

Guidance on Community Use Agreements for Sports and Education Facilities

Purpose of Guidance

This informal guidance note has been prepared by the Council to assist applicants, landowners and operators in understanding expectations in relation to Community Use Agreements (CUAs).

The borough contains a significant number of sports facilities, playing fields and schools sites, many of which are privately owned or operated and where there may be opportunities to increase the wider public benefits through multi-use and co-location. In circumstances where development proposals include new or enhanced sports or educational facilities, or where proposals rely upon wider community benefit to support policy compliance, the Council will expect appropriate community access arrangements to be secured through the planning process.

The document has been prepared to provide guidance on:

- What a Community Use Agreement is
- When the Council is likely to require one
- What a Community Use Agreement should typically include
- How it will normally be secured

It is intended to support early discussions at pre-application stage and to provide clarity and consistency for applicants.

The Planning Obligations Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) (2026) sets out in section 7 the planning policy context for the use of Community Use Agreements, including the relevant policies in the Council's adopted Local Plan.

What is a Community Use Agreement?

A Community Use Agreement (CUA) is a formal arrangement that secures public access to sports, leisure or educational facilities that may otherwise be privately operated. A CUA ensures that community benefits put forward in the support of a planning application are delivered in practice or managed over time.

A CUA will normally set out:

- The sporting facilities and ancillary facilities (such as car park, changing rooms, pavilions etc) to be made available
- The hours during which community access will be provided, for weekday and weekends, both during school term and school holidays
- The implementation date and any phasing of facilities associated with the CUA
- Pricing arrangements and affordability
- Eligibility of those who can use the facilities
- Management and booking procedures

- Safeguarding and site security arrangements (where relevant)
- Arrangements for monitoring and review
- Specific exclusions in response to the needs of the primary use of the site (for example sports halls during exam periods, or due to safeguarding restrictions etc.)

CUAs should be clear, proportionate and capable of being effectively implemented. Informal or discretionary arrangements will not be acceptable where community access forms part of the case made through a planning application.

When Community Use Agreements Are Likely to be Required

The Council will typically seek a CUA where proposals involve:

- New or enhanced indoor or outdoor sports facilities, independent or part of a development
- Artificial grass pitches (including 3G pitches)
- Sports halls, studios, swimming pools or multi-use games areas (MUGAs)
- Development affecting existing playing fields
- Expansions or intensification of independent / free and academy schools
- There is an identified local deficit in sports provision as identified in the [Playing Pitch and Outdoor Sports Strategy](#)
- Development proposals that rely upon wider community benefit to justify policy compliance.

In particular, where development affects designated open land (Green Belt, Local Green Space, Metropolitan Open Land or Open Land of Townscape Importance), or playing fields, appropriate and secured community access may form an important part of the Council's assessment.

For schools, the Council recognises that safeguarding and operational management are key considerations. However, legal and governance can be put in place to manage risks, and where community access is relied upon to support the proposal it must be clearly defined and appropriately secured.

How Community Use Agreements will be Secured

CUAs will normally be secured through a Section 106 planning obligation where the Council considers that a legally binding agreement is necessary to secure the required community access arrangements.

Where appropriate, the CUA will be identified as a heads of term for the Section 106 agreement, with the detailed terms of the CUA to be agreed with the Council as part of the Section 106 process.

This approach is generally appropriate where:

- Where the development affects protected playing fields or designated open land;
- Long-term community access is necessary;
- Detailed pricing, monitoring and review provisions are required; or
- The proposal relies on community access to demonstrate policy compliance.

The Section 106 agreement will set out the relevant obligations and mechanisms for securing the CUA, including where necessary, arrangements for access, pricing, monitoring, review and enforcement.

Early Engagement and the Planning Process

Applicants are strongly encouraged to discuss potential community use requirements with the Council at pre-application stage. Early engagement can help to ensure that:

- Sporting benefits will address local sporting needs (including those identified in the Council's Playing Pitch and Open Sports Strategy)
- The site design accommodates community access
- Safeguarding and security considerations are properly addressed
- Management arrangements are realistic and deliverable
- Legal mechanisms are identified at an early stage
- The benefits of the CUA are clearly understood and can be appropriately considered through the planning process

Further details on the types of pre-application advice available can be found on the Council's website via:

www.richmond.gov.uk/pre-applications

Early engagement may involve engaging with the Council's Sports and Fitness Services, and as appropriate National Governing Bodies of Sport along with Sport England, to ensure any community use will achieve sporting and public health outcomes. There may be other local sporting or voluntary clubs or organisations that can be signposted to discuss relevant proposals with.

Where a CUA is likely to be required, at application stage an outline agreement should be submitted, including key details, on what facilities are to be available for community use, how community access to the facilities will be secured (ensuring that access is affordable and accessible), and other aspects including how it will be managed, maintained and reviewed, such as the practical arrangements, the hours/days of availability and pricing.

The level of detail secured through planning should be proportionate to the scale and type of development proposed, while still providing sufficient detail for the Council to assess and determine applications.

What are the Benefits of a Community Use Agreement?

CUAs are not solely a mechanism for securing mitigation through the planning system. When structured positively, they can create lasting partnerships between educational establishments, sports organisations and the wider community, delivering benefit that extend beyond the planning process. These benefits include:

1.) Supporting Health and Wellbeing

In a borough where participation in organised sports is high and demand for pitches and indoor space is significant, shared use of facilities can help to address identified shortfalls

in the provision as detailed in the borough's Playing Pitch and Outdoor Sports Assessment and Strategy and Indoor Sports Facility Needs Assessment:

www.richmond.gov.uk/sport_open_space_and_recreation_needs_assessment

Community access to sports and recreational facilities can help support the local communities health and wellbeing by:

- Increasing opportunities for physical activity across all age groups
- Support borough-wide health and wellbeing objectives as set out in the boroughs leisure strategy, which can be accessed via:
www.richmond.gov.uk/richmond_moves_strategy.pdf
- Contributes to social cohesion and mental wellbeing
- Provides accessible local facilities that reduce travel demand, or enables active travel as a form of travel to and from leisure and fitness activities, in line with Policy 1 (Living Locally) of the Council's Local Plan.

2.) Maximising Use of Existing Infrastructure

As identified within the boroughs Playing Pitch and Outdoor Sports Assessment and Strategy and Indoor Sports Facility Needs Assessment, there are shortfalls in specific sports requirements. The borough is limited in appropriate locations to accommodate more facilities, however, it is identified that many schools and private sport facilities can support the identified need by engaging in CUA outside school hours. These CUAs can:

- Maximise the efficient use of existing buildings and land
- Improve the long-term viability of facilities
- Support maintenance and reinvestment through additional income streams
- Reduce the need for new standalone development elsewhere and support the sustainable development principles by making better use of land and infrastructure already in place.

3.) Fostering Positive Partnerships

In some cases, CUAs facilitate collaborative arrangements between the operator and local sports clubs. For example a local football club may use school pitches in the evenings and at weekends, in return the club may provide coaching during curriculum PE lessons, extracurricular sessions or holiday programmes, as well as financial contributions to pitch maintenance or equipment.

These reciprocal arrangements often provide educational and operational benefits for the school as well as community benefits, these include:

- Enhance the quality of sports provision for pupils and/or the school
- Broaden access to qualified coaching that may not be accessible otherwise
- Create clear player development pathways from school sport into local clubs
- Strengthen relationships between schools and their surrounding communities
- Broaden opportunities to access funding or other financial benefits, through investment, discounts or bids, facilitated through partnership working and sporting bodies.

4.) Supporting Educational Outcomes

Community partnerships can:

- Support and enrich the curriculum through specialist coaching
- Increase pupil participation in competitive sport
- Provide volunteering and leadership opportunities
- Strengthen links with local organisations.

In particular, for privately operated facilities, structured community access can also demonstrate civic contribution and social value within the borough.

5.) Enhancing Community Cohesion

The Council encourages applicants to view CUA as an opportunity to:

- Strengthen local partnerships and increase interaction between different age groups and communities
- Enhance the quality and reach of their facilities and provide inclusive spaces for grass pitch sport
- Demonstrate social value and community engagement, helping to foster a sense of shared ownership of local facilities
- Support borough-wide health and sport objectives.

This is particularly important in areas where access to affordable sport facilities is constrained. Early engagement with local clubs and sport organisations can often identify mutually beneficial arrangements prior to the submission of a planning application.

6.) Delivering Certainty and Clarity

A formal CUA avoids the reliance on informal arrangements which may change over time and provides reassurance that the agreed community benefits will be delivered. In particular a formal CUA provides:

- Clear expectations for all parties
- Transparent booking and pricing arrangements
- Defined safeguarding and access controls
- Long-term certainty for community users
- Build in review and monitoring to enable changes in provision.

Key Components of a Community Use Agreement

Key components of a Community Use Agreement (CUA) include:

1.) Facilities Provided

Clearly identifying the facilities covered – indoor, outdoor and ancillary provision:

- Indoor activity provision (e.g. sports halls, activity rooms and studios, including the number and size of space, with provision reflecting relevant national standards, guidance, and specifications as appropriate)

- Specific pitch provision (e.g. 3G pitch, dimensions)
- Changing facilities
- Parking arrangements
- Access routes
- Toilets

2.) Community Access

Specify hours and days for availability and unavailability of community access, such as:

- Weekday evening hours (e.g. 17:00 – 20:00)
- Weekend hours
- Year-round access or any different access arrangements during holidays and outside typical term time
- Specific exclusions (exam periods, safeguarding restrictions etc.) – note that there should be an appropriate level of access provided and alternative arrangements suggested where possible

Encourage an agreement of:

- Minimum guaranteed hours per week
- Separate summer/winter timetables as appropriate.

3.) Pricing and Affordability

Consideration should be given to:

- A pricing structure
- Differential pricing including affordable rates for different sets of users (both individuals and clubs) (specifying e.g. for local clubs, junior rates, concessions)
- Commitment that pricing remains comparable to public facilities

Appropriate pricing for community use should take into consideration costs as well as income. A useful starting point will be to carry out a benchmarking exercise of other local provision and the rates of hire for similar facilities. The Council's Fair Access pricing offers free and discounted options to make sure everyone can afford to access leisure facilities. It is encouraged that pricing is reviewed annually as required. Revenue can be used in the longer-term to renew and develop facilities further, including the option of a sinking fund for future capital expense.

4.) Management and Booking Arrangements

The CUA should cover:

- A named management body (e.g. school, trust, operator etc.)
- A public booking system (not informal requests)
- A named contact point to manage and coordinate bookings
- An advance booking window
- A cancellation policy.

It is expected that the lead management body will provide appropriate updates and communication with the Council's Sports and Fitness Services.

5.) Safeguarding and Access Controls (*Particularly for Schools*)

The CUA should consider the following elements with regards to safeguarding and access control:

- Separate entrance for community users (where feasible)
- A zoning of community accessible areas
- DBS and supervision arrangements where required
- Car park management.

6.) Monitoring and Reporting

The CUA should set targets for community use, and the party responsible for managing the community use, with the expectation that the best endeavours are undertaken to achieve them.

The CUA should consider the ongoing use of the facilities and effectiveness of the CUA. This includes submitting regular usage reports to the Council, to provide insight into the type of user accessing the facilities, age groups, club types, peak/off peak usage etc. Where appropriate, monitoring and review should include liaison with relevant community groups and local councillors, with the CUA identifying an appropriate point of contact (such as a liaison officer) where necessary. This helps to understand the local experience of and demand for community use at the site, and identify any issues and inform opportunities to improve access. The CUA should clearly outline the mechanism for review, particularly if the facilities are underused, or potential to increase hours / days.

Model Template for Community Use Agreements

To assist applicants in preparing appropriate policy-compliant CUA, the Council encourages the use of the Sport England Model Community Use Agreement template as the starting point for drafting. The template for Community Use Agreements and further guidance can be found via the Sport England website:

www.sportengland.org/how-we-can-help/facilities-and-planning/planning-for-sport/community-use-agreements

There is also dedicated information for schools on opening up their facilities to community use:

www.sportengland.org/funding-and-campaigns/use-our-school

The model template provides a structured framework covering the core components typically required to secure a meaningful and enforceable community access to sports and recreational facilities. It is clear it can be amended as appropriate to reflect the context.

Applicants should note that the use of the model template does not remove the need to tailor the agreement to the specific site, facility and operational context.