

ESSEX PLAYING FIELDS ASSOCIATION

F. A. Q.'s

Who Are We?

Essex Playing Fields Association is a registered Charity (No. 301448) that was founded in 1924. To that extent it actually pre-dates the National Playing Fields Association by two years. There are some 30 or so registered County Playing Fields Associations throughout England and Wales, of which EPFA is generally regarded as being one of the more pro-active.

Our Association is managed by a part-time Director, two part-time Field Officers, and an Executive Council of eight volunteers. We are additionally able to call on four 'advisors' who are specialists in various aspects of matters in which we get involved, and a further 25 volunteer judges who assist with the running of our Best Kept Playing Fields competition each year.

And we also have two Ambassadors – Danny Crates, the Paralympian, World and European gold medal athlete, and Peter Such, the former Essex and England cricketer.

What Do We Do?

We are committed to the protection, preservation and maintenance of playing fields, playgrounds and play areas, particularly for children, young people and the disabled.

How Do We Do It?

We work closely with local Parish and Town Councils, sports clubs and associations, and managers of playing field facilities across the county, providing technical and practical advice and, where possible, financial assistance either via our own Small Grants Fund or by putting the organisation concerned in touch with other grant-making bodies known to us. We also run seminars and training days from time to time on matters relevant to our mission statement.

Where Do We Get Our Funds From?

We are an essentially voluntary organisation whose main form of income is derived from our membership. Our membership comprises local Councils, sports clubs and associations, all of whom pay annual subscriptions, and individuals who support our

cause, usually by virtue of Life Membership for a one-off subscription of £50.00. We also encourage Corporate Membership for an annual subscription of £100.00 which, we believe, appeals to local businesses whose workforce invariably have children who can benefit from the availability of playing fields and playgrounds in their community. We get no automatic central funding, although we have been fortunate in receiving financial support from Essex County Council recently. However, this is by no means guaranteed and indeed has been dramatically cut by more than 75% over the past two years. We also apply for grants where we believe we have the necessary criteria to satisfy the various grant-makers, and have received regular financial support from, amongst others, Essex Police, The Fryerning Foundation, the Charles S French Trust, and the Augustine Courtauld Trust.

How Do We Spend Our Money?

The funding we currently receive from Essex County Council together with our members' subscriptions cover the remunerations of our part-time Director and the incidental expenses that our other, volunteer, Executive Council members incur. All the other income that we receive – grants, donations and the like – is used in the furtherance of our work. We are, of course, a non-profit making Charity. Over the years we have built up a small amount of financial reserves, but we need to dip into that every year now in order to make ends meet. Ideally, we need an absolute minimum of £30,000 income per year: £10,000 for salaries and management expenses; £10,000 to make donations from our Small Grants Fund, and £10,000 to run competitions, events, training days, seminars, etc. We are a very long way away from that target at present.

Over the past two years we have given money to the following organisations from our Small Grants Fund:

- Brentwood County Ground Club - £350 for outfield renovation
- Action for Play, Manningtree - £500 for new playground equipment
- Alresford Parish Council - £1,350 for new boundary hedge and new children's play equipment
- Beaumont cum Moze Parish Council - £200 for repairs to playground swings
- Earls Colne Cricket Club - £300 to improve their square
- Stansted Scouts Tortoises Group - £1,000 for improvements, including disabled access, to their scout hut
- Braintree Cricket Club - £420 for training courses for new colts' coaches
- Finchingfield Parish Council - £475 for new goal posts
- Hatfield Peverel Parish Council - £500 for boundary fencing and picnic tables
- Orsett Cricket Club - £1,000 towards relaying their vandalised square
- Ashdon Parish Council - £1,000 towards development of new playing field
- North Fambridge Parish Council - £600 towards new playground fencing
- Rayleigh Town Council - £1,000 towards new play equipment
- The Buxton Trust, Theydon Bois - £1,000 towards ground renovation and improvement
- Sheering Cricket Club - £500 towards a new mower

- Maldon Cricket club - £800 towards outfield remedial work
- Boreham Parish Council - £750 for renovation and maintenance of recreation ground
- Lawford Parish Council - £1,000 for replacement metal fence enclosing play equipment
- Feering Parish Council - £739 for disabled access picnic bench and replacement litter bins

What Other Examples Are There Of What We Do?

Our flagship activity is our annual Best Kept Playing Fields competition which we have run every year since 1971. The competition is divided into six Classes:

- Best playing field serving communities of more than 2,500
- Best playing field serving communities of fewer than 2,500
- Best children's playground
- Best cricket ground (irrespective of whether or not a winter sport is played there)
- Best playing field professionally maintained and managed by larger authorities or commercial organisations
- Best project carried out during the year

The competition regularly attracts in excess of 125 entrants from around the county and it is generally regarded as being second only to the county's Best Village competition in terms of prestige. Entrants are parish and town councils or district authorities, and clubs (especially cricket clubs) and associations. All the Classes are sponsored by local or national firms with a particular interest in playing fields or playgrounds, so the winners receive goods or vouchers to the tune of between £250 and £500. The Awards are presented by our Patron, Lord Petre, and the current Chairman of Essex County Council at our AGM at Essex County Cricket Club in October.

And a spin-off from the competition is that where our judges find something not quite right, one of our Field Officers contacts the playing field or playground manager and arranges a site visit to discuss the problem and offer technical and/or financial help to rectify it.

Other initiatives and events that we have organised in recent times include:

- A groundsmen's course specifically aimed at cricket groundsmen, which has subsequently led to the formation of the local Association of Groundsmen
- In conjunction with Disability Essex, a subsidised inspection programme for children's playgrounds to ensure that they were 'all-inclusive' and compliant with the Disability Discrimination Act.
- A one-day seminar on the protection of playing fields consequent upon legislative changes to the Planning Act.

- A rugby football scheme to enable local schools without facilities for rugby to join with their local rugby club and use their pitches during the week, and at the same time encourage parents to acquire a basic coaching qualification.
- An Inter Cricket tournament for ‘Year 7’ schoolchildren held at a local cricket club. This is now an annual event.
- A training day, in conjunction with Writtle College, for the protection and maintenance of playing fields, specifically aimed at groundsmen and dealing with autumn work to put cricket pitches to bed and prepare football and rugby pitches for their season.
- A one-day seminar specifically dealing with playgrounds and play areas – their construction, safety, accessibility, etc.

How Do We Publicise Ourselves?

We publish our newsletter, “The Playing Field” quarterly, with a circulation of 750 around the county. It is sent free of charge to all our members, all parish and town Councils, and all county councillors. And it is available – also free of charge - to anyone else who wants it. Just contact our Secretary.

We also have good links with many local newspapers and routinely issue press releases to selected papers when we have been active in their circulation area. We also get regular air time on BBC Essex, where Steve Scruton is a particular supporter of us.

And our website, www.essexplayingfields.org.uk, is gradually growing. There is a lot more that we want to put on it: it is just a matter of having the time (and expertise!)

How Can I Help?

In the first instance – join us. Membership for an individual is £10.00 per annum, or £50.00 for Life Membership. Corporate Membership is £100.00 per year. Parish and Town Councils pay £25.00 per year, and District and Unitary Authorities £50.00. And Sports Clubs and Associations pay £15.00. Your membership alone is extremely important to us.

However, it might be that having read this, you would like to get more involved in some aspect of our work, whether it is organising an event, judging some of the entries in the Best Kept Playing Fields competition, fundraising, or anything else for which you have a particular aptitude and which you believe could be of assistance to us. Like most Charities, we never have enough volunteers.

Who Should I Contact?

Our Director, Malcolm Webb, can be reached on our Helpline (01277 218005) or via malcolmwebb@talk21.com and our Secretary is: Kathryn Gibson, 76, Buckingham Road, Hockley, SS5 4UE. Tel. 01702 207433. Email kat.gibson@btinternet.com

Or you can contact us for general enquiries by email via our website at postmaster@essexplayingfield.org.uk

**OF THE 42 SHIRE COUNTIES IN ENGLAND AND WALES,
ESSEX LIES 36TH IN TERMS OF PROVISION OF
PLAYING FIELDS PER 1,000 HEAD OF POPULATION.**

**PLEASE JOIN US AND HELP US ENSURE THAT NO
FURTHER PLAYING FIELD LAND IS LOST TO
DEVELOPERS, AND THAT WHICH REMAINS IS
MAINTAINED TO THE HIGHEST LEVEL FOR THE
BENEFIT OF ALL OF US AND FOR FUTURE
GENERATIONS.**