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FIELDS OF DREAMS:

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

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



FOREWORD —

It gives me great pleasure to preface this Executive Summary with a few words of introduction.

Throughout our 125 year history we have always known that playing fields can improve lives. 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 transform lives we need to make best use of those places where sport is played. Unfortunately up until now we have not been able to reliably measure this impact. This report, written by Substance, feels like a line in the sand moment and I hope that the research findings provide the type of compelling evidence we need to safeguard the long term future of the nation's playing fields and inform and inspire other providers to adopt the London Playing Fields Foundation model which highlights the importance of:

- Providing leadership by becoming the first port of call for those seeking help in the protection, provision and promotion of playing fields
- Using sports development principles to underpin the management of playing fields to ensure that they engender a lifelong love and involvement in sport
- Designing and delivering innovative approaches to engaging with and supporting disadvantaged and under-represented groups.
- Using its facilities, expertise and networks to deliver wider social, health and educational outcomes and associated cost savings to society
- Initiating and developing relationships with elite sport and iconic venues so that the top end of sport can nourish the roots

I also welcome the Substance recommendation for London Playing Fields Foundation to push ahead with updating the audit of playing fields in London as the improved insight will lead to stronger protection, better use of existing sites and more strategic investment. Our ultimate goal is to create a long term legacy so that in 100 years time people look back at us with the same fondness and gratitude that we have for those philanthropists who founded the charity.



ALEX WELSH
CHIEF EXECUTIVE

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY —

The London Playing Fields Foundation 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 clubs and sport for development work suggests that LPFF remains an attractive organisation in which funders and commissioners can invest. 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.

The full report is available at www.lpff.org.uk

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