

£195m package to help sports sector

A total of £195m of National Lottery funding has been made available to help the sport and physical activity sectors through the ongoing coronavirus (Covid-19) crisis.

Distributed by Sport England, the funding package will be divided into four main strands.

A £20m Community Emergency Fund will be opened immediately for clubs and community organisations, from which grants of between £300 and £10,000 will be made available.

An additional £55m will be made available to support the sector during the ongoing period of restrictions.

Up to £115m worth of current funding will also be rolled into 2021-22, to give long term certainty to more than 100 organisations that Sport England has identified as playing a vital role in the delivery of activities.

Separately, a £5m pot will be opened to organisations which already receive



■ The lockdown has put sports under pressure

Sport England funding, allowing the organisations to bid for grants to tackle specific financial difficulties.

Sport England CEO Tim Hollingsworth said the package would help the sector get through the "extremely challenging times".

"We want the sector not just to come through this crisis, but to be in a position to thrive again," he said.

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We want the sector to be in a position to thrive again in the future

Tim Hollingsworth



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Business rates cut for sports clubs and gyms

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Huw Edwards: "physical activity sector adapting to closures, but reports of eviction threats are shameful"

The physical activity sector is adapting to the difficult circumstances caused by COVID-19 (Coronavirus), according to inactive CEO Huw Edwards.

Speaking on the BBC Radio 4's Today programme on 28 March, Edwards said the closure of all gyms and sporting facilities means that the sector is facing unprecedented challenges.

"It's been a very traumatic period for the leisure sector – for the leadership as well as the workforce," he said.

"There are great levels of anxiety and stress. But we have to contribute to the fight and support the NHS.

"And while facilities are temporarily closed, they



■ Edwards said there was work to be done to ensure help is delivered

"It's been a very traumatic week for the fitness and leisure sector – for the leadership as well as the workforce"

are still open for business. We are seeing our gyms and leisure centres getting their

facilities online and providing resources, so people can be active at home. Many are

also looking after the older and the vulnerable with bespoke programmes."

While Edwards also welcomed the government's financial support packages, he said there remains work to be done.

"We're seeing our members having zero income," Edwards said.

"We need the government to really enforce the issue of freeing up that funding when it comes to private landlords, local authorities and the banks.

"There are some really shameful stories of our members being threatened with eviction and winding-up orders."

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UK's DCMS Committee, led by Julian Knight, hears from charities over impact of COVID-19 outbreaks



■ Committee chair Julian Knight has urged the UK government to take immediate action to safeguard charities

The UK's Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee (DCMS) has met to hear from charities over the level of government support needed to ensure their survival in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Committee convened remotely on 31 March to consider the increased demand facing the charities, during a time of growing financial pressure.

Concerns over the long-term impact of the coronavirus is expected to have on these

"The charities sector is likely to lose £4bn in the next quarter, a third of its usual income over a three-month period"

charities was also discussed. Committee chair Julian Knight, MP for Solihull, urged the government to take immediate action in order to safeguard the sector, while DCMS' secretary of state and culture secretary Oliver Dowden was questioned whether funding would be available for charitable and voluntary organisations working directly on tackling the coronavirus.

Karl Wilding, chief executive of the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO), told the committee that the charities sector was likely to lose £4bn in the next quarter, a third of its usual income over a three-month period.

The pandemic has highlighted the 'essential services' delivered by charities.

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■ Sweeney revealed a grassroots support package worth £7m

"We're working hard with the wider rugby community to take the necessary measures to safeguard a financially resilient Union"

Bill Sweeney wants rugby to play 'big role' in energising communities post-outbreak

Rugby Football Union (RFU) chief Bill Sweeney has said the sport wants to play a major part in getting the public back to normality, once the restrictions on everyday life will be lifted following the coronavirus outbreak.

"I'm confident that rugby will play a big role in energising communities across England after this difficult period," said Sweeney, who was appointed chief executive of the RFU in February 2019.

"In the meantime, we are working hard with the wider rugby community to take the necessary

measures to safeguard a financially resilient Union."

Sweeney was speaking to the media after the RFU launched a support package worth £7m, providing financial support for community clubs across England.

Funded directly from the RFU coffers, the relief package includes a £5m support loans programme, offering loans of between £2,000 and £10,000 to clubs, with deferred re-payments for six months and repayable over three years.

Clubs with outstanding loans have also seen their loan repayments suspended.

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Geoff Webb reveals plans to re-brand IOG and rename organisation as Grounds Management Association



■ Webb said research into attitudes towards IOG had revealed 'real concerns'

The Institute of Groundsmanship (IOG) has called an extraordinary general meeting, where members will vote on a resolution to change the organisation's name to Grounds Management Association.

All IOG members have been invited to cast their vote on the matter, with a final decision being based on the membership's vote.

According to IOG chief executive Geoff Webb, the proposed rebrand and

"We found that the profession is not seen as inclusive – it is the domain of 'older white males'"

renaming follows research around attitudes towards the existing IOG name and identity.

Webb said the research had revealed "real concerns".

"We found that the profession is not seen as inclusive – it is the domain of 'older white males'," Webb said.

"There is also a feeling that no one is standing up for our profession and the skilled nature of the

work – and that grounds management is not seen as an important part of sport.

"The research also showed that there is a lack of understanding of the skills needed for groundsmanship and that the profession has little appeal to young people.

"Worryingly, the name is seen as old fashioned and as adding to an outdated image."

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Bear Grylls' Be Military Fit mobilises army of volunteers – also launches BMF at Home service

Be Military Fit with Bear Grylls (BMF) will activate its network of ex-armed forces personnel and mobilise it in the fight against the COVID-19 (coronavirus) outbreak.

The outdoor fitness operator's move is a response to the government's call to find 250,000 volunteers to help the under-pressure NHS.

"When we saw the call for action, we knew we were in a position to help, with a fleet of vans across the UK and passionate franchisees, staff and members willing to step up," said Jan Spaticchia, vice-chair of BMF.

"This response was driven by the franchisees themselves and we're



■ Bear Grylls' BMF is stepping up to support the NHS

"This response was driven by the franchisees themselves and we're committed to contributing to the relief efforts"

committed to contributing to the government effort to deliver essential medicine

and supplies to the most vulnerable and isolated in our communities."

According to Chris St George, chair of NM Capital, the private equity firm behind BMF, the company is particularly well placed to help in major cities.

"Our 2,000-strong veteran member network has military experience and is well versed in planning, organising and delivering in a crisis," St George said.

The volunteer mobilisation follows BMF investing heavily in a 'BMF at Home' platform, which offers a programme of live-streamed workouts to keep its membership active and safe during the lockdown.

The franchise-based BMF normally has operations at 65 parks across the UK.

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■ In his previous role, Worthy led the Life Fitness brand portfolio

"From the moment I learned more about the mission, I was immediately compelled to get involved"

Dallaglio RugbyWorks appoints fitness sector veteran **Jason Worthy** as CEO

Sports charity Dallaglio RugbyWorks has appointed Jason Worthy as its new CEO.

Worthy, who until July 2019 was president and CEO of fitness equipment giant Life Fitness, replaces Rachel Roxburgh, who is leaving the role after nine years.

Roxburgh has been CEO since the launch of RugbyWorks in 2011. During her tenure, she has overseen the growth of the organisation, including the development of a three-year skills-led programme which is now being delivered to more than 2,000 young

people across eight regions in England and Wales.

The programme helps marginalised teenagers, at risk of being left behind by society, to aspire for and achieve a better future.

Former England rugby captain Lawrence Dallaglio, founder of RugbyWorks, said: "In Jason, I know we have recruited an outstanding successor for Rachel and he will now take us forward to the next stage."

Worthy added: "From the moment I learned more about the mission I was immediately compelled to get involved."

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BUDGET 2020

Business rates cut for small leisure firms

Business rates in England will be abolished for one year for firms in the leisure and sport sectors with a rateable value below £51,000.

This means that thousands of small firms – from gyms to sports clubs – will not pay any business rates in the coming year.

The announcement was made by chancellor Rishi Sunak, who delivered his first budget in the House of Commons on 11 March.

The measure is an expansion of a pledge, made in the 2019 Conservative manifesto, which outlined plans to increase business rates discounts for cinemas and restaurants (with a rateable value of less than £51,000) to 60 per cent.

Sunak said the 60 per cent pledge would be extended to 100 per cent in order to help the businesses weather the effects of the coronavirus pandemic.

He then added: "Gyms and sports clubs wouldn't have originally benefitted from the rate discount – but they could be some of the hardest-hit."

"So, for this year, I have decided to extend the 100 per cent retail discount to them as well."

"That means any eligible retail, leisure or hospitality business with a rateable value below £51,000 will, over the next financial year, pay no business rates whatsoever."

READ MORE ONLINE



■ Sports clubs will be among the businesses to benefit from the cut



“

Any eligible business with a rateable value below £51,000 will pay no business rates

Rishi Sunak

GRASSROOTS FUNDING

Sport England begins period of 'significant flexibility'

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Previously-agreed KPIs, targets and conditions within the funding agreements signed off may no longer be relevant, appropriate or proportionate given the drastically changed circumstances

Sport England

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Sport England has initiated a three-month period of "significant flexibility" as part of plans to offer targeted support to organisations struggling with the effects of COVID-19 (coronavirus).

As well as helping funded organisations, the grassroots body said it would do "everything it can" to encourage people to stay active, wherever possible, as keeping fit is now "more important than ever".

In a statement, Sport England said that previously-agreed KPIs, targets and conditions within the funding agreements it had signed off "may no longer be relevant, appropriate or



■ Sport England will now focus on getting people active

proportionate" given the drastically changed circumstances.

Instead, it is switching its focus supporting the sector and encouraging people to stay active, not on asking organisations to report on previously agreed conditions.

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ARENA PROJECT

Manchester Arena redesign to make it 'largest in Europe'



We are still in the process of consulting with our partners

John Sharkey

ASM Global has revealed plans to increase the capacity at its Manchester Arena venue to 24,000.

As well as an increase to capacity, the initial proposals for a redesign of the arena – drawn up by architects HOK – include the creation of an additional concourse level to house VIP boxes and lounges, as well as F&B outlets. The designs also feature a new "worker bee façade" – in honour of the city's symbol, the Manchester bee – and upgrades to the venue's access infrastructure, in order to improve the people flow between the arena and the close-by Manchester Victoria station.



■ The work would see capacity increase to 24,000

In a statement, John Sharkey, executive vice president European operations for ASM Global, said: "These plans have been made public earlier than intended, as we are still in the process of consulting with Manchester City Council, our neighbours and landlord on the design – their input and involvement in this journey will be crucial."

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MAJOR EVENTS

New dates for Tokyo 2020 and Euro 2020

The Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games will now begin on 23 July, 2021 and run to 8 August, after being postponed for a year due to the coronavirus pandemic.

The Games will still be called "Tokyo 2020" despite taking place in 2021.

The Paralympic Games, originally due to start on 24 August, 2020, will now take place between 24 August and 5 September, 2021.

In a statement, IOC president Thomas Bach said: "I am confident that, working together with the Tokyo 2020 Organising Committee, the Tokyo Metropolitan Government, the Japanese Government and all our

stakeholders, we can master this unprecedented challenge.

"Humankind currently finds itself in a dark tunnel. The Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games can be a light at the end of this tunnel."

Meanwhile, Football's European governing body UEFA has postponed its flagship national team competition, Euro 2020, by a year.

The event was due to be played in June and July this year, involving 12 cities across Europe.

The tournament will now take place from 11 June to 11 July 2021.

"Moving EURO 2020 comes at a huge cost for us," said UEFA president Aleksander Čeferin.

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■ All of the Tokyo venues were completed in time for the Games



Working together, we can master this unprecedented challenge

Thomas Bach

CORONAVIRUS

Sector leaders welcome help for self-employed

Physical activity sector bodies have welcomed the government's measures to help the UK's self-employed workers during the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic.

Chancellor Rishi Sunak announced on 26 March that those who have suffered a loss in income will be eligible to a taxable grant worth 80 per cent of their profits – up to a cap of £2,500 per month.

Called the Coronavirus Self-employment Income Support Scheme, the grant will be available for three months in one lump-sum payment and will start to be paid from the beginning of June.

The scheme will be open to those with a trading profit of less than £50,000 in 2018-19,

or an average trading profit of less than £50,000 between 2016-17 and 2018-19.

The financial support for the self-employed is broadly in line with company employees, who will receive 80 per cent of their wages subsidised by the government.

In a joint statement, CIMSPA, ukactive and Community Leisure UK said: "This support will be hugely reassuring for the estimated 60,000 self-employed people working in the sport and physical activity sector.

"A recent survey showed that 95 per cent have already experienced significant financial losses as a result of the Covid-19 crisis."

READ MORE ONLINE



■ There are around 60,000 self-employed workers in the sector



“

This support will be hugely reassuring for the sector's self-employed workers

Tara Dillon, CIMSPA

MAJOR PROJECT

Chelsea puts stadium on hold as planning permission expires

“

We will continue to consider our options for a new stadium, should economic conditions improve

Chelsea FC statement

Chelsea Football Club has put its plans to build a new stadium on hold until "economic conditions improve".

The English Premier League received planning permission in 2017 to build a 60,000-seat venue at the site of its current Stamford Bridge stadium.

The new stadium was expected to cost around £1bn to build.

In a statement, Chelsea FC said it would not look to utilise the planning permission it had received.

"We acknowledge that the planning permission we obtained expired on 31 March 2020," the statement reads.



■ The club received planning permission in 2017

"We're grateful to all our fans and stakeholders for their patience and understanding in the matter.

"We will continue to consider our options for a new stadium, should economic conditions improve."

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PITCHING IN

Sport gets stuck in with relief efforts

Sports clubs and organisations have launched initiatives to help ease the pressures on local communities and the National Health Service (NHS), created by the coronavirus pandemic.

Manchester United legend Gary Neville has opened his two hotels in Manchester to NHS staff, to help with the crisis. The two hotels have now been closed to the public, freeing 176 beds for NHS and other medical staff.

A number of football clubs have also joined the relief effort. League Two club Stevenage and Scottish club Stenhousemuir have introduced a number of measures, from players phoning fans to volunteers

doing shopping for those most vulnerable.

The clubs have created phone and online carelines, which will provide those who might otherwise slip through the usual safety nets when forced to live the next weeks or months behind closed doors.

English Premier League club Watford has launched a campaign to help elderly and disabled fans who are forced to stay at home during the outbreak. The "Hornets at Home" initiative will connect fans who are prepared to help those who need it most.

Other clubs to have launched initiatives include Aberdeen FC, Blackburn Rovers and Eastleigh FC.

READ MORE ONLINE



■ The Hornets at Home initiative will help the elderly and disabled



Premier League club Watford has launched a campaign to help elderly and disabled fans who are forced to stay at home during the lockdown

DATA

Website offers 'live' feed of coronavirus' effects on sport



Postponements within the US sports market have led to an 87 per cent decrease in the number of visitors to stadiums, arenas and other sports venues

Technology firm Purple WiFi has launched a live data website, offering a real-time, visual representation of the effects of the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic on leisure industry sectors globally.

Utilising the company's billions of football data points, Purple's data scientist team has constructed the live charts to help visualise the impact felt in a number of sectors.

Among the key findings is that cancellations and postponements within the US sports market has led to an 87 per cent decrease in the number of visitors to stadiums, arenas and other sports



■ Professional sport has been hit hard by the outbreak

venues across North America – costing the industry an estimated US\$5bn.

The US hospitality sector is one of the industries worst hit, with a 77 per cent decrease in hotel guests across the region, while restaurants have seen a significant decline in footfall too.

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RELIEF EFFORTS

Welsh facilities being converted into hospital wards



Community has always been a huge part of what we are about

Jon Daniels

Leisure centres and stadiums in Wales are being transformed into emergency hospital wards, as part of measures to tackle the unprecedented challenges placed on the NHS.

Selwyn Samuel Centre in Llanelli, Carmarthen Leisure Centre and the Parc y Scarlets stadium in Llanelli are among those being used to create hundreds of additional hospital beds.

Parc y Scarlets is the home of Pro14 rugby union club Scarlets, which made the decision to hand over its venue to help relieve the strain on services after discussions with



■ The home of Scarlets will be turned into a hospital

Carmarthen County Council and the Hywel Dda University Health Board.

"Community has always been a huge part of what we are about and in unprecedented times like these communities stick together," said Scarlets general manager of rugby Jon Daniels.

"The health service and workers are doing an incredible job in challenging circumstances and we are happy to be offering help and support in any way we can."

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CORONAVIRUS

Join The Movement campaign launches to get people active

A new national campaign has been launched to encourage people to stay physically active at their homes during the COVID-19 (Coronavirus) lockdown.

The Join the Movement campaign is designed to provide inspiration and trusted information to the public about how to keep fit in and around the home during the pandemic.

Funded by The National Lottery and created by Sport England, the campaign has its own online hub, giving access to a range of home workout options – including existing free exercise content and advice from organisations such as the NHS.



■ The campaign is designed to provide inspiration to the public about how to stay fit at home



It's not just a means of maintaining physical health but also to support mental wellbeing

Tim Hollingsworth

Added to that are workouts from popular influencers and major fitness brands, such as Les Mills on Demand, The Body Coach (Joe Wicks) and FiiT – many of which are offering extended free trials to help people get active at home.

"It's not just a means of maintaining physical health but also to support mental wellbeing and helping people to deal with the anxiety that this period will inevitably

bring," said Sport England CEO Tim Hollingsworth.

"Despite this time of great uncertainty, we're already seeing people find fun and creative new ways to get moving and come together, even while staying apart.

"This campaign seeks to help bring together the best of that and encourages people to share what they're doing using #StayInWorkOut."

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CHANGING TIMES

The definition of "normal" will probably never be the same again

Things have been happening so fast over the past few weeks that what seemed important at the beginning of March no longer seems to matter. For me, the beginning of the year was spent helping organisations develop post-2020 strategies. None of our forward-thinking, however, included measures to deal with what is currently happening. The challenges we identified now seem very minor!

LEADERSHIP ISSUE

At least we now have some clearer guidance from the UK Government. Personally, I feel that the firm guidance to stay indoors could and should have been done earlier. The next few weeks will see whether the lockdown came



If there's a positive to take from this terrible situation, it's the embedding of physical activity at the heart of the government response

Andy Reed is founder of Sports Think Tank

a little late from the government. All parts of our sector must now show leadership in staying inside.

I know that for many who love sport, exercise and the outdoors, there is a temptation to "tough out" the virus. But this really isn't the time to demonstrate some of the worst traits of our behaviours. Now is the time for responsible behaviour.

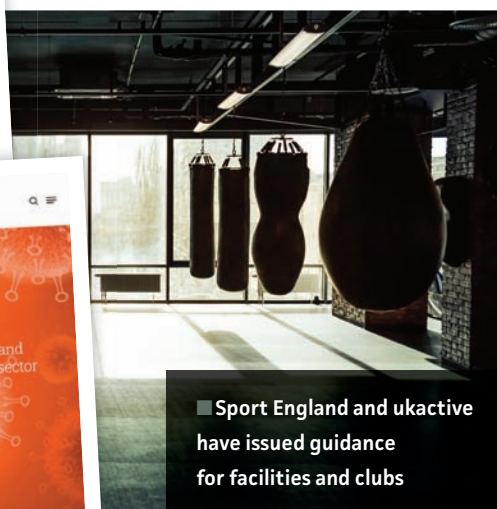
Bodies such as Sport England, ukactive and the SRA have been working hard to get out the right guidance and messaging - but even this has had to change rapidly.

By the time the government finally banned attending gyms, I'd already taken the personal decision to stop going - and advised anybody who asked to do the same - as the social distancing rules just weren't being observed.

I've had to come down hard on some friends who have suggested replacing the weekend game of rugby with a game of #Touch instead. While some of us, trying to get ahead of this pandemic curve, may have been labelled "snowflakes" a couple of weeks ago, I'm hoping the severity is now starting to hit home and people will stay at home.

Having said that, I, among many others, applauded the National Trust for opening its grounds for people. A combination of nice weather, large numbers and people not observing proper social distancing, however, quickly led to their closure and those of other major parks. Sadly, it was probably the right thing to do.

As long as we all stick with the latest guidance of one daily exercise outside and observe social distancing, we can keep ourselves physically active. From what I could see on my village run, people were observing this latest advice.



■ Sport England and ukactive have issued guidance for facilities and clubs



PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK/SEARICKI

■ Could the Covid-19 pandemic help highlight the importance of staying active?

Perhaps this will finally help the importance of physical activity to be recognised. We now need to make sure the recognition isn't lost

MIXED MESSAGES

It has felt the government has always been slightly behind the curve in ramping up its decision making and therefore the messaging has been very confused. Hopefully, now it is clear for the coming month at least and when this lockdown is reviewed for effectiveness we all persevere if it requires longer.

In one area it has not been – construction sites for example. Hopefully, by the time you read this, even this will have been sorted. One of my industry roles is being the chair of the Sports and Play Construction Association (SAPCA) and I can say that the association's members have been given conflicting advice.

IN IT TOGETHER

This is going to be tough economically on the entire physical activity sector – from self-employed personal trainers to gym chains all the way through to the grassroots clubs and professional sports. While sport is an important component in the fabric of our lives, each decision to end a league or postpone a competition has been the right

thing to do. Nothing is more important than the collective effort to save thousands of lives – and easing the massive pressure that is being put on the NHS. Sporting and financial pressures should not lead to the pre-emptive opening of any leagues, clubs or gyms that put others' lives at risk.

For example, I've been speaking to athletes about the postponement of the Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games. They agree it was the right thing to do. Their personal stories pale into insignificance in the face of curbing the pandemic – even if it means that those due to retire in 2020 may now not get their swan song in 2021.

I understand the financial impact too – as it is also affecting our own work. Income is plummeting and we're cutting to the core. Somehow, we need to all look after each other as soon as things are opened up again!

LEARNINGS

If there is anything positive to take from this terrible situation, it has been the embedding of the message to stay physically active at the heart of the

government response. The speed of innovation to enable 'virtual' classes to be delivered has also been impressive. It has also enhanced the case we've been making about the need for public green space in all communities for our physical and mental wellbeing.

Perhaps this crisis has finally helped the importance of physical activity to be recognised. We now need to make sure the recognition isn't lost. The fact that Joe Wicks racked up 16.3 million views in the first week of his PE sessions online – with many of those doing exercise at home for the first time in their lives – needs celebrating.

These are the most extraordinary times of our lives. Even before the pandemic, my definition of "normal times" had changed beyond all recognition. What is certain, however, is that the post-Covid-19 world will look completely different. Over the next few weeks, we will see both the worst and the best of human nature. Let's hope that it is the kindness and heroism that wins and society ends up stronger at the end of this all. ●

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SUPPLIER NEWS

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■ The new kit will be more sustainable and will be made from a blend of bamboo, charcoal and polyester

Warwickshire CCC and PlayerLayer partnership shows how sport can drive change, says **Roderick Bradley**



■ Roderick Bradley, PlayerLayer

Warwickshire County Cricket Club has announced a new three-year official kit supplier partnership with PlayerLayer, which will see the development of a more sustainable kit, made with materials derived from bamboo.

Billed as a first for professional cricket, the material in the shirts and sweaters worn by Warwickshire in the Royal London Cup and by Birmingham Bears in the Vitality Blast will be made from a blend of bamboo, charcoal and polyester.

Designed to significantly reduce the use of plastic

in sport, the new material and its capabilities was first showcased last year with PlayerLayer's partnership with League Two Forest Green Rovers Football Club, which is recognised by both FIFA and UEFA as the world's greenest football club.

"We have talked about our ambitions to be the most sustainable cricket club and venue in the country and working with PlayerLayer to create our new bamboo kits takes us a step closer to this goal," said Ben Seifas, commercial partnerships manager at Warwickshire CCC.

Roderick Bradley, co-founder and marketing director at PlayerLayer said: "The Warwickshire CCC Bamboo project is extremely important to us. We believe that sport can drive change and this is a perfect example. Warwickshire CCC has a global reach and will show how cricket can send a message far beyond sport."

The design for the full kit with new sponsors is set to be unveiled later this year, closer to the 2020 season, if it goes ahead.

SPORT-KIT KEYWORD
PLAYERLAYER

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1885 Lounge celebrates Southampton FC's history, says Claire Wilson



■ Claire Wilson, KSS Architects

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ONLINE

KSS Architects has partnered with Rainbow Design, a London-based furniture supplier, to create the 1885 Lounge at St Mary's Stadium, home to Southampton FC.

The pitch-side lounge, designed by KSS, offers a relaxed experience for guests and features a lounge and bar area with full height glazing, so guests don't miss any of the on-pitch action. The design includes historical memorabilia, celebrating the club's rich heritage, as well as Southampton's naval history.



■ Rainbow worked closely with KSS on the project

"The concept of this pitch lounge was to celebrate the first two decades of the club since it was founded in 1885, a very specific time frame, which gave us some fantastical historical moments to look at. There was so much depth that we could use made it very interesting overall," said Claire Wilson, senior interior designer at KSS.

Rainbow supplied all of the furniture for the lounge, and worked closely with KSS to ensure all the products not only matched the design vision for the space, but would stand up to the rigours of a match day hospitality experience.

SPORT-KIT KEYWORD
RAINBOW DESIGN

Satisfi Labs' COVID-19 Assistant streamlines emergency communications for sports venues

Satisfi Labs, a knowledge management platform powered by Artificial Intelligence (AI), has announced the launch of its COVID-19 Assistant, a free virtual assistant that enables clients in the live entertainment and sports industries to answer customer

queries relating to the coronavirus in real-time via their websites.

It was developed after Satisfi Labs found that customer queries, received by Satisfi Labs' Answer Engines, relating to the coronavirus increased by 2,000 per cent between the first and second week of



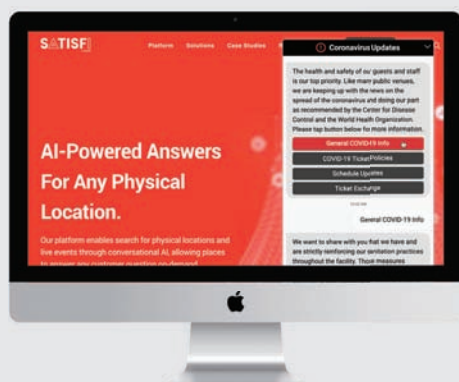
■ Don White, Satisfi Labs

to streamline communication that enables sports venues to provide consumers with custom responses on their websites. Users can adjust their answers in real-time as the situation changes.

"During these uncertain times, we know it's important for our partners to be able to address pressing questions from their customers about how the coronavirus is affecting their favourite events, shows and games," said Don White, CEO and co-founder of Satisfi Labs.

"We're aiming to create a process to help clients address these types of emergency questions rapidly."

SPORT-KIT KEYWORD
SATISFI LABS



■ The new service offers venues help with coronavirus enquiries

March. The company found that 98 per cent of queries fell into one of four categories: refund policies, venue facility change, event cancellations, and event rescheduling.

Satisfi Labs used this information to create the COVID-19 Assistant, which features a guided-flow solution



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BUILDING ISSUES

How are the Covid-19 measures affecting sports construction projects?



The UK government's measures to tackle the Covid-19 (coronavirus) pandemic are having a huge impact on the way UK businesses operate. Only key workers – and those who can't do their jobs remotely – are allowed to travel to work. This means that a large number of those working across the sports and play construction industry find themselves discovering the wonders of homeworking.

Are sports construction projects still allowed?

So far, the UK government's advice is that external construction projects are allowed to continue, but only if it is possible for contractors to comply with the official guidance on social distancing and the procedures for the safe operation of sites.

This is a very considerable challenge, both for the specialist work that takes place on-site to build and maintain sports and play facilities, as well as for the industry's workforce, which travels to and from the various projects on which they are employed.

Adding to the on-site challenges, the industry is also experiencing increasing difficulties in obtaining the materials and products which are essential to delivering sport and play projects. Those looking to build, redevelop or maintain their sports facilities should be aware that, as a result, many projects are

Contractors remain open for business and many continue to run full operations working from home



currently being suspended. SAPCA's advice is that those, whose projects may be affected, should discuss their individual situation with the contractor (or contractors) that they have engaged.

But while the UK lockdown is resulting in some projects being put on hold, contractors remain open for business and many of them continue to run full operations working from home. It is a great opportunity, therefore, to discuss and develop future facility projects.

Using this "down time" for project planning – and getting projects ready for the tender process – could give many a headstart once the lockdown ends. This is because there is likely to be a clamour to continue projects (and start new ones), once things begin to return to normal.

During the coronavirus emergency, SAPCA will continue to be in close contact with sports councils, sports governing bodies, funding agencies and other key stakeholders to work together to produce and share helpful information and guidance for all those involved in developing and managing sports and play facilities. For this, please visit the Guides section of the SAPCA website: (<https://sapca.org.uk/guides/>).

Shutting down safely

For those that are facing the prospect of closing down a project site, the Construction Leadership Council (CLC) has developed a useful guide

■ Operators who have closed their facilities could use the lockdown to plan future projects

on temporary suspension of sites. The advice looks to ensure that all closures can be achieved as safely as possible, avoiding potential issues while the site is not active.

The guidance is particularly pertinent to sports and play facility operators, as owners of sites have a legal duty of care to any visitors to their sites – even in the event of trespass.

The document includes advice on how to come up with a structured plan to carry out a shut down – from analysing the emerging risks to the site and prioritising its critical functions to site safety and security. There is also guidance on dealing with any special considerations the site might require, relating to environmental issues.

The main message is clear – even if a shut down needs to happen quickly due to Covid-19 issues, there should be a clear, structured plan for it. You can access the full document here: <https://bit.ly/2R6GpQf>

What about maintenance?

As with construction work, the message from the government is that, for



now – and as long as social distancing regulations are adhered to and due regard for health and safety is followed – essential ground maintenance work can still be carried out. This includes maintenance work at golf clubs, football clubs, cricket clubs, tennis clubs and other similar facilities.

Things are, however, moving quickly in the current climate and guidance is constantly being amended. SAPCA will look to keep its members and its partners up-to-date with news from the government departments, as well as its various stakeholder organisations.

For those looking for the latest information, there is a useful, dedicated Covid-19 section on the Sport England website, which provides updates on the situation. Information about how Sport England is working to support the sector can also be accessed through the website: (<https://www.sportengland.org/news/coronavirus-information-sector>). ●



Figures show that public leisure alone is worth £3.3bn annually, having a huge impact on wellbeing (£2.4bn) and health (£715m)

Huw Edwards, CEO, ukactive



RELIEF MEASURES

Sports and physical activity industry bodies call for special measures to keep leisure facilities afloat



■ All grassroots sport has ground to a halt due to the unprecedented lockdown measures

Leading trade bodies representing the physical activity sector have called on the government to introduce "urgent additional measures" in order to keep leisure facilities afloat during the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic.

The heads of ukactive, the Chartered Institute for the Management of Sport and Physical Activity (CIMSPA), and Community Leisure UK have written to chancellor Rishi Sunak, offering to work with the Treasury on the priorities for financial support designed to protect thousands of jobs, businesses and charities.

Gyms, leisure centres and other activity facilities were closed as part of a UK-wide lockdown on 23 March. PM Boris Johnson did, however, say people could continue to go out to exercise once a day – as long as they adhere to physical distancing



■ The UK's leisure centres, swimming pools and gyms were ordered to close on 23 March

We simply cannot allow the physical activity facilities at the heart of our communities to disappear

measures in order to remain safe, in line with guidance from Public Health England.

In the letter to the Chancellor, the sector leaders highlighted the unique position and value of the physical activity sector – and its ability to contribute to the nation's health.

"We want to work with you and your team to ensure the physical activity sector has the tools it needs to survive in this rapidly changing climate," the letter reads.

"Our gyms, leisure facilities and sports providers are on the frontline of the prevention agenda, contributing hugely to both our national wellbeing and productivity.

"We cannot allow the facilities at the heart of our communities to disappear.

"Figures show that public leisure alone is worth £3.3bn annually, having a huge impact on wellbeing (£2.4bn) and health



■ Professional sports clubs are counting the cost of postponed and cancelled games

(£715m), but findings also demonstrate benefits for wider social issues such as education and crime, shaping the future of children and young people, ensuring a productive workforce, tackling loneliness, supporting an ageing society,

and providing deeper connections within communities. Throughout the coronavirus crisis our members have been working tirelessly to support the public to maintain active lives, supporting the nation through increasing



■ There are concerns over the future of the "vital infrastructure" provided by grassroots sport facilities

- pressures on both our physical and mental health, as our routines are disrupted.

"The significance of maintaining our physical and mental health cannot be underplayed in these circumstances, and the physical activity sector finds itself uniquely placed to offer support to people.

"If physical activity organisations are not supported to survive, it will be difficult for this vital infrastructure to be restored once the crisis is over – and a lengthy restoration process would have dire consequences for our society."

The measures proposed by the sector bodies are:

- Comprehensive salary payment support, as instituted in other European countries.
- Rental/management fees reduction support, to reduce/cease rental payments.
- For public sector operators, clarification on the responsibility of local authority clients and the non-payment of management fees as well as additional support with cash flow.

- Making gym memberships tax deductible for a stipulated period. This would make it easier to regain memberships after the unsettled period, as well as possibly allowing facilities to hold on to current members.

In addition to this, the sector is looking for clarification on the processes for the following:

- Clarity on the terms of loan provision, as six months is not feasible for the repayment of interest, given the low margins within the sector. It requests that the window is extended to 12 months.
- Clarity on Business Interruption Insurance and the grounds for payouts, in addition to confirming the parameters in the new business interruption loan scheme.
- Clarity on non-payment of VAT, National Insurance, pension and payroll contributions during the period of disruption.
- Clarity on tailored financial support for self-employed physical activity professionals. ●



■ The leaders say financial help would allow companies bounce back quicker following the lockdown

The Sports and Play Construction Association, SAPCA, is the recognised trade organisation for the sports and play facility construction industry in the UK. SAPCA fosters excellence, professionalism and continuous improvement throughout the industry, in order to provide the high quality facilities necessary for the success of British sport. SAPCA represents a

wide range of specialist constructors of natural and synthetic sports surfaces, including both outdoor and indoor facilities, from tennis courts and sports pitches to playgrounds and sports halls. SAPCA also represents manufacturers and suppliers of related products, and independent consultants that offer professional advice on the development of projects.


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The community leisure trust collective has launched a new brand that seeks to support and develop our public leisure and culture services. **Community Leisure UK** – formerly Sporta – is the association that specialises in charitable leisure trusts across the UK, enabling networking and knowledge sharing with peers and external stakeholders.

Collectively, member community leisure trusts manage a **combined budget of more than £1.6bn, employ over 67,000 people**, and receive **233million visits per year**.

Charitable trusts are key community anchors who **reinvest every penny** into developing services focused on their local people across the life course. Trusts are working with more and more partners to develop supported routes to **mental and physical health improvement**, while reshaping services to meet local strategic objectives.

The ultimate aim of community leisure trusts is to **engage all people across the community**, whether that is having a health check, a coffee in a safe and warm space, going for a swim, taking a walk in the park, borrowing a library book or becoming a member of a gym.

Community Leisure UK are keen to help organisations who would like to know more about the public leisure landscape and / or the charitable trust model. Please do get in touch at:

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Thank you for reading.

