to show people the wider benefits that could be achieved.**

### 7.2.1 Participation opportunities and programme design

The ultimate goal of LPFF is to provide a place to play sport forever and to use playing fields to create a healthier, more active, happier, more cohesive London through sport. This suggests a need to learn from the experience of Douglas Eyre Sports Centre and its success in providing models of participation that work for a whole range of groups and which can be adapted and sustained elsewhere. This will require a step change in thinking about activity provision and programme design for those playing fields where the current focus is on grounds maintenance and booking management. This creates an opportunity for LPFF to play a key facilitatory role through:

- **Provision of leadership in the use of open space with the aim of becoming the 'go to' organisation that people approach for advice and help. Wherever possible LPFF should be consulted to ensure sporting bodies become more joined up and that good practice is shared.**
- **Provision of innovative solutions around participation and the delivery, management and replication of sport for development programmes at LPFF sites. LPFF can**





now adopt a twin track approach: developing and replicating ‘home grown’ sport for development programmes; and supporting and advising partner agencies’ delivery of their own programmes at LPFF sites.

The individual impact scores and cost savings generated by a core group of providers demonstrate how different approaches deliver a range of social outcomes. **These programmes have the potential to deliver increased cost savings if further refinement is undertaken with targets being set, activities agreed and retention of participants monitored. This approach has the potential to benefit both the delivery agency and LPFF, particularly where additional cost savings are articulated as part of a funding application to a charitable trust or statutory agency.**

The best opportunity to replicate programmes at other playing field sites across the country is undoubtedly provided by Coping Through Football, which is developing a strong evidence base and growing profile. **A replication strategy will require new resources in both the set up and delivery phases, but given the track record and achievements to date, this programme should be an attractive proposition for national and local funders. First steps will need to include the production of a Programme Manual and Implementation Handbook that specifies what the programme is, how it works and the resources required to deliver it.**

- **Promotional work to celebrate both the role of playing fields in maintaining the health and happiness of London but also the connections to wider sporting institutions, icons and facilities.** As this year is the 125th anniversary of LPFF the organisation has been seeking to reinvigorate historic links with FA and MCC. As the Chief Executive remarked:

*“There’s a London paradox here, isn’t there? If you think of cricket, where do people want to play? Lord’s. Football, where do they want to play? Wembley. Where do they want to play rugby? Twickenham. Where do they want to play tennis? Wimbledon. They’re all in London, yet some of the grassroots facilities in London are absolutely terrible. Why can’t we harness the power and the lure of all these iconic facilities to rejuvenate, reinvigorate, breathe life into grassroots facilities?”*

This strategy of using the iconic and elite end of the sporting spectrum to nourish the roots is undoubtedly important, particularly in those sports which have historically found it difficult to widen participation to young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. These partnerships and a programme of work linking the two ends of the spectrum has the added potential to **further highlight the key message that playing fields can be valuable community assets as well as starting points for elite sport careers.**

### 7.2.2 Knowledge and information

As the Chief Executive remarked:

*“It’s difficult to protect what you don’t know is there; and also it’s very difficult to improve fields if you haven’t got the knowledge of what is there.”*

As such LPFF has played a key role in building knowledge and local intelligence with regards to the existence, condition and susceptibility to development of playing fields in London. It maintains a ‘Fields at Risk Register’, including a list of playing fields that are under threat and have been brought to the Foundation’s notice. This information is usually provided by community groups who are concerned enough to do something about the perceived threat, who the Foundation can then work with and support through the other elements of the strategy. However, this potentially misses those fields that are most at risk, having moved through the cycle of playing field decay.

**It is in this context that LPFF should progress its plans to author an updated audit of all playing pitches in London in order to better understand what facilities exist and what their current condition is. In turn this will help identify where investment could be made to improve the facilities, where the existing stock could be better used in order to drive up participation and usage and where pitches are in a state of neglect and need to be added to the Fields at Risk Register.**

**This should itself provide a model for other playing field associations, local authorities and other stakeholders with an interest in protecting playing fields nationally, perhaps ultimately feeding into a national register.**

### 7.2.3 Protection and risk management

When pitches are under threat and there is a level of local opposition to development LPFF currently provides three levels of assistance; these should be further resourced in order to ensure they are protected for the long term.

- **Arm’s length advice, guidance and facilitation focused on building local organisation and capacity amongst groups who have a shared interest in safeguarding the long term future of the field and restoring it to full use**
- **Direct intervention to build the case for retention and investment, which might take the form of market research and feasibility studies**
- **Acquisition**

In all circumstances, and building on the recommendations above, action needs to be accompanied by a strategy to drive up usage which is the best defence against the risk of allowing fields to be designated as ‘surplus to requirements’. This has the additional benefit of tying the protection of playing fields into sports participation strategies, as the two aims of playing field protection and getting more people to play sport are interdependent.

Whilst LPFF is opposed to non-sport related development on playing fields in London there are also circumstances where what is referred to as ‘fringe development’ can be supported as a last resort in order to maintain the wider facility or develop new ones. The guardian of these decisions is the principle of ‘No net loss of pitches’. This is an important principle in the context of contemporary pressures to develop more housing and a commensurate lack of public sector funding for investment in facilities, which are making it increasingly common for irregular or unusable pieces of land to be sold off to safeguard the long term future of the facility as a whole.

**‘LPFF HAS PLAYED A KEY ROLE IN BUILDING KNOWLEDGE AND LOCAL INTELLIGENCE WITH REGARDS TO THE EXISTENCE, CONDITION AND SUSCEPTIBILITY TO DEVELOPMENT OF PLAYING FIELDS IN LONDON.’**

**SECTION 8 —  
APPENDICES**

**LIST OF CLUBS AND  
ORGANISATIONS CONSULTED:**

Academy Youth FC  
Ainslie Wood FC  
Amir Nobu  
Clapham Ultimate  
Crown and Manor FC  
East London Leisure Trust  
Egbertian FC  
GM Brothers CC  
Hackney Community College  
Hackney Schools FA  
Inner London Schools FA  
Islington Ladies FC  
Kelmscott School  
Lea Valley FC  
Leyton Orient Advanced Soccer School  
Leyton Orient Trust  
London Communities Football League  
London Football Association  
London Legal League  
London Metropolitan University  
NELFT  
North London CC  
Norwich City FC  
Old Garchonians FC  
Old Parmitarians FC  
Professional Footballers' Association  
RCC FC  
Rushcroft School  
Somerville Old Boys FC  
The Football Association  
Tottenham Hotspur Foundation  
Waltham Forest Schools Cricket  
Waltham Forest Schools Sports Network  
Willowfield School

**substance.**

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