



**SPORT  
ENGLAND**



# **EAST LANCASHIRE FOOTBALL DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATION**

**COMMUNITY ASSET CASE STUDY**

# IN BRIEF



**Name:** East Lancashire Football Development Association

**Type:** Creation of a collective of football leagues for the development of grass football pitches. Refurbishment of changing rooms are also planned

**Type of organisation:** A Community Interest Company - East Lancashire Football Development Association

**Sports:** Football. Plans to deliver cricket in the next phase of the project

**Overall cost:** £540,000

**Sport England investment:** £90,000

**Other significant funding:**

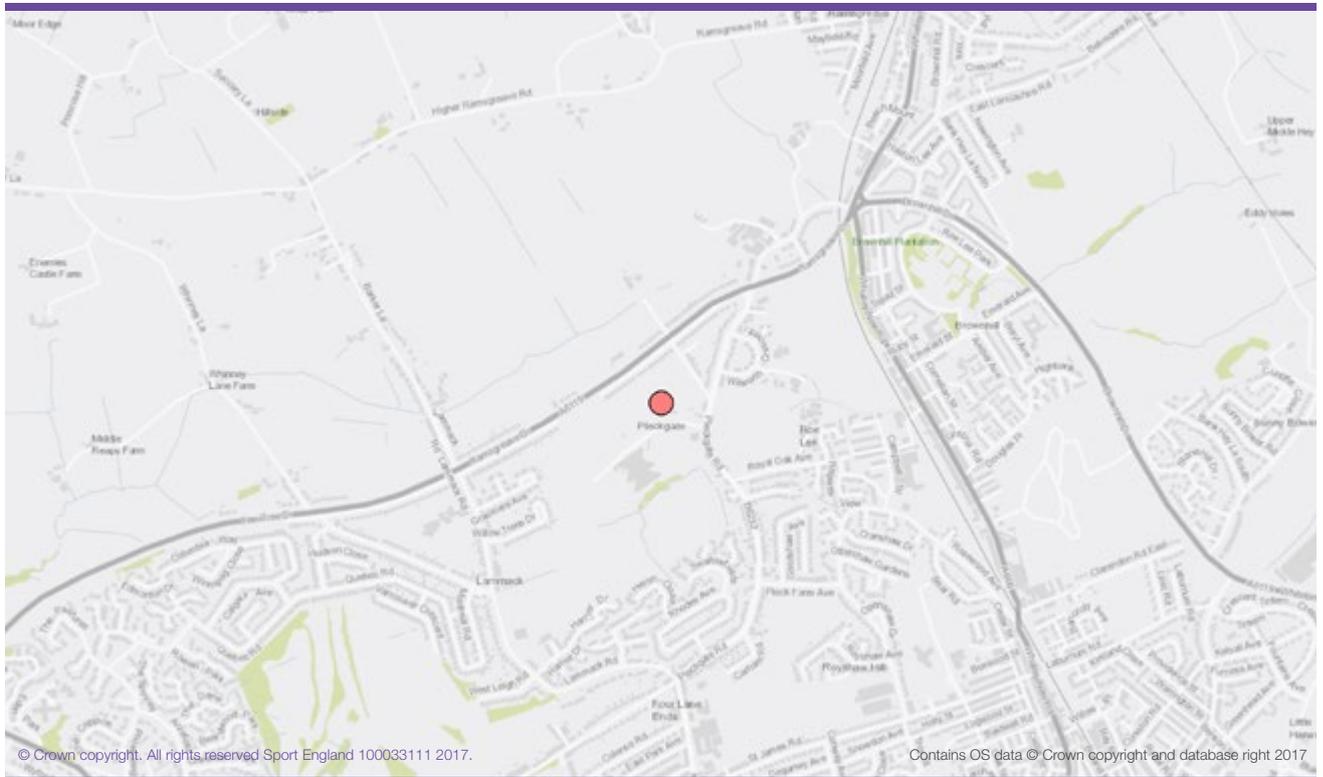
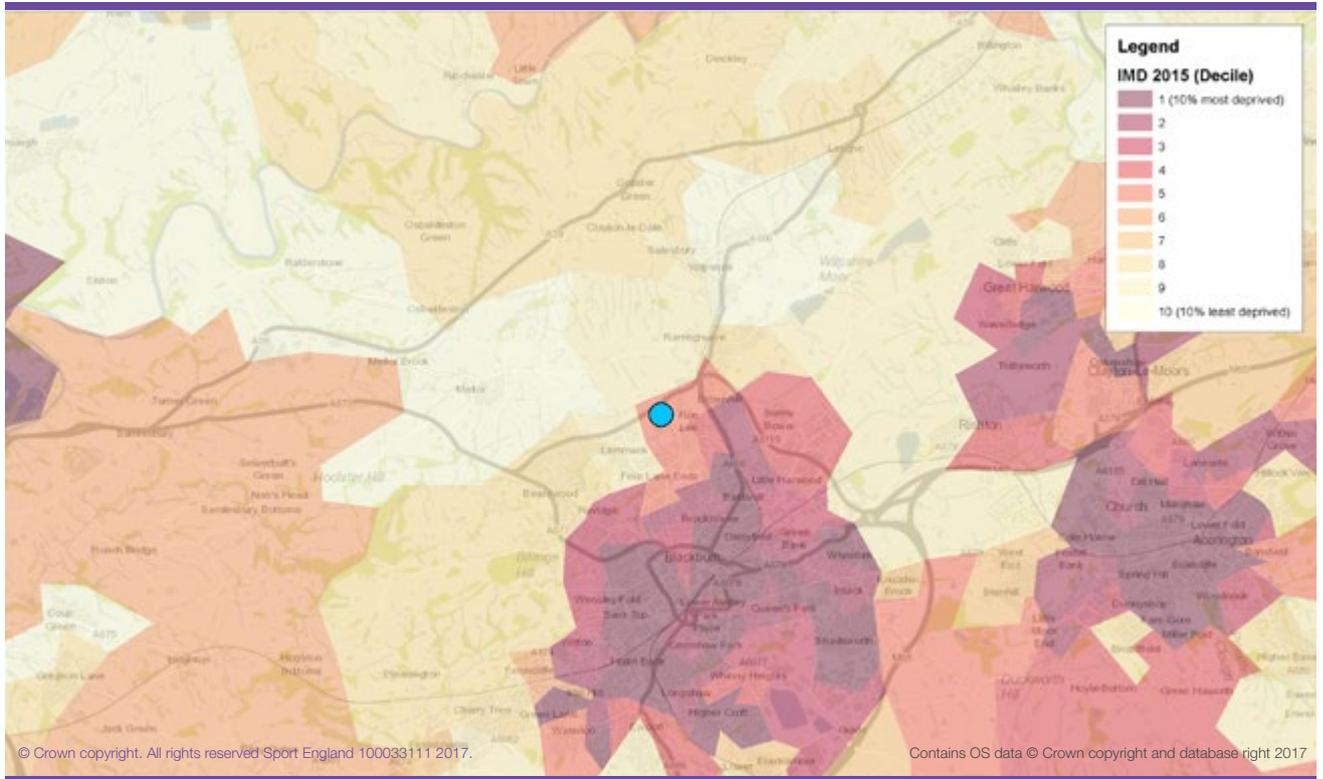
- Power to Change £200,000
- Football Foundation £98,979.00
- Section 106 contribution from a local housing development £207,979

## PEOPLE AND PLACE

Category	
<b>ONS Urban / Rural</b>	
Top tier classification	Urban
Second tier classification	City and Town
<b>Geographical setting</b>	
Location description:	Industrial town in North West of England
Local Authority Population	147,049 <sup>1</sup>
<b>Local Authority and Region</b>	
Local authority	Blackburn with Darwen - Unitary
Region	North West
<b>IMD</b>	
LSOA ranking position	13,394 <sup>2</sup> This is in the top 41% MOST deprived neighbourhoods in England.

1 Source: Mid-Year Population Estimates 2016, ONS

2 Each LSOA is ranked out of 32,844 LSOAs in England; where 1 is the most deprived



# RESOURCES

## PROJECT COST:

**Total project cost: c. £540,000**

**Purpose:** Creation of a collective of football leagues for the development of grass football pitches. Refurbishment of changing rooms are also planned.

## SPORT ENGLAND CONTRIBUTION

**Protecting playing fields:** £90,000

## OTHER GRANT FUNDING

- **£200,000** from Power to Change
- **£207,979** as a [‘Section 106’ contribution](#) from a local housing development
- **£130,000** from the Football Foundation

There’s unanimous agreement at ELFDA that the Power to Change funding of £200,000 was a tipping point for them. It came at a time when they still had doubts that they could raise the £568,000 needed. However, it quickly became clear that this grant and Sport England funding bid of £90,000 was unlikely to make the project viable. The reasons for this were explained and the grant application to and subsequent offer from Power to Change of £200,000. A further £207,979 came from a section 106 agreement from a local housing development.

The Football Foundation committed £98,791. The community share issue raised £15,000 and hopefully this will encourage others to raise this type of investment. This and the section 106 money would pay for a changing room refurbishment (TBC). The Foundation and FA are committed to sustaining the project, particularly as ELFDA have successfully built a coalition of supportive partners:

*“WHEN THE POWER TO CHANGE MONEY WENT THROUGH WE GOT INVOLVED AROUND SUPPORTING IT WITH MATCH FUNDING. THE FF £99,000 WILL BRING CHANGING ROOMS BACK INTO USE WITH TWO CHANGING ROOMS, A KITCHEN, OFFICES AND A SPECTATOR AREA,”*

**ALICE WATSON, FA REGIONAL FACILITIES AND DEVELOPMENT MANAGER**

## OTHER SOURCES OF FINANCE

There was a contribution of £15,000 from ELFDA themselves.



The new pitches are now being used by local schools, including a primary which only had no access to a grass pitch before ELFDA's new facility was opened.



## OTHER SUPPORT

**Most significant:** The main source of support is from volunteer time running ELFDA and running the leagues.

**Local authority:** It was acknowledged that Blackburn with Darwen Council had been an important partner since 2012 when the conversation about asset transfer had started. This support, along with changes in personnel, worked to improve what had previously been a poor relationship. In 2014, the council produced a playing pitch strategy which listed the pitches identified by ELFDA (the 'Pleckgate site') as the number one priority.

Although there was a feeling from ELFDA that the process of developing the facility had partially been 'on the hoof' it had been a largely 'enjoyable experience'.

**Political:** Planning permission was not required to develop the site and the council signed a 25 year lease (an asset transfer) for ELFDA to take responsibility for managing and developing the site.

**Local Community:** The majority of local community members are now supportive and ELFDA aim to increase local volunteer participation. Further support was provided by the two primary schools that border the site, the fields will benefit both schools in terms of outdoor playing pitch space. Neither school previously had a sports field.

**Other help:** A secondary school opposite the site has offered a 180 car parking spaces for use by players, officials and spectators on match days. ELFDA has introduced a car-park marshal volunteering scheme which they believe will appease any concerns residents may have about an increased amount of traffic in the area.



# THE JOURNEY

## KEY EVENTS AND MILESTONES

Date	Event
First steps	Social Investment Business feasibility grant to explore if a Community Asset Transfer and restoration of grass pitches was achievable. Big Potential funding secured by Sporting Assets to enable them to provide both strategic leadership and build capability and capacity in ELFDA.
2014	The East Lancashire Football Development Association (ELFDA) is formed, bringing together three formerly disconnected adult and youth leagues
April 2015	Sport England funding is confirmed
May 2015	Power to Change funding secured (this was when the ELFDA team knew their plans could become reality)
November 2015	Football Foundation grant £100,000 secured
April 2016	Community engagement day held
July 2016	Work started on developing/improving pitches
September 2017	New facilities open

**The spark:** ELFDA came from a group of people with the “*desire and will to save grassroots football in the town*”.

Sporting Assets were invited to attend a meeting between an action group (later to become ELFDA) and the council to discuss the state of local grass football pitches. From this discussion a suggestion of a community asset transfer of pitches was identified as a possible solution with third party funding available to explore if it were feasible.

At this same event, the FA explained that funding was available for facilities, but this was unlikely to go to council's who could not guarantee maintenance of facilities in the long term. Smarter ways of operating facilities differently using third sector operators were sought. Local league secretaries from the area took up this challenge and ELFDA was born, becoming a constituted group and bidding for funding. This was a new way of doing things and those involved saw it as a potential model for the rest of the country.

**Knowledge of the audience:** The leagues represented by ELFDA have good, longstanding and positive relationships with individual club officials -their primary audience. Additional community consultation was undertaken and a community engagement event was held. Colin Brindle, an ELFDA director, mentioned “*the number of leagues, not clubs that have disappeared over the last few years*” as a motivating factor for the asset transfer, particularly as Blackburn has a long tradition of organising and developing football. This goes back to the 1880s when Blackburn Rovers became one of the 23 clubs to form the Lancashire Football Association.

**The location:** Blackburn Rovers helped support the initial planning, they could see that there was a need for the facility and a “*shortfall of good quality grass pitches*”. There was agreement that the existing pitches were often waterlogged, preventing many grassroots games from taking place. Geoff Wilkinson, social inclusion director at ELFDA, highlighted the frustration felt around the site being neglected and run down:



***“THE COUNCIL CAN’T LOOK AFTER THE PITCHES THEY HAVEN’T GOT THE MONEY. IF A COUNCIL CAN’T PAY FOR THEM WE NEEDED TO STEP IN”***

**GEOFF WILKINSON, ELFDA SOCIAL INCLUSION DIRECTOR**

## FIRST STEPS

From the outset the aim was to work with the council. An agreement was reached that once the development is completed ELFDA will take over the operation and management of the facilities under the terms of a 25 year lease i.e. an asset transfer.

A process of trust building between local leagues and the council started in 2012, motivated by the need to keep grass roots pitches in the town. A playing pitch strategy was published by Blackburn Council in 2014. This suggested that, because of the commitment of a number of people within local leagues and clubs, player numbers were increasing rather than dropping. It was recognised that good facilities were needed to capitalise on this.



ELFDA's innovation is to have brought three quite separate leagues together into one association. More than 400 clubs' interests are represented, both adult and youth clubs amongst them.

## FORMATION

ELFDA brought together three leagues, two adult (Blackburn Combination and Sunday League) and one youth (Youth Alliance). ELFDA initially felt “*a little bit out of their depth*”, but the expertise of a consultancy, Sporting Assets, helped guide them through the set up process. This resulted in the creation of a Company Limited by Guarantee and later a Community Interest Company.

## CAPACITY BUILDING

All directors acknowledged that they had never undertaken a project of this type. However, a mix of skills (banking, finance, commerce etc.) were brought together in a partnership which also had “*organisational skills in abundance through our years involved in local football.*” - Bill Maynard, ELFDA chair.

The initial funding application to Power to Change (PTC) of £200,000 and news that it had been approved made everyone realise that the scheme would happen. As part of the funding approval ELFDA had to appoint officers to various positions that enabled PTC priorities to be delivered. These included a social inclusion officer, to ensure safeguarding and equality standards were maintained, and the delivery of a social inclusion strategy.

ELFDA are aware that in the future they need to build links with other organisations. This will enable them to deliver their aims and objectives, and to ensure that football is used for wider social outcomes. ELFDA's approach is to “*use football as a carrot to get people into services*” and the social inclusion officer role will help them achieve this.

## FUNDING

Once the Sport England and Power to Change funds were secured, ELFDA were confident that the project was viable. This, added to the support from the council and the local school (who provided a parking solution), ensured that the project was sustainable. ELFDA continued to be supported throughout this process by Sporting Assets.



ELFDA put plenty of time and effort into allaying local residents' fears about their project. One major concern was that the pitches would be 'privatised'. But they very much remain a community asset – accessible to the general public.



## DEVELOPMENT

A key moment for ELFDA was when they were able to appease local concerns over the development of their new facility. The Residents Association had initially opposed the project.

A consultation event was held at which ELFDA explained their proposals and debunked some false rumours that had arisen. Key messages delivered were:

- The land could otherwise be used for a new housing development with more noise and disruption over a longer period of time
- There would be no floodlights or burger vans
- Residents would still have access to the fields as it was a community asset
- All concerns around car parking would be alleviated with marshals and volunteers.

This was followed up by a community engagement day in 2014. ELFDA directors were acutely aware that they would be making large financial decisions which could affect the lives of many local residents. Plenty of time needed to be factored into the process to allow for consultation and re-planning.

## BUSINESS PLANNING

ELFDA's business plan identifies income streams set aside to pay for an enhanced annual pitch maintenance program. This will keep them in perfect playing condition.

The plan is based on:

- A £560,000 investment to create a new football hub
- Establishing nine new pitches
- Consolidating football pitch provision into a multi pitch hub for improved financial sustainability
- A secondary school opposite the site having offered ELFDA the use of 180 car parking spaces for players, officials and spectators on match days.

ELFDA approached the local FA for advice and both parties agreed to structure the pricing to be fair to the local leagues and not price them out of the facility.

## INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT

By providing advice and a 25-year lease on the site, the council has enabled external funding to be secured. Additional support has come from the Lancashire County FA who helped with ELFDA's football development plan; and Blackburn Rovers FC who advised on pitch maintenance. On completing the asset transfer the council will remain involved in the development of the site. They consider it a best practice example of a successful playing fields asset transfer.

## THE FUTURE

ELFDA are hopeful that their new site will prove to be instrumental in supporting many local people. A facilitator of local alcohol and substance misuse recovery programmes thinks that service users will gain real benefits from using the facilities as an everyday social support structure:

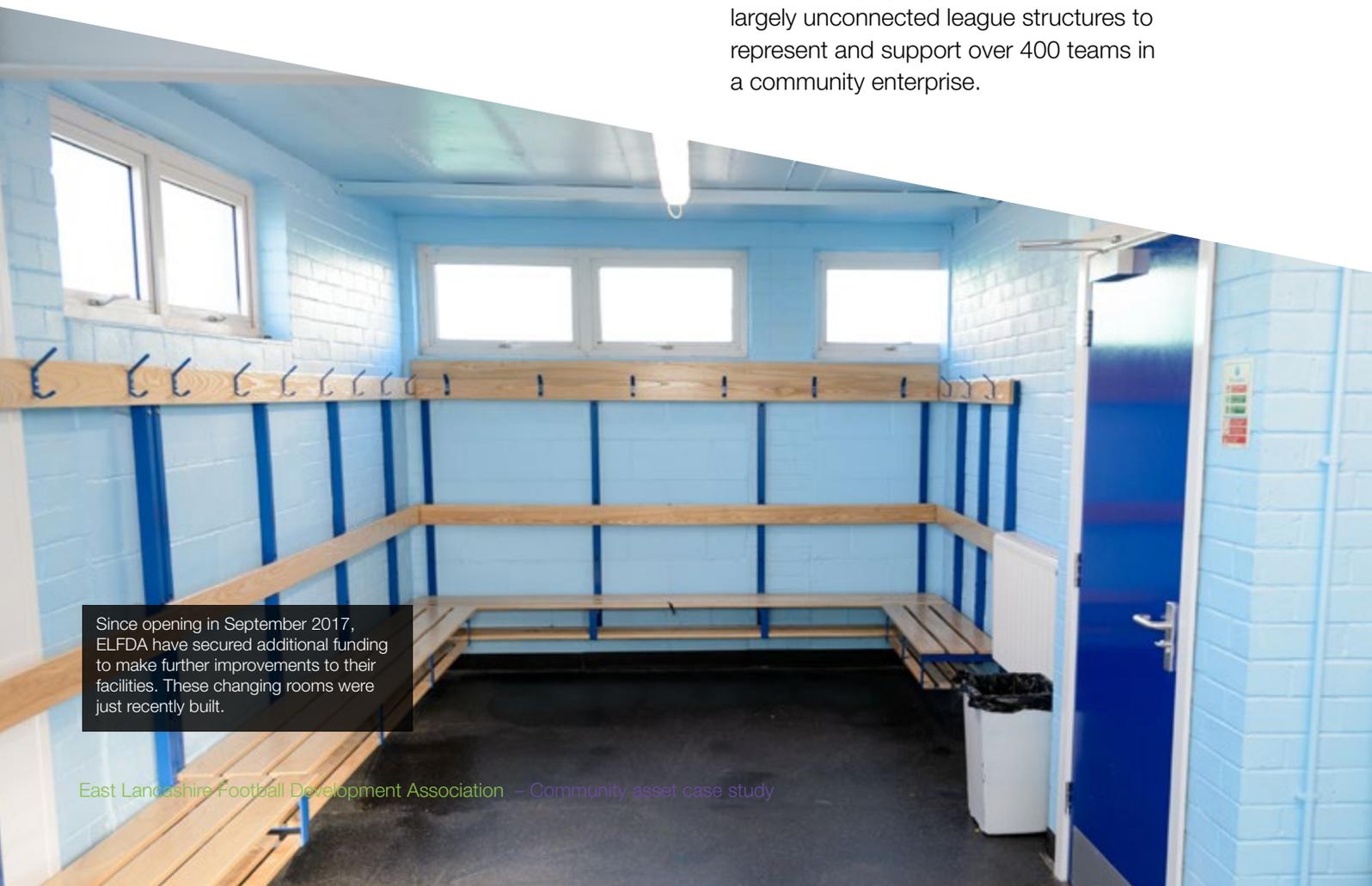
*“As service users they think I can find them a team but it doesn't work like that, they need to be seen by managers of the football teams. Then if they start playing with teams without support it helps them with the next stages of life. They have new friends and wellbeing and take positive steps themselves. Their use of the ELFDA booking system might get them to a stage where they are forming their own teams.”*

Now that their new facility is up and running ELFDA's directors are planning to undertake a similar asset transfer at the nearby Pleasington playing fields (around four miles away).

They're also considering applying for a second grant of £40-50,000 for an FA pitch improvement programme. This will allow them to look after the pitches through purchase of maintenance equipment and storage.

## USP

The uniqueness of the development has been in bringing together three separate and largely unconnected league structures to represent and support over 400 teams in a community enterprise.



Since opening in September 2017, ELFDA have secured additional funding to make further improvements to their facilities. These changing rooms were just recently built.

# IMPACT

## USAGE

At the time of writing, usage figures were not yet available from ELFDA. However they plan to have a throughput figure of 13,500 each year, 7,500 of these users will be children or young people and approximately 6,000 will be adult footballers.

(ELFDA will collate the bookings centrally. It was suggested by the council that the participation figures will increase due to more teams using the pitches more often as well as pupils from the adjacent secondary school and two primary schools having access to the site. There will also continue to be informal public use of the site, mainly in the evenings and at weekends.)

## OTHER LOCAL IMPACT

Geoff Wilkinson says that the impact the site will have on the players making use of it extends beyond just playing. He predicts that it will open up social circles, widen access to grassroots community leagues, and strengthen progression routes from informal play into affiliated clubs.

### Initiatives

The Blackburn Rovers Kicks (Premier League Charitable Fund Programme) coordinator is also hopeful that the site will help boost grassroots football; through greater use by BAME groups, women and girl's teams and disability groups. Yasir from the Abu Hanifah Foundation FC said that the site would allow them to increase their membership figures, adding: "*The potential is massive. We have got 450 [members currently] and [another] 70 on a waiting list. We could double [membership]*".

## Performance against the business plan

ELFDA will report directly to the Football Foundation against participation and retention rates, and specifically growth in the numbers of teams and female players. Key targets are:

- A total of over 450 matches every year, with a formal annual play throughput of over 13,500 players in year one
- 18 matches on the pitches every weekend (nine adult plus others and off-season usage)
- Host fixtures from the Accrington District Football League and the Saturday Football Combination, as well as summer football tournaments
- Provide use for St Gabriel's and Holy Souls primary school that currently has no access to a grass pitch
- Additional informal recreation and sport available every day of the year.



# IMPACT

## SPORT ENGLAND OUTCOMES

### Community Asset Fund – Key Outcomes: Innovation

What makes ELFDA stand out is the innovative way they went about forming a body which is able to represent the needs of more than 400 grassroots teams. It's an approach which has piqued the interest of the FA, local council and funders. One which is being followed with interest.

### Third party support

Whilst securing the capital grants were key milestones on the journey without the third-party funding to help support and grow the organisations capacity and capability the capital grants would not have happened. It is the need to provide skills and resources that enables complex projects like ELFDA to happen. Accessing third party funding and support was the critical success factor because neither the Council or ELFDA had the resources to fund these key building blocks.

Some would call it giving the Community Group two things:

- 'arms and legs' – by way of additional capacity; and
- 'bit of brain power' – the strategic leadership to map out 'what and how' needs to be done. Sporting Assets provided capacity and by the end of the project ELFDA had grown into a community sports based social enterprise capable of running the business.

So third party funding (or some way of paying for specialist support) was the critical driver behind the successful delivery of this project.



ELFDA are aiming to host more than 450 matches every year.

## OTHER STRATEGIC OUTCOMES

**Participation:** The site is important as it will allow the community to play five-a-side and 11-a-side games and will increase participation across many leagues, ages, abilities and demographic groups. This is hoped not only to increase sports participation but many other health and wellbeing outcomes. Geoff Wilkinson, ELFDA's social inclusion director told us: *"The idea behind [the pitches] is they are accessible and we can finally play 11-a-side. We want to get spotted by other teams. My role to empower more people to not just play the game but play life, football is just one part of it but it's an important part"*.

**Diversity:** Local club, Abu Hanifah Foundation FC, are a multi-award winning grassroots community club which was voted the 2015 FA National Charter Standard football club of the year. It has over 350 members, with teams competing in the East Lancashire Football Alliance League and will be a key tenant at the site. The club now sit on the board of ELFDA and are committed to promoting inclusion. They think that the site will *"create a central hub where parents can come and watch"*, rather than the previous arrangement of playing matches at a number of facilities across the county.

**Community development:** Blackburn Rovers will support the upskilling of local coaches and volunteers through continuous professional development.

**New Ways of Working & New Types of Organisation:** ELFDA are the first example of a Community Interest Company formed to represent the interests of a number of grass roots leagues.

**Innovations:** an additional innovation is the appointment of a social inclusion officer to ensure wider social benefits to ELFDA's new facility and that a range of communities are engaged.



*"We can sit, have a chat and a coffee while the kids are skating. They have their freedom then. There are no other places to hang out as a family"*.

## TIPS FROM ELFDA

- Take a long term view and persevere
- Link to local strategies – in their case the council's playing pitch strategy
- Build relationships – with the local council and county and National FA
- Reach out to other organisations that can add value
- Play to your strengths and recognise where specialist support is needed
- Manage your volunteer networks - there are hundreds of volunteers associated with this project.

## WHAT THEY WOULD DO DIFFERENTLY

Though neither of these things had a detrimental effect on their project, ELFDA's directors suggested that there were two things that they could have done differently. The first was that they, along with Blackburn and Darwen council officers, could have adopted a more strategic approach at the outset - agreeing a phased approach to all facilities that had the potential for asset transfer. However, in mitigation, the experience, skills and knowledge that have been gained through the successful transfer of the site to ELFDA, would suggest that the process for acquiring other similar sites should be more efficient.

Secondly, ELFDA now recognise that it is critical to get the residents on side much earlier in the process. By the time they managed to discuss the site with different groups of residents, they were on the back foot and having to explain that several of the things that were of concern to them weren't planned. In particular, the residents were needlessly concerned that they wouldn't be allowed any access to the site once it had been transferred.

## LEARNING FOR SPORT ENGLAND AND OTHER SUPPORTERS

**Sport England:** Support organisations to show that they have adequate changing facilities for the size of the site.

**Others:** The project so far has only developed pitches, although there is a bid for funding for changing rooms pending. Partners and funders might want to discuss how other elements could be included in the site to assist sustainability – particularly those that might generate revenue (food, drink etc.)

More support from governing bodies is needed to help volunteers with the funding processes and areas such as health and safety, corporate governance, funder priorities, legal requirements, tax and insurance.

If this example is to be used as a model for elsewhere, there will need to be key individuals within local authorities to help, support and guide replicas of the project and if they are not identified, other help may be required from funders and governing bodies.



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