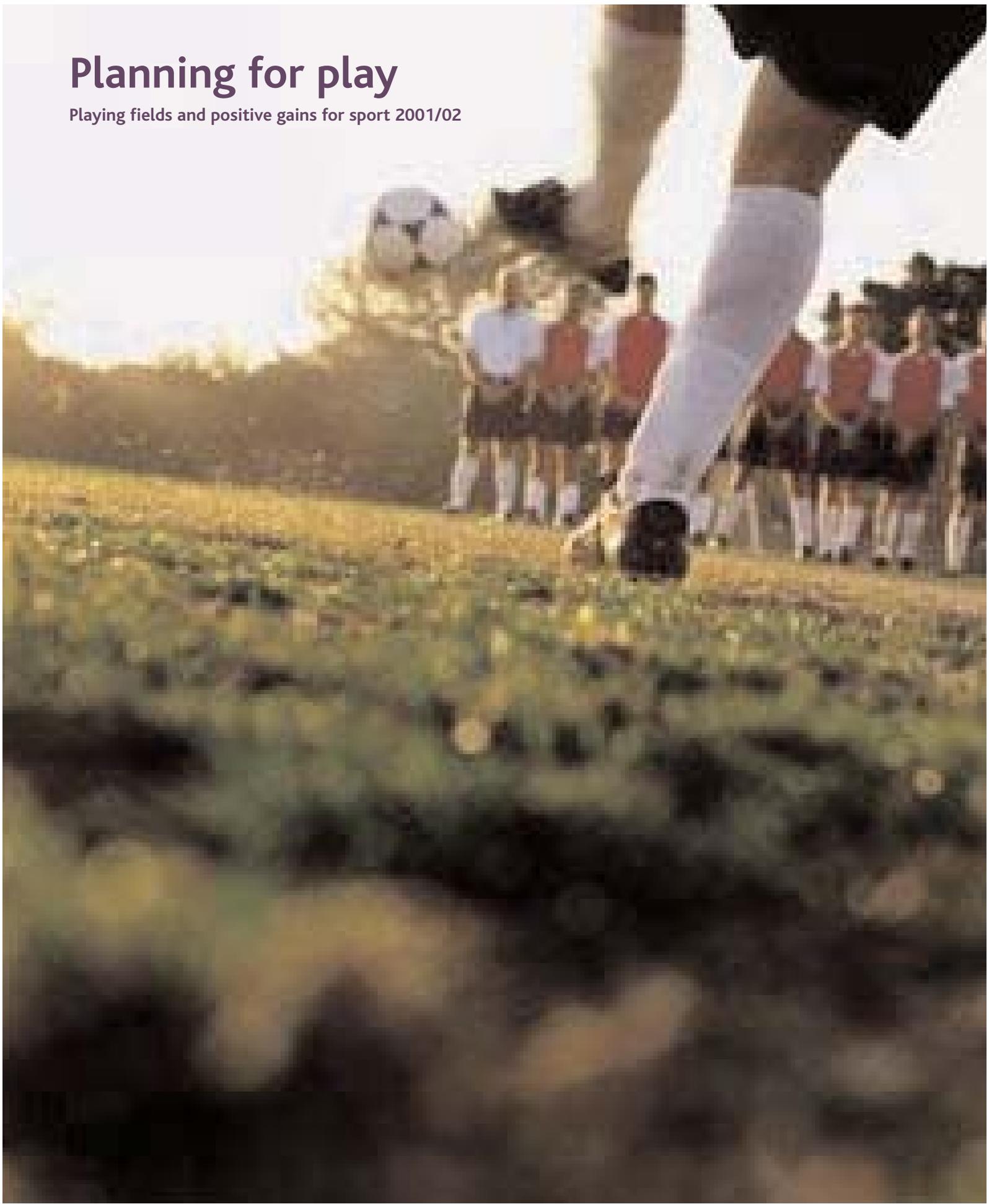




# Planning for play

Playing fields and positive gains for sport 2001/02





The Government is committed to protecting playing fields wherever possible and to boosting the opportunities that young people have to participate in sport.

Playing fields are not only a precious resource for sport and recreation, but also provide important green areas in towns and inner city areas.

There were 985 planning applications relating to playing fields between April 2001 and March 2002. Of these, 695 have been approved, 161 have been rejected or withdrawn and 129 have yet to be decided.

The great majority of approved applications involve redevelopment to provide new or improved sports facilities for communities:

- 188 sites will provide 447 new sports facilities to a value of over £270 million
- 134 applications will improve the use of playing fields, through new or refurbished changing rooms, added floodlighting or improved access to the site
- 113 new playing fields will be provided as like-for-like replacements

A regional breakdown is shown in Table 1.

Of the remaining approved applications:

- There were 201 cases where the site was too small or the wrong shape to accommodate a playing pitch.
- There were seven cases where a careful assessment of supply and demand against a playing field strategy showed that there was a strong case for releasing the land for a different use.
- There were 52 cases where Sport England objected to the proposals and applications were approved by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister for local strategic reasons.

In 91% of approved cases, sport benefited or remained unaffected.



## Background

Before the Government acted, the sale of school playing fields was a free-for-all. A new law introduced in 1998 requires local education authorities and schools to obtain the Secretary of State for Education and Skills's agreement before they can dispose of their land. Since then, there has been a dramatic reduction in the number of playing field sites sold. The School Playing Field Advisory Panel advises the Secretary of State for Education and Skills on such applications. The Panel consists of representatives from the Local Government Association, Learning Through Landscapes, the National Association of Headteachers, National Playing Fields Association and the Central Council for Physical Recreation.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) has published a statutory Direction enabling its Ministers to consider proposals from local authorities planning to develop playing fields where Sport England object. The 1998 Playing Fields Direction requires planning authorities to refer these applications to the Deputy Prime Minister. In these cases, Ministers can intervene where the interests of school children and local people are not being fully considered.

The ODPM has also published new planning guidance for open space, sport and recreation (PPG 17), which requires local planning authorities to protect all open space which communities need. In advance of an assessment of need, local authorities should give very careful consideration to any planning applications involving development on playing fields.

Sport England is a statutory consultee on all planning applications affecting playing fields, land used as playing fields, or land allocated for use as playing fields in a current development plan. This includes being consulted on applications affecting any land which has been used as a playing field in the last five years and any replacement of a grass pitch with a synthetic surface. Sport England's policy is founded on presumption against loss except in exceptional circumstances.



**Table 1:**  
**Regional breakdown of new facilities to be provided**

Region	Number of new facilities	Estimated value of new facilities
East	28	18,435,000
East Mids	50	22,387,000
London	34	31,387,000
North East	83	40,823,000
North West	41	35,170,000
South East	60	24,990,000
South West	15	6,840,000
West Mids	69	38,775,000
Yorkshire	67	55,538,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>447</b>	<b>274,345,000</b>



*Anchorage Lane, Doncaster: A new football pavilion (right) provides players with much improved changing facilities, replacing the previous dilapidated portacabin (left).*



**Table 2:**

**Examples of benefits secured through planning applications in 2001/02**

<b>New sports facilities</b>
Allertonshire School, Northallerton, North Yorkshire
An artificial turf pitch with floodlighting was added to the playing field site, providing a more flexible range of sports facilities for the school and the local community
Stanney County High School, Ellesmere Port, Cheshire
Part of the existing playing field was redeveloped to create a new athletics area, comprising a 400m six-lane running track with floodlights. This upgrading of a poor quality playing field into a high quality facility also answered a need identified in the national athletics strategy.
<b>New/better playing fields</b>
Nantwich Football Club, Nantwich, Cheshire
Development on a playing field site under demand for housing was approved on condition that the developer provided an agreed replacement on a suitable site nearby. As a result, a former agricultural site was brought into use for sport, providing playing fields that include football pitches and a stadium for the local football club and enabling the local community to benefit from much improved facilities.
Sandbach Cricket Club, Sandbach, Cheshire
A better quality cricket field with vastly improved changing facilities and pavilion were provided on a nearby site to replace the existing site, which was redeveloped to provide housing for the local community.
<b>Enhancements to existing playing fields</b>
Anchorage Lane, Doncaster, South Yorkshire
A new football pavilion was built to give better changing facilities for the players using the pitches. The pavilion was situated in the corner of the playing field site, where it did not affect the number of pitches.
Workington Cricket Club, Allerdale, Cumbria
A new cricket pavilion and indoor cricket centre were constructed, replacing the existing dilapidated pavilion with much improved facilities and taking up only a small amount of extra land.
<b>Land incapable of forming a pitch</b>
Loughborough University, Leicestershire
Work is underway to build the new National Cricket Academy, due for completion later this year. It is being built on a sloping bank between existing pitches, which will be unaffected.
Mark Rutherford Upper School, Bedford, Bedfordshire
New buildings were provided to accommodate an Adult Education Centre and a Children's Playgroup. They were located on an area that could not be used as a playing pitch, and the rugby pitch was unaffected.
<b>Excess provision</b>
Sport England's playing pitch assessment revealed a surplus of playing fields in Wilford, Nottingham. Developers agreed to provide £300,000 for playing field improvements in the locality.



**Table 3:**  
**Breakdown of 2001/02 playing field applications**

Application	Outcome
Approved without objection by Sport England or following negotiation over replacement/alternative provision	643
Refused or withdrawn applications <sup>(1)</sup>	161
Outstanding applications <sup>(2)</sup>	129
Approved despite objection of Sport England <sup>(3)</sup>	52
<b>Total</b>	<b>985</b>

**Notes:**

1. As well as those applications refused, a significant number are withdrawn as a result of Sport England objection.
2. The outstanding applications are currently going through the local planning process.
3. In those cases where applications were approved despite objection by Sport England, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister decided that the application should go ahead for local strategic reasons.