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Chair of the Health and Environment Committee
London Assembly
City Hall
The Queen's Walk
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3rd December 2012

Playing Fields in London

The LPFF welcomes and supports your call for a public discussion on the need for strategic monitoring of playing fields in London and helpful responses when they come under threat.

We share your disappointment that some of the key recommendations included in the Offside Report 2006, most notably the need for local authorities to have a current Playing Pitch Strategy, have not been met. With only a quarter of London boroughs having a PPS, it makes the task of protecting fields and restoring them to full use even more difficult. To compound matters the historic leadership on this issue provided by Sport England has been steadily eroded and may eventually disappear altogether following the imminent merger with UK Sport. In London, where there is enormous pressure to build more homes, there is an obvious need for a more active playing fields champion. The LPFF has consistently lobbied for the protection of playing fields in London and prior to the Offside Report produced a Sub Regional Playing Fields Strategy for North London.

Three years later after the publication of the Offside Report and, in the absence of any proactive measures to arrest the loss of playing fields, the LPFF set up a Fields at Risk Register. Since then it has played a key role in helping to secure the long term future of over 20 sites that were in real danger of being lost to sport. Responding to information from a variety of sources, the Foundation has intervened in one of three ways:

- Providing arms length advice to organisations resisting the potential loss of a local field or
- Providing more detailed consultancy advice to organisations resisting the potential loss of a local field or
- Acquiring the ground on a freehold or long lease basis

In addition to supporting those sites at the endangered end of the playing fields continuum, the Foundation also led a piece of work in identifying a network of multi-sport hub sites that could benefit from targeted investment as

part of the Mayors Legacy Fund (Playsport). As a result of this work £925,000 was levered into seven sites resulting in partnership funding of £16million towards total project costs of £26million.

The two main lessons learned from these two pieces of work are the importance of having:

- a) Up to-date information on playing field sites
- b) Leadership in terms of rescuing endangered sites.

Without dynamic leadership the number and quality of playing pitches on which Londoners can play sport will continue to diminish, as evidenced by the 40% drop in natural turf cricket wickets over the last twenty years. Put simply the 2012 Olympic Legacy ambition of inspiring a generation will not happen unless we provide accessible and affordable places where sport can be played.

We are therefore delighted that the Health and Environment Committee want to invoke the spirit of the Offside Report and create a public debate on the need for better playing field protection. There is little doubt that a new audit of the supply of playing pitches in London is over due and we would be happy to assist the GLA in defining the current position.

Best wishes

Yours sincerely

Alex Welsh
Chief Executive