



east durham
community
athletics track

NEWS RELEASE

Plans for new County Durham athletics track clear planning hurdle

Proposals for a new community athletics track in County Durham have cleared a major hurdle. At a meeting of its County Planning Committee, Durham County Council resolved to grant planning permission for the East Durham Community Athletics Track (EDCAT) in Sedgefield. The team behind the initiative is now preparing for the next phase of the project, on a site on the north east edge of NETPark. This work will include finalising the business plan to ensure the long term viability of the track. That plan has already received praise from Sport England.

The EDCAT application, which was recommended for approval by council officers, was supported by members of the committee who voted nine to five in favour of granting planning permission, subject to the completion of a Section 39 Agreement in relation to the delivery of ecological mitigation / biodiversity net gain. The decision represents the latest stage in a process and community-led campaign that goes back as far as 2010.

Since the scheme was first presented in a public consultation late in 2020, EDCAT has attracted significant support from the local community and athletics organisations, including home club Sedgefield Harriers. Objectors had raised concerns in relation to ecology, but officers confirmed that the scheme would deliver a biodiversity net gain, through the creation of new wetland and hedgerow habitats. From the start, the EDCAT Steering Group has focused on developing a scheme which has a positive impact on the environment. To achieve this, the application incorporates a carefully designed landscape strategy which accommodates a large new wetland area, with a proposal to double the amount of hedgerow currently on the site.

Ean Parsons, chair of the EDCAT Steering Group and founder of Sedgefield Harriers, comments: "We are clearly delighted that Durham County Council has granted planning permission for this project. The track will provide a much needed facility for residents of Sedgefield, but also Fishburn, the Trimdons, Ferryhill, Coxhoe and Spennymoor from where Sedgefield Harriers draw much of their

membership, along with those in Wingate, Peterlee and throughout east Durham, and in parts of the Tees Valley.

“We are from this community and we care deeply about Sedgefield and its surroundings, so of course we plan to be good neighbours and responsible guardians of the land. We look forward to working with NETPark, with local ecology and wildlife groups, and with other residents, to achieve our vision for a sustainable and successful track that has a positive impact on the natural environment. In doing so, we will give accessible opportunities to participate in sport to many thousands of County Durham residents, and particularly young people. More than ever, community-led facilities like this are needed to encourage the public to lead healthy, active lives.”

The EDCAT proposals were developed by a team of volunteers from Sedgefield, working closely with council officers and experienced professionals across a range of topics. Many of those involved offered their time and expertise on a pro bono or low fee basis. Among the firms that provided support were SAJ, Apex, Ward Hadaway, Lichfields, Billingham George & Partners, and Southern Green.

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