Case study

Transforming lives through sport and physical activity

Sport England

The Challenge

- Make data and analytical tools accessible internally and externally to evidence the need for new sporting

The Benefits

- Evidence-based allocation of funding
- Shared understanding of gaps in sporting provision
- Effective challenges to developments on sports fields
- Time savings and improved data quality

Sport England is using ArcGIS to identify gaps in the provision of sporting facilities nationwide and allocate funding to projects that break down inequalities in physical activity and sport participation. The organisation has also integrated ArcGIS web maps and spatial data services to key investment and planning business systems to establish data capture standards, reporting and visualisation.

The Challenge

As part of a new ten-year strategy called 'Uniting the Movement', Sport England aims to 'transform lives and communities through sport and physical activity'. Launched in 2021, this wide-ranging initiative aims to address inequalities in physical activity and sport participation, making it possible for everyone to live more active, healthier lives.

To achieve this vision, Sport England needs to be able to visualise and analyse vast amounts of data, so that it can make fair and appropriate decisions about where to allocate funding and target interventions. It also needs to share its data with hundreds of local authorities and sporting associations, to help everyone work together to ensure the right sporting opportunities are established, in the right places, for the people who need them most.

The Solution

Sport England and its contractors make extensive use of Esri's geographic information system (GIS) technology, ArcGIS, in a range of tools, used both internally within Sport England and externally by organisations in the wider sports industry. Furthermore, Sport England subscribes to Premium Data and National Data Services from Esri UK, giving it live access to accurate, current datasets in pre-prepared formats that are ready to use in ArcGIS. The key data sets it leverages include: contextual basemaps and geodemographic data such as census, health, deprivation and socio-economic data.

One of the organisation's most pivotal tools is its Planning and Information Management System, a bespoke solution created by embedding ArcGIS capabilities into a Salesforce solution. The addition of ArcGIS improves the accuracy of data captured and the visualisation of data in a spatial context, allowing Sport England's planners to view and evaluate planning applications that affect existing sports fields in the context of other relevant geospatial data and aerial photography.

A second tool is Sport England's Investment Management System. Also a Salesforce-based solution, this tool utilises ArcGIS capabilities, via the ArcGIS JavaScript API. Used internally, it allows investment managers to capture information accurately, visualise data and then check and challenge funding applications to make sure they are delivering value to target audiences, including deprived communities, in line with its vision.

Another key tool is Active Places Power, which is an ArcGIS-based web solution primarily used by the wider sports sector, including organisations like the Football Foundation. Provided free of charge, the tool enables all users to view detailed data from the National Sport Facility Database and analyse it spatially, to improve understanding of the catchment area for existing facilities, taking into account walking, cycling and driving catchments and demographic data.

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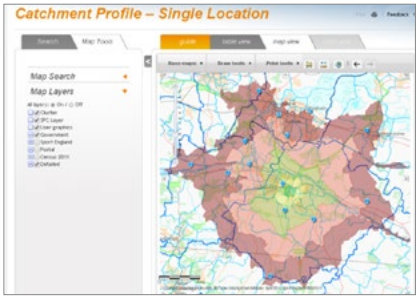
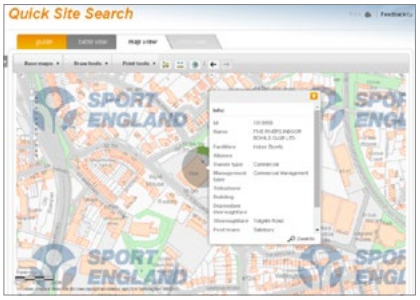
> “ArcGIS helps us to target funding more precisely to make sports facilities and activities available to people in communities where there is currently low participation in sport and physical activity”

Mark Critchley, head of GIS, Sport England





Sport England’s Active Places Power web app, built using ArcGIS and Esri UK Data Services

Most recently, Sport England has launched a Local Area Insights tool, providing the sports industry with an intuitive way to visualise and analyse open data, to build up a better understanding of communities and identify the location of target audiences. Built using Esri’s InstantAtlas and consuming live data from Esri UK’s National Data Service, the solution is fully integrated into the Sport England website, with its branding and accessibility standards.

The Benefits

Evidence-based allocation of funding

By using ArcGIS to visualise and analyse multiple datasets on interactive maps, Sport England can more easily identify the locations and communities where interventions will have the greatest impact. It can then allocate targeted grant awards, which amount to millions of pounds of National Lottery funding on an annual basis, to projects that will help break down inequalities in access to sports – particularly in areas with high levels of deprivation. “ArcGIS helps us to target funding more precisely to make sports facilities and activities available to people in communities where there is currently low participation in sport and physical activity,” said Mark Critchley, head of GIS at Sport England.

Shared understanding of gaps in sporting provision

Organisations of all sizes, from England Athletics to smaller organisations such as individual sports clubs, can use the ArcGIS-based online tools developed by Sport England to better understand demand for their sport, area by area. They can see gaps in provision, to understand how best to tailor their sport offerings and plan effectively for the future. With Critchley adding: “Sporting organisations and local authorities can use our free online ArcGIS tools to direct their strategic thinking about what facilities are needed in specific communities and justify their applications for funding.”

Effective challenges to proposed developments on sports fields

Integrated in the Planning and Information Management System, ArcGIS supports Sports England in its statutory duty to respond to planning applications that affect playing field land. Using the data visualisation capabilities of ArcGIS, Sport England can see how proposed developments will affect existing sports fields, see what other sports facilities are in the area and gather evidence to protect existing provision or secure new provision for new housing developments.

Time savings and improved data quality

By subscribing to Esri UK’s Data Services, Sport England is able to deliver a wide range of GIS services, including large volumes of key geospatial data, despite having a small in-house GIS team. Accurate, consistent and current data is streamed directly into Sport England’s applications, saving time and allowing the organisation to use the same data resources in a standardised way, across all its ArcGIS-driven tools. Critchley said: “Esri UK’s Data Services provide Sport England with a single source of accurate, up-to-date mapping and geospatial data that we can use for many different solutions, significantly reducing our data management overheads and freeing up our time to deliver business-focused solutions.”

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