

Saving Your Playing Field

1. Get Involved

- The best way to protect recreational open space is to use it! Use your local playing fields as much as possible for formal sport and general recreation.
- Let the owners know how valuable they are and, if they neglect them, make them aware of your views.
- Get involved in any consultation processes connected with your Council's local plan 1.
- Ensure that general policies and those related to specific sites make adequate provision and provide protection for recreational sites.

2. Keep Watch

- Don't ignore rumours of planned proposals or developments. They are often true!
- Contact the owners and your local authority planning department immediately and ask for specific information about any plans for sale or change of use.
- Read the list of planning applications displayed at the council's offices, on its web site or in the local newspaper.
- Look out for any official notices displayed at the site. It is important to respond to the notice in writing by the stated deadline.

3. Get Organised

- If you discover that recreational space in your neighbourhood is under threat, you will have to move quickly. Talk to local residents, sports clubs, play associations, school governors, local councillors, council officials, environmental and conservation groups.
- Find out details of the proposals and get as many people on your side as possible. The more people you can involve, the more chance you have of success.
- Assess the demand for the land under threat as a playing field: if you can establish usage your case will be stronger. Make a log of the user groups, the different sports which take place, the number of hours used and the number of people employed there. Look also at unmet and potential demand.
- You need to think through your own views to make your case as strong as possible and support your campaign to fight the planning application. Ensure that the key organisers in your campaign have the time available to make the case effectively. It can be helpful to have a lawyer and/or a town planner on your campaign team.



4. Seek Expert Advice

- Write to FIT and let us know the name and address of the playing field, the name of the local planning authority and the development proposed. Keep us informed of any developments.
- Become a FIT member and reference FIT in all correspondence. Membership details can be found at www.fieldsintrust.org.
- Contact the Royal Town Planning Institute for details about Planning Aid. Planning Aid is a free, voluntary service offering independent professional advice and help on town planning matters. It is aimed at individuals, community groups and other voluntary groups who cannot afford to pay for private consultants.

5. Check Local Need

- Ask your Council about its policies which affect local recreation space. They will be found in the local plan. Look particularly for the Council's policies on:
 - Open space
 - Sport
 - Recreational land
 - Play space
 - Green Belt or other forms of protected green networks.
 - Metropolitan Open Land (in Greater London)
- Establish whether the proposals would contravene the policies contained in the local plan.
- Ask the local authority if the amount of outdoor playing space in your area meets the recommendations of FIT's *Planning and Design for Outdoor Sport and Play* (formerly *The Six Acre Standard*) or a local standard contained in the local plan.
- Check whether a playing pitch assessment has been carried out and, if so, when and by whom.

6. Involve Council Leaders

- Contact your local Councillor to request a meeting with the Leader of the Council, members of the Cabinet with responsibility for planning, leisure and education and the Chairman of the planning or development control committee, so that you can register your opposition formally.

7. Go to National/Central Government

- Request a meeting with your Member of Parliament (Westminster, Scottish or Welsh at their next surgery. The local library should have details about the time and place. You will need to provide all the relevant information on your case and emphasise the strength of local opposition. Ask your elected representative to raise the case with the appropriate government departments e.g. in England the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG), Department for



Education (DfE) and the Department for Culture Media and Sport (DCMS). Write to these Departments presenting your case and request a response.

- Planning matters, in England, are the ultimate responsibility of the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, supported by the Planning Minister; in Scotland the ultimate responsibility of the Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainability, supported by the Minister for Local Government and Planning; and in Wales the Minister for the Environment and Sustainable Development supported by the Planning Minister. Deputy Prime Minister (in Scotland the Development Department's Planning Division, Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport, in Wales the Minister for Environmental planning and Countryside). If appropriate, ask the Deputy Prime Minister (or Minister) to call-in the application for their own consideration and decision, under Section 77 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. This should be done by writing to the relevant regional Government Office. In Scotland, ask the Communities Minister to call in under Section 46 of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997.
- Check that your national Sports Council has been consulted and ask for a copy of its response. Local planning authorities have a statutory duty to consult the relevant Sports Council on most planning applications for development on playing fields that have been used at any point during the last five years.
- In the case of school playing fields in England, ask the Secretary of State for Education whether consent has been given for the change of use or disposal of the land in accordance with the School Standards and Framework Act 1998. This includes land that has been used as a school playing field at any time during the last 10 years.

8. Use the Media

- Write to your local newspapers, radio and television stations. If you do not get any response, call and ask to speak to the News Editor. Publicise your views in the local community to gain support. You may wish to call a public meeting at a local hall. Invite representatives of the developers or applicants for planning permission, the Council and your Member of Parliament (Westminster, Scottish or Welsh) to take part. Invite the local press.
- Set up a Facebook group and Twitter account and encourage as many people to join as possible
- Produce a poster which can be easily photocopied and ask all local shops and offices to display it. Send a copy to the press, radio and television stations. It will help if you can produce an inexpensive leaflet outlining your case for distribution to homes in the area. You should avoid extreme language and extravagant claims in any thing you say or publish.



9. Seek Wider Support

• A number of interested organisations could help your campaign and you should contact them for advice and support. They may include:

- County Playing Fields Associations
- Local sports associations
- Local Sports Associations
- Rural Community Councils
- Council for Voluntary Services

Telephone numbers for County Playing Fields Associations can be found on the FIT website www.fieldsintrust.org.

10. Fight Applications

- You should fight the planning application by objecting to the proposals, in writing, at both outline and detailed planning stages.
- An increasing number of local authorities allow members of the public to address their planning or development control committee. If available, you should use this opportunity to speak.
- If the application for planning permission is refused by the Council but the applicant appeals against this decision, you can lodge a further objection. The local planning authority will explain the appeal procedure to you.

