



## Creating a sporting habit for life

Murad Qureshi AM  
 Chair of the Health and Environment Committee  
 City Hall  
 The Queen's Walk  
 London SE1 2AA

4<sup>th</sup> December 2012

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Murad Qureshi".

Thank you for your letter regarding the protection of playing fields in London.

As outlined in our previous letter, we are committed about ensuring we have the right playing fields in the right places to meet local need. We are confident that our statutory responsibility robustly protects playing fields from development and recent statistical evidence supports this view.

Figures released this week show playing fields throughout the country are being protected thanks to Sport England's role as a statutory consultee on planning applications. In London 161 out of 185 concluded planning applications affecting playing fields in 2010/11 resulted in improved or safeguarded sports provision. This trend is reflected nationally with 1373 out of 1460 applications resulting in improved or safeguarded sports provision.

In addition, we have directly invested in protecting or improving around 500 pitches at more than 150 sites and nearly 1,900 acres in England and enabled the purchase of over 57 acres of land for the benefit of sport. At this point we are confident that the levels of protection and investment we provide over playing fields are strong enough and we do not see the need to enhance our role further.

It is our belief that decisions about the future of playing fields in each area should be taken at local, rather than at national level, to take account of local needs. This is a view shared by National Government and the Mayor of London and is reflected in the National Planning Policy Framework and the Localism Bill which places a strong emphasis on bottom up planning from neighbourhoods. We therefore strongly advocate that this is addressed via the undertaking of a playing pitch strategy, at a local level and not at a sub-regional or regional level. This is because the local authority as a major owner of playing field land as well as the local planning authority, and are best placed to bring stakeholders together and create a vision for future provision that can be taken forward into the local plan.

**Creating a sporting habit for life**

To reiterate, we believe a better use of resources and effort would be to convince all London local authorities to take responsibility for their land and develop a playing pitch strategy for their area. Our analysis suggests that authorities with a playing pitch strategy have a better understanding of the needs and demands of the local community and as a result get far more use out of their playing fields. We have a framework of consultants who help local authorities achieve this.

We believe the Committee could play a fundamental role in protecting playing fields and encouraging more effective use of playing space by being an advocate of playing pitch strategies to local authorities in London.

If it would help we would be happy to meet with you in the New Year and talk through how we could work together to ensure the continued protection of playing fields.

Finally, with regards to your comments on the 'reconfiguration' of Sport England and UK Sport, it is worth noting that the Government has proposed a merger of the two bodies and we are awaiting the outcome of this proposal. To date, no official decision has been made.

I look forward to hearing your response to our suggestions.

*Yours sincerely*  
*Jennie Price*

Jennie Price  
Chief Executive