



myplace
support team

Outdoor MUGA

Introduction

Outdoor multi-use games areas are a great way to exploit available space and, as more young people express interest in taking part in sport in clubs and with their friends as the 2012 Olympics approaches, are becoming an increasingly popular facility. If you're thinking of including one in your **myplace** centre this briefing will provide some useful pointers and advice on what to consider.

How to set up and use an outdoor multi-use games area

With an ever growing culture of encouraging social and physical development within our communities, never before has the need to provide quality sporting facilities been so great. A recent Sport England survey found that half a million young people who don't normally play sport outside of school lessons have made a change and completed ten-week sports courses in their own time. Encouragingly, the researchers also found that two in five continued to play sport afterwards - in clubs and with their friends. This suggests that the demand for sports activities is there, as long as the activities on offer are accessible, reliable, relevant and affordable, reflecting the diversity of young people's needs - and young people have been fully consulted when planning them.

A multi-use games area (MUGA), whether indoors or outdoors, is a large capital investment though that will need extensive specialist design, planning and maintenance if it is to be successful. Whilst it may look like just a simple macadam construction with a synthetic or painted surface the demands of sport mean that they are best built by companies with relevant and proven expertise. Likewise, designers with the appropriate experience and expertise should be involved in the design, specification and project/construction management of a MUGA. Young people should play a key role too in briefing the professionals on how they will use the facility.

Critical to the success of any sports facility is an initial assessment of its likely use. Is it the right location? What else is on offer in the community? Questions to ask include which sports the facility will provide for and what will be the predominant sporting use? How intensively will it be used and what standard of playing performance is needed? What is the intended lifespan? The choice of sports, and the balance between them, may also depend on the levels of income generation that are required or possible. The initial planning stages should also include a thorough assessment of the proposed management and operation of the new facility.

Among the most commonly played sports on multi-sports games areas are tennis/mini tennis, netball, basketball, soccer/five-a-side soccer and hockey. Other sports that might be played include rugby/tag rugby, rounders, athletics training, tri-golf, roller hockey and volleyball. The need for facilities to compromise arises mainly due to the choice of playing surface, as certain surface types are more suitable than others for different sports. How much shock absorbency or cushioning, for example, is designed in. There are conflicting requirements between different sports but also a clear need to design in health and safety and protect participants from injury.

One limitation for a MUGA is the possible difficulty for players in identifying the relevant play lines, where there are many overlapping sets on the same surface. For this reason it is unwise to include lines just for the sake of completeness, if the sport is not likely to be played very often.

Other aspects a designer will need to consider include the site's topography, access, drainage, electrical supply, water supply, trees and ground conditions. Before starting detailed design, the designer will require as much information as possible about the site and its surroundings. Allowing sufficient resources for initial information gathering greatly reduces the risk of unforeseen problems, (and increased costs) during construction or later.

Trees adjacent to a site may have the advantage of providing privacy, shelter or screening from a low sun. Their roots, however, can be a threat to the facility itself, by distorting or cracking the surface. The location of the MUGA should also be sympathetic to its surroundings and any adjacent buildings, especially houses, and early guidance should be sought from the local planning authority.

Other aspects you will need to consider include equipment. There is a wide range of nets, posts, goals, division netting and rebound boards to choose from. The precise use of each facility will determine what's right, so that the change of use from one sport to another can take place without too much effort and inconvenience. Equipment storage, fencing style and floodlighting should also be considered and, in all of this, don't overlook disabled and emergency access. Finally, don't overlook maintenance. The maintenance of any synthetic sports surface is of vital importance if it is to remain consistent in how it plays, good to look at and long lasting - and therefore appealing to the young people who will use it.

“Finding your sport and developing a love for it at a young age is an important step towards continuing participation when you're older. London 2012 is just around the corner so there has never been a better time to get out and get active.”

Richard Lewis, Sport England's Chair

Action planning

Young People

Get young people involved in the planning and development. Which sports do they play? Which sports would they play if the facilities were available? Ask them to think about how the requirements of different groups can be balanced.

Making a Difference

Success in sport can be a life-changing achievement. But not everyone who takes part will be a world champion. By undertaking sport leadership courses and accreditation young people can make a difference in their own lives and those of others. Find out more at www.sportsleaders.org.

Vision and Values

How does sport fit within your wider vision. Is it sport for sports sake or part of wider health and fitness activity. Is it community-led or fundraising-led? How can you go about encouraging those who normally don't participate in sport to join in?

Practicality

The constraints of your site, its size and shape and what else is available in the community will all impact on your proposals. Be realistic in what will work, and work with young people to ensure you achieve a facility that they will use.

Links and Further Guidance

Sport England invests National Lottery and government funding in organisations and projects that will grow and sustain participation in grassroots sport and create opportunities for people to excel at their chosen sport. Sport England employs advisers in each of its regional offices to assist with the technical development of projects. Contact them to discuss proposals. See the website at www.sportengland.org.

Find out what is happening in your local area already – there are 49 County Sports Partnerships covering England. They are local networks of local authorities, national governing bodies, clubs, schools and school sport partnerships, primary care trusts and other local agencies committed to working together to increase participation in sport and physical activity. Find out more at www.sportengland.org/support_advice/county_sports_partnerships.aspx

Sport England provides best practice design advice and requirements for building types and sporting activities covering a range of sports. These design guidance notes are free to download from its website at www.sportengland.org/facilities_planning/design_guidance_notes.aspx

One of the areas covered is Multi Use Games Areas but there are also detailed requirements on layout, finishes, accommodation and support requirements for, for example, badminton centres; floors for indoor sports; and indoor bowls, as well as updated and combined guidance for Sports Halls Design and Layouts. The notes aim to increase awareness of good design in sports facilities; help key building professions, clients, user representatives and other stakeholders to follow best practice; and encourage well designed sports facilities that meet the needs of sports and are a pleasure to use.

Through its website you will also find links to the National Governing Bodies of (most) sports where further information on specifications can be found.

Lots of private contractors design, build and install MUGAs. A quick internet search is a good way of checking the range that is available and distilling ideas for your own facility.

See also the Sports and Play Construction Association website at www.sapca.org.uk

The Youth Sport Trust is focused on creating a world-leading PE and sport system that reaches, inspires and engages all young people – whatever their age or ability. It has a number of programmes and initiatives that can help include all young people in sport and has also developed a network of 14-19 year old Young Ambassadors who advocate the benefits of sport and health to their peers. See www.youthsporttrust.org

Read the Youth Active Toolkit from UK Youth and Youth Active. They have worked together to produce this resource to help encourage young people to take up sport and physical activity. This toolkit can either be used in its own right or can be used to recognise the learning and participation skills through the Youth Achievement Awards (YAA). This toolkit sets appropriate challenges and targets through sports, in game and activities, cycling, swimming, basketball, football, athletics, cricket, racquet sports, dance, action sports, circuit training and fitness. It also goes through the benefits of sport; how to introduce sports and physical activities to young people; 14 sample worksheets, ideas for workers, peer leaders and volunteers and progression in sports and fitness.

Available from stores.lulu.com/ukyouth

Places people play

The Olympic and Paralympic stakeholders have announced plans for the mass participation legacy from the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games, which will involve significant investment in sports facilities. Places People Play will “bring the sporting legacy to life in communities across the country, answering London 2012’s Singapore promise to inspire a new generation to play sport.”

The £135 million initiative has been made possible by the Government’s National Lottery reforms, which are bringing additional funding into grassroots sport. Clubs, community and voluntary sector groups and councils will be able to apply for grants of between £25,000 and £150,000 where there is a proven local need for a facility to be modernised, extended or modified to open up new sporting opportunities.

Sport England will invest £50 million of National Lottery funding in up to 1,000 local sports facilities. This phase, known as Inspired Facilities, launched in February 2011 with applications open in April for the first of five £10 million funding rounds, with the final round in 2014-15. For more details of the programme see www.sportengland.org