

Facilities Strategy

2018 – 2025



“To create an innovative and inspiring network of sustainable athletics facilities, with the capacity to meet both current and future demand across England”

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1 Introduction



About England Athletics

England Athletics is the membership and development body for grassroots athletics and running clubs in England.

We work closely with UK Athletics, who are responsible for establishing the rules of the sport across the whole of the United Kingdom, for organising major televised events and for the British Athletics team that competes at the Olympic, Paralympic, World and European Championships. We also work collaboratively with the other home country athletics federations in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland and other athletics bodies in England.

High profile success at international level and a major boom in mass participation running has meant that interest in the sport of athletics and running in England is at an all-time high.

- 900,000 5-15-year olds participating in track and field at least once a month
- 7M people running at least 2 times per month (a 64% increase over the last 10 years)
- 1,350 England Athletics affiliated clubs
- 170,000 registered athletes
- 65,000 qualified coaches/ leaders
- 11,500 qualified officials
- 367 Outdoor Athletics Tracks

The England Athletics Strategic Plan *Athletics and Running: for Everyone, Forever* describes the overall vision for athletics and running in England over the next five years and how England Athletics is seeking to best serve such enthusiasm across the whole spectrum of the sport by seeking to sustain and increase participation and performance levels.

Our Vision

For athletics to be the most popular, inclusive sport in England.

Our Mission

To grow the number, range and accessibility of opportunities for everyone to experience athletics and running – enabling them to reach their full potential.

Our Strategic Priorities

1. Expand the capacity of the sport by supporting and developing its volunteers and other workforce.
2. Sustain and increase participation and performance levels.
3. Influence participation in the wider athletics market.



Our vision for athletics facilities

The purpose of this document is to set out our long term vision for athletics facilities in England.

Facilities form a vital component of the overall England Athletics strategy. The development, protection and enhancement of facilities will support our strategic plan and help us contribute to the delivery of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport's *Sporting Futures: A New Strategy for Sport* and Sport England's strategy *Towards an Active Nation*.

Appropriate facilities help to attract and inspire new participants and provide the foundation and focus for a significant proportion of the England Athletics family.

Having the right facilities in the right places is vitally important in providing opportunities that will encourage further growth and better personal performance and deliver the increases in participation that will primarily benefit the sport of athletics and running but also help to improve the general health and wellbeing of the population as a whole.

The England Athletics Strategic Plan notes that the sport increasingly needs to become financially sustainable and that a business-like and innovative approach is a vital component of its future success. Facilities are fundamental, but they are also expensive to create and to maintain. The sport therefore faces a significant challenge to develop, improve and maintain facilities, most of which are currently operated and funded by third parties.

Our ambition

This strategy sets out a challenge to all those involved with the delivery of the sport to be innovative and business like in the operation and development of facilities at a time of financial challenge, as we aim

"To create an innovative and inspiring network of sustainable athletics facilities, with the capacity to meet both current and future demand across England."

How will we achieve our ambition?

We estimate that a figure of circa £60m would need to be invested to bring the present network of outdoor synthetic track and field facilities to a safe, secure and operationally fit-for-purpose state. England Athletics does not have any capital resources available to us and there is limited investment available for capital projects from key partners. This strategy therefore sets out what the key priorities will be for us to achieve our ambition.

Our Key Facilities Priorities

Based on our strategic priorities we have adopted three key facilities priorities to guide the commitments made throughout this document:

- 1. Ensure that the allocation of resources to new and existing track and field facilities is prioritised to those that have the greatest potential to impact positively on general participation, club membership growth and retention, and improved personal performance.**
- 2. Actively encourage athletics and running facilities to be used to their fullest possible extent by the sport and by all sections of the community in order to maximise viability.**
- 3. Encourage innovative approaches to the location and design of facilities for individual components of the sport in order to increase reach and improve sustainability.**

2 Outdoor Track & Field Facilities



The background

- In England, in 2017, there were 367 outdoor athletics tracks; synthetic, cinder and permanent grass.
- 73% of tracks are synthetic – and thus provide a reasonable or better ‘all weather’, all year round option.
- 67% of tracks are floodlit; making evening/all year-round use possible.
- Many athletics facilities share a location with natural turf or artificial grass pitches which can limit access and restrict all year-round use.

Facilities are crucial to participating in track and field athletics for recreation, training and competition. Quality of design, social amenities, facility condition and layout have a substantial impact on athlete enjoyment, club capacity to operate effectively, venue flexibility to accommodate a broad range of athletics related uses and multi-sport provision. Ultimately, all these factors affect venue (and club) capacity to function on an effective business-like footing.

Quality of design, social amenities, facility condition and layout have a substantial impact on athlete enjoyment.

Hierarchy of Facilities

England Athletics has adopted UK Athletics’ Hierarchy of Facilities:

Compact Athletics Facilities

A new generation of affordable and sustainable satellite athletics facilities that provide a stepping stone into Club Venues.

Club Venues

Track and field facilities that have a strong anchor club membership and can provide appropriate training and competition opportunities.

Regional Competition Venues

UKA certified competition facilities with a strong anchor performance club, capable of hosting a high level of competition.

National Competition Venues

UKA/IAAF certified competition facilities capable of hosting the highest level of domestic competitions.

International Competition Venues

UKA/IAAF certified competition facilities capable of hosting world class competitions.

More details of this hierarchy of facilities and the club membership numbers required to sustain facilities at each level can be found in UKA’s Facilities Strategy.

TrackMark

Launched in 2018, TrackMark is UK Athletics' quality assurance scheme for Track & Field Athletics facilities. TrackMark is a low-cost accreditation process that utilises a simple web based portal. A venue that achieves TrackMark status is recognised by UKA as having well managed, well maintained facilities that are accessible to participants of all abilities.

UKA recognises that track and field facilities come in all shapes and sizes and TrackMark is split into six units so that venue operators can select and complete only the units that are relevant to them.

Unit 1 - Track: Track layout, Track surface condition

Unit 2 - Field: Throws and jumps facilities, field layout, safety equipment, disability provision

Unit 3 - Floodlighting: Floodlighting provision including track and field lux levels

Unit 4 - Ancillary facilities: Changing rooms, toilets, car parking, storage, clubroom/social areas, multi-purpose rooms, disability provision

Unit 5 - Operations: Staff/volunteer training, maintenance/inspection regimes

Unit 6 - Competition: Facility Competition Certification, photo finish, warm up areas, spectator seating, PA system, EDM, competition equipment, disability provision

ACTION: England Athletics will encourage all tracks to seek accreditation through TrackMark.

Track maintenance and refurbishment

The maintenance, upgrading and resurfacing of outdoor athletics tracks is, arguably, the main challenge faced by operators and clubs. For tracks over 20 years old that have catered for a reasonable level of use and have not benefitted from interim investment, the estimated cost of refurbishment and of bringing all main facilities up to a good standard can be in the region of a million pounds.

Not every track can be a Regional Competition Venue. The majority need to focus on the provision of high quality training for the sport, provision for other forms of community access and use and offering a good standard of social amenities.

ACTION: England Athletics will help venues to identify the level in the Hierarchy of Facilities that is most appropriate for them and will support clubs seeking to raise funding to maintain facilities at that level.

TrackMark is UK Athletics' quality assurance scheme for Track & Field Athletics facilities

"England Athletics recognises the specific challenge for track and field facilities in safeguarding their future."

(Strategic Plan page 30)

A more commercial focus

England Athletics has limited direct influence over facilities. Track and field athletics in England is predominantly reliant on the public sector for the provision, management and maintenance of the facilities it uses.

The operation of the majority of publicly owned tracks still necessitates some level of subsidy, but this subsidised operational model is no longer sustainable. In common with other aspects of public sector leisure stock, athletics tracks are under pressure to improve usage, generate more income and limit the net cost of operation. Proactive management will be required to achieve this without impacting negatively on the end user.

The characteristics of track venues which are being more proactively managed include the following:

- A clear, positive (not just cost-cutting based) business plan in place with associated usage and income targets and someone accountable for achieving these.
- A high level of actively programmed year-round use for club athletics and competitions, schools training and competitions, and non-athletics based sports and events.
- In situ club(s) that are effective and business-like with good operational systems
- A positive working relationship (i.e. something more than simply charging for use of the facility) between owner/operator and the in situ club(s).
- Measurement and evaluation of take-up and usage levels is accurate and used to inform management practice.
- The net operating cost is reducing on an annual basis without adversely affecting programme quality, club effectiveness and track condition.

England Athletics recognises the vital role that local authorities and educational institutions such as schools, colleges and universities play in providing for our sport and we will continue to work closely with partners in these sectors and to share ideas for encouraging the integration of athletic disciplines into a wide variety of settings. For example: marking short sprint tracks on school playgrounds. We also recognise that the relationship between athletic clubs and facility owners will change as a result of economic constraints. Clubs will need to work closely with facility owners to help identify opportunities to increase income and reduce costs.

ACTION: England Athletics will help clubs to develop a strong partnership with facility owners / operators and will share examples of good practice.

88% of athletics tracks are publicly owned, 41% education and 47% local authority

(Sport England Active Places)

“England Athletics’ priority is to work with clubs, facility providers and operators to ensure we can safeguard the existing facilities stock by exploring innovative and commercially viable programmes at athletics facilities that generate revenue and reduce the subsidy gap.”

(Strategic Plan page 36)

“We know that to maintain a good network of facilities we need more people accessing them more often, creating sustainability and securing their use for athletics in the future.”

(Strategic Plan page 21)

Multi-sport hubs

Proactive management and sustainable models of operation are most commonly found at venues that are part of a wider sports complex. This tends to result in more creative uses of athletics facilities and has the benefit that changing provision, track supervision and maintenance are part of a wider operation with consequent economies of scale.

One example of diversification is the use of tracks by cycling groups, particularly those for disabled people and novice cyclists. If carefully managed, there is no reason why this type of additional activity should have any detrimental impact on the track surface.

ACTION: England Athletics will prioritise new track and field facilities within multi-sport hubs.

Athletics track infields and provision for throws disciplines

There is a common misconception that athletics is only a summer sport. The reality is that training takes place on the track and on the infield throughout the year. In some facilities, where a sports pitch is located on the infield, this has led to conflict between those using the pitch for team sports and athletes participating in throws (shot, discus, hammer and javelin) events or training.

Whilst recognising the important contribution that diversification can play in ensuring the sustainability of an athletics facility, it is essential that the use of the infield for athletics retains priority, or that suitable alternative facilities for throws are provided before any restrictions are placed on the use of the infield. This also applies to proposals for the replacement of the infield with an artificial grass pitch.

Despite there being over 70,000 grass pitches in England, but only 268 synthetic athletics tracks, there is frequently an expectation that the track infield will be made available for football or rugby, and this can have a detrimental impact on athletics. There are several tracks where heavy throws in particular are either restricted to the summer, or banned altogether, because of concerns over their impact on the quality of the turf for ball sports. Whilst appreciating the pressure some local authorities feel under to provide additional facilities for football, this should not be at the expense of the several hundred track and field athletes for whom there is usually only one athletics facility.

ACTION: England Athletics will support athletics clubs in disputes with facility operators and local authorities over the use of the track infield for heavy throws and will collate examples of good practice and design guidance on minimum requirements for external throws areas.

“Most track and field venues are not owned by the clubs who use them. Financial pressures mean that we must work in partnership with clubs and bodies from other sports and collaborate to ensure that we make the most of existing facilities and demonstrate value for money. England Athletics can and will facilitate this process”

(Strategic Plan page 22)

Artificial grass pitches

There are just over 6,000 artificial grass pitches (AGPs) in England but over half of these were built in the last decade and the rate of growth is accelerating, due to football and rugby funded grants programmes.

For local authorities looking for a site for a new AGP, an athletics track infield may seem like an obvious choice, as a large level area of ground with the requisite infrastructure already in place – drainage, floodlighting, changing facilities etc. England Athletics accepts that sometimes, where the track cannot operate sustainably in isolation, we may need to accept that an AGP on the infield is the only viable way to protect the track in the longer term. However, we need to ensure that there is no impact on throws.

ACTION: England Athletics will require an external throws facility to be provided adjacent to and strongly connected to the track before an infield used extensively for throws is converted to an AGP. We will not support such a development where the infield remains important to the operation of the facility.

ACTION: England Athletics will continue to work with the manufacturers of artificial grass to encourage the development of products that are compatible with throws.

We need to ensure that the creation of new AGPs has no impact on throws.

Facilities for disabled athletes

The Equality Act 2010 places a legal duty on sports clubs to make reasonable adjustments to their services to ensure that they are accessible for disabled people to use.

The Activity Alliance estimates that there are over 11 million disabled people in the UK, which is one in five of the population, so also it makes good business sense to be welcoming to this significant section of our community. The Activity Alliance produces a useful guide to help clubs improve physical access for disabled people and Sport England also produces accessible facilities guidance.

ACTION: England Athletics will support clubs and groups to ensure the facilities they use for athletics activity are accessible to all.

ACTION: England Athletics will expect all new indoor and outdoor track and field facilities to provide anchor points for seated throws, as well as indoor facilities to provide space for indoor training rollers for wheelchair racers. England Athletics also recommends that this type of provision should be made in all existing indoor and outdoor venues.

The Equality Act 2010 places a legal duty on sports clubs to make reasonable adjustments to their services to ensure that they are accessible for disabled people.

Lighting

The IAAF and Sport England provide guidance on lighting levels for athletics track and field facilities. It is important to note that the recommended lux levels apply not just to the track, but to all parts of the athletics facility, including the whole infield and all jumps and throws facilities.

ACTION: England Athletics expects all new and refurbished floodlight schemes to deliver a minimum of 200lux across the whole of the track and the infield. This is the minimum standard for competition and the minimum necessary to achieve the floodlighting module of TrackMark.

England Athletics expects that facilities will need to become increasingly environmentally sustainable

Environmental sustainability

As well as improving financial sustainability, England Athletics expects that facilities will need to become increasingly environmentally sustainable such as by installing more energy efficient lighting, renewable energy generation, rainwater harvesting etc.

ACTION: England Athletics will support clubs in exploring options for improved environmental sustainability and will share examples of good practice.

Playing pitch strategies

A large number of local authorities are developing or updating their playing pitch strategy (PPS) at the moment. The key drivers for developing a PPS include: developing targets for improving health and increasing participation; providing evidence to protect existing provision and prioritise new projects to meet deficiencies; providing evidence to help secure external funding.

Unfortunately, there is no statutory protection for athletics tracks, which makes the infield vulnerable to demands by pitch sports for additional natural or artificial grass pitches. However, England Athletics and other NGBs should be consulted when a new PPS is being written, which gives us the opportunity to emphasise the importance of the infield to us and share information about the demand for our sport in the area. Where we know of a facility need, we should endeavour to have this acknowledged in the PPS and taken into account when the local authority is allocating Community Infrastructure Levy or "Section 106" funding. This is also a good time to work with clubs to ensure the best use for sport is made of any available spare track capacity, and to encourage the club to review the quality and efficiency of management and maintenance regimes. A standard template has been developed to assist Club Support Managers when responding to PPS consultations.

ACTION: England Athletics will seek to be actively involved in the development of local planning policies wherever possible.

Asset transfers

One way in which local authorities are responding to pressures on public finances is to divest themselves of facilities that are peripheral to their main areas of operation, particularly those facilities such as athletics tracks which often receive significant subsidy.

There are three main routes being followed: either an invitation to tender for the future operation of the facility at zero subsidy, which requires a more commercial approach to their operation, or an invitation to the organisation (usually a school/college since 40% of tracks are on education sites) on who's land the facility sits to take on its future operation, or an invitation to the main user to take on the management of the facility.

In the first two instances, England Athletics can help the resident club gather evidence of their contribution to the objectives of the new operator and also demonstrate clearly what it is realistic for them to pay for future usage. In many cases this may be more than they have paid up to now, but should not be more than they can reasonably afford. Where an athletics facility is offered to the club or the club is interested in acquiring greater control over their home track, England Athletics can help the club build a business plan that will help them assess the viability of the proposal and, if necessary, attract funding to help them with set-up and early operating costs.

The imminent launch of TrackMark will help clubs to identify areas where investment is required to bring facilities up to a good standard prior to transfer, such as by improving track surface or providing facilities for Para Athletics. Our guide to asset transfers will be updated in the next few months.

ACTION: England Athletics will provide advice and guidance to clubs actively pursuing an asset transfer.

"We will focus our local, professional workforce on supporting member clubs with the tools they need to sustain and grow their membership, improve their club and physical environment."

(Strategic Plan page 31)



Club capacity

It is recognised that additional and specific support may be required for volunteers and club officials that currently manage or are considering taking on the management of an athletics facility e.g. through an asset transfer arrangement. Providing correct, informed and detailed advice alongside the appropriate tools will ensure that facility usage and operational effectiveness is managed and maximised. Support may be required in areas such as:

- Maintenance
- Facility planning / management
- Financial/business planning for facilities
- Fundraising for facility development
- Taking ownership of facilities
- Exploiting commercial opportunities

Whilst some clubs have managed to take on the operation of their track without recourse to other sources of income, most tracks will struggle with viability if operated in isolation. It is therefore increasingly important for athletics clubs to work with other local partners and sports in a multi-sport hub approach, to ensure they remain sustainable in the medium to long term. As part of this, clubs will be encouraged to work in partnership with other sports clubs to develop multi-sport hubs.

ACTION: England Athletics' network of Club Support Managers will continue to help athletics and running clubs to become more professional and sustainable in how they operate.

Alternatives and innovations

England Athletics is aware that athletics facilities have traditionally been built to a very rigid design (a 400m oval with 6-8 lanes with a natural turf infield). With the challenges faced by public sector bodies, a key driver of this strategy is to 'break the mould' and give clubs, operators and investors the ability to innovate and develop a new generation of athletics facilities that are both inspiring and viable. Not all clubs/athletes need a 400m oval track. The fundamentals of run, jump, throw can be taught on scaled down facilities that are much more appropriate and attractive for beginners/younger users and cost much less to build and maintain.

"We will provide member clubs with the tools and support that they need to sustain and grow their membership and improve their club environment.."

(Strategic Plan page 22)

Compacts

England Athletics has adopted UKA's strategic position that we should concentrate on preserving and improving the existing stock of 400m tracks rather than seeking to build additional ones. However, there are areas in the country where journey time to the nearest full size outdoor track is greater than ideal and there are places where good coaching has created significant demand despite the lack of a local athletics facility. The Compact Athletics concept is intended to fill this gap, providing training facilities in places where there is insufficient demand, funding or land to accommodate a full size track.

A Compact Athletics facility can take a number of forms, but essentially provides a strip of synthetic track plus some capacity for jumps and throws, enabling core athletic skills to be taught, enjoyed and developed. It can then be linked in to a wider network of athletics facilities using a 'hub and spoke' approach.

Priority will be given to developing compact athletics facilities at locations where there is proven demand, a base of athletics participation and a partnership that enables the facility to be maintained, managed and financially secure. It may, for example, be a useful, first stage enabling development for clubs that do not have access to a facility or for those seeking to establish a base for the sport in a town or community that is presently not served by a standard synthetic athletics track. Suitable locations might include:

- Primary/secondary schools to complement existing sport/play provision.
- As additions to existing sports and leisure facilities.
- Aligned to tracks developed for seasonal running, such as grass marked routes at secondary schools.

Compact facilities will mainly develop athletes up to the age of 16, so ideal locations will have a high under 16 population within 20 minutes.

ACTION: England Athletics will support the development of compact athletics facilities where there is a viable business case based on proven demand, good coaching and strong partnership working.

Priority will be given to developing compact athletics facilities at locations where there is proven demand, good coaching and strong partnership working.

Other innovations

We live in a fast changing world where there is great pressure on businesses to innovate constantly in order to remain relevant, but the technical specifications of the various elements that make up an athletics facility has changed very little in the last few decades other than to improve safety. The Compact Athletics concept is the only significant facility related innovation of recent times.

As stated above, we will continue to promote the Compact concept, but we have also explored other innovations such as the Exploratorium from Denmark, the Friplassen (Free Space) from Norway, and tracks of non-standard size built around new AGP developments. The maintenance implications of innovative track use have also been explored such as the use of tracks by cyclists.

ACTION: England Athletics will consider supporting facility innovations involving non-standard track shapes, designs and uses providing they are backed by a sound business case and do not negatively impact on our core market.

Clubhouses

Clubhouse buildings make an important contribution to the overall experience of club members so it is important that they are designed, operated and maintained well. Detailed guidance on the design of clubhouses is available from Sport England.

Clubhouses should be attractive and function well in order to attract new members and retain existing ones. Clean well designed changing rooms and toilets, a multifunctional room in which people can gather for meetings or to socialise, and convenient car parking, all help to sustain participation not just for athletes, but also volunteers. For example, having a space for volunteers to relax and take a break is crucial to making them feel valued.

All new athletics tracks should be provided with access to suitable clubhouse facilities including social space, changing rooms and toilets and, where possible, these ancillary facilities should be available at Compact Athletics facilities too.

Clubhouses should be attractive and function well in order to attract new members and retain existing ones.



3 Indoor Facilities

The background

There are 20 indoor straights and four permanent 200m indoor track facilities in England, along with a temporary indoor facility located in Birmingham.

Retaining and improving venues

Indoor athletics facilities rely heavily on clusters of clubs, regular community/school usage and cross boundary competition programmes to make them operationally viable. Strategy consultation suggests that use of the current network of indoor straight facilities in England is not being maximised. Therefore the primary focus moving forward will be on retention of existing venues and improvement in their levels of use.

However, whilst indoor facilities serve a much larger catchment area than their outdoor equivalents, ideally the majority of the population should be within 60 minutes journey time of an indoor athletics facility and this is not achieved uniformly across the country. Previous studies have suggested that geographical coverage of indoor athletics facilities is weakest in the South West, the South Coast, London, the East Midlands and East Anglia.

ACTION: England Athletics will support new 200m indoor tracks and indoor athletics training facilities where there is a proven demand and a clear geographical gap in supply.

Working in partnership

On a more local level, there is already a strong network of indoor sports spaces that are not always used to the fullest extent, especially those on school sites. Opening up these spaces to our member clubs is a priority for us and we will promote the range of tools produced by Sport England to encourage greater community use of schools. We will also continue to work with a range of partners including local authorities, schools, coaches and clubs to deliver athletics products and services that use non-sport-specific indoor spaces such as sports halls, building on the success of programmes such as Sportshall Athletics.

ACTION: England Athletics will encourage new partnerships between athletics clubs and schools that have available indoor facilities.

Research suggests that the use of the current network of indoor facilities in England is not being maximised.

“We will work with partners to promote our sport into schools so even more young people can access athletics in their school environment and be able to progress into a club if they choose.”

(Strategic Plan page 26)



4 Running Facilities

The background

The number of people running in England has grown by 67% in the last 10 years. The current boom in running is driven by social, health and economic factors – such as relieving stress, getting fit, losing weight and enjoyment. The gender gap is reducing, more middle aged/ older people are running and participation from people with a disability is at an all-time high.

Current participation behaviour is dominated by those that run alone, with 4/5ths of runners doing some form of solo running and half of those only running alone. However, studies have shown that regular contact with others increases participation and reduces dropout rates, suggesting that the majority of runners are extrinsically motivated and need motivation from peers, expert support and the camaraderie of like-minded people.

England Athletics agrees that running / jogging is most fun when shared with others and has created RunTogether to provide fun, friendly, supportive and inclusive running opportunities for everyone in England. The programme includes groups and routes, and services, such as Find a Guide and #RunAndTalk all designed to help people to run with others.

Considering the needs of runners

In addition to being a popular informal mass participation activity, running is also a distinct facet of club athletics and over 98% of England Athletics' affiliated clubs offer road running. It is therefore important that any discussion about facilities considers the needs of this group too.

Running doesn't require a specific facility, with the majority of participants making use of non-specialist (and largely free of charge) existing facilities and infrastructure, including roads, rights of way, parks and open spaces. However, there are things England Athletics can do to improve the environment in which they train.

We have begun conversations with bodies such as the National Infrastructure Commission and The Design Council, who are developing urban design principles which encourage greater physical activity. We have looked at initiatives in other countries such as the airport terminal running tracks in Japan. We have also met with the developers of some of the largest urban regeneration projects. The aim of this work is that the needs of runners for well lit, suitably surfaced, safe, running routes are built into the design of new infrastructure development projects for the benefit of all residents' health and wellbeing.

ACTION: England Athletics will continue to lobby bodies with an influence over urban design, to ensure that the needs of runners are considered alongside those of cyclists and pedestrians.

“The diversity of athletics and running is a strength, but it also presents challenges. Every event group has different needs for facilities and equipment.”

(Strategic Plan page 2)

Sharing facilities

Many of the road running clubs affiliated to England Athletics do not have their own facilities but gather for their weekly training runs in local leisure centres, schools and clubhouses belonging to other sports. They may also use changing rooms, toilets and meeting rooms at these alternative venues.

ACTION: England Athletics will assist road running clubs that are looking for somewhere to meet, by introducing them to sports clubs in their area that have suitable facilities.

Public parks

It is important to note that the sport of athletics is not confined to built facilities and that cross country and fell running are important disciplines in the sport with very high levels of participation. However, race organisers have expressed a concern about increasing charges for both access and the support required from the authorities.

There has been recent debate over the long established principle of public parks being free to all, and whether any exceptions to this rule are acceptable. There is little disagreement about lease costs for commercial operations such as cafes and charges are commonplace for parking and for exclusive use of particular sporting facilities such as football pitches, bowling greens, or tennis courts. However, charging for community events and "not for profit" events is more controversial.

The Government has stated that it does not consider it appropriate for a local authority to charge a volunteer community for the use of a public park. However, local authorities have been given authority to generate the income required to maintain and manage parks and some argue that it is reasonable for a local authority to require payment from the organisers of large running events because these activities can have a financial impact on a park's management due to the wear and tear from hundreds of runners following the same route.

England Athletics is of the opinion that activity that drives people to local parks and generates a variety of positive health and community benefits should be encouraged and that it is not appropriate to charge non-profit making voluntary groups that want to use parks for running. This issue is not just limited to the sport of athletics and England Athletics has been working in partnership with Sport England and other sports governing bodies of sport to seek dialogue with the agencies involved.

ACTION: England Athletics will continue to lobby for the free use of public parks and open spaces by runners and voluntary running groups.

Race organisers have expressed a concern about increasing charges for access and support from the authorities

Marked running routes

England Athletics owns two marked running route products: 3-2-1 and Greenline Urban Running Routes. However, there is no comprehensive system in place to track usage of either form of route and there is no consistent quality assurance process connected to them. As a consequence, the intention is that existing 3-2-1 and Greenline routes will remain, but no further investment will be made in the development of physical marked running routes in their current format.

ACTION: England Athletics will produce guidelines on the key characteristics of a good running route and encourage future route providers to self-assess against this.

“We are working with people outside the sport who have additional understanding of potential solutions”

(Strategic Plan page 30)

Technology innovations

Technology innovations are having a big impact on the running market, particularly in the field of ‘wearable tech’ equipment to measure distance and human performance, and digital platforms such as Strava where runners can upload their routes for others to use.

ACTION: England Athletics will engage with tech companies to explore how new products and platforms could be used to benefit the wider running community.



5 Summary



What we will do

"To create an innovative and inspiring network of sustainable athletics facilities, with the capacity to meet both current and future demand across England."

To drive our ambition above, athletics as a sport will implement a business-focused and innovative approach to development. England Athletics will undertake the following specific actions:

Key Facilities Priority 1

Ensure that the allocation of resources to new and existing track and field facilities is prioritised to those that have the greatest potential to impact positively on general participation, club membership growth and retention, and improved personal performance.

To support this priority England Athletics will:

- encourage all tracks to seek accreditation through TrackMark
- help venues to identify the level in the Hierarchy of Facilities that is most appropriate for them and will support clubs seeking to raise funding to maintain facilities at that level.
- prioritise new track and field facilities within multi-sport hubs.
- seek to be actively involved in the development of local planning policies wherever possible.
- support new 200m indoor tracks and indoor athletics training facilities where there is a proven demand and a clear geographical gap in supply.

Key Facilities Priority 2

Actively encourage athletics and running facilities to be used to their fullest possible extent by the sport and by all sections of the community in order to maximise viability.

To support this priority England Athletics will:

- support athletics clubs in disputes with facility operators and local authorities over the use of the track infield for heavy throws and will collate examples of good practice and design guidance on minimum requirements for external throws areas.
- require an external throws facility to be provided adjacent to and strongly connected to the track before an infield used extensively for throws is converted to an AGP. We will not support such a development where the infield remains important to the operation of the facility.
- continue to work with the manufacturers of artificial grass to encourage the development of products that are compatible with throws.
- support clubs and groups to ensure the facilities they use for athletics activity are accessible to all.
- expect all new indoor and outdoor track and field facilities to provide anchor points for seated throws competitors, as well as indoor venues providing space for indoor training rollers for wheelchair racers. England Athletics recommends that this type of provision should be made in all existing indoor and outdoor venues.
- help clubs to develop a strong partnership with facility owners/operators and will share examples of good practice.
- provide advice and guidance to clubs actively pursuing an asset transfer.
- help athletics and running clubs to become more professional and sustainable in how they operate.
- encourage new partnerships between athletics clubs and schools that have available indoor facilities.

Key Facilities Priority 3

Encourage innovative approaches to the location and design of facilities for individual components of the sport in order to increase reach and create sustainability and viability.

To support this priority England Athletics will:

- expect all new and refurbished floodlight schemes to deliver a minimum of 200lux across the whole of the track and the infield.
- support clubs in exploring options for improved environmental sustainability and will share examples of good practice.
- support the development of compact athletics facilities where there is a viable business case based on proven demand, good coaching and strong partnership working.
- consider supporting facility innovations involving non-standard track shapes, designs and uses providing they are backed by a sound business case and do not negatively impact on our core market.
- continue to lobby bodies with an influence over urban design, to ensure that the needs of runners are considered alongside those of cyclists and pedestrians.
- continue to lobby for the free use of public parks and open spaces by runners and voluntary running groups.
- assist road running clubs that are looking for somewhere to meet, by introducing them to sports clubs in their area that have suitable facilities.
- produce guidelines on the key characteristics of a good running route and encourage future route providers to self-assess against this.
- engage with tech companies to explore how new products and platforms could be used to benefit the wider running community.

Encourage innovative approaches to the location and design of facilities



How will success be measured?

It is intended that this document underpins and guides the work of England Athletics in this area at a national and local level. As such it is important that we monitor and evaluate our success and we intend to measure our impact through the following:

- Number of “Track-Mark” accredited facilities
- Annual amount of investment in athletics facilities (all types and sources).
- Retention and membership growth levels of track and field members in affiliated clubs
- Satisfaction survey of England Athletics registered athletes

All specific outputs and progress against the key facility priorities will also be assessed in terms of England Athletics’ overall strategic ambitions as set out in the current Strategic Plan.

It is important that we monitor and evaluate our success





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