

Recreation and Sport Facility Design Guide



Government of South Australia
Office for Recreation, Sport and Racing

Table of Contents

Purpose of this guide	3
Background	3
Facility design considerations	4
Design stages	7
Establishing the facility design team	8
Developing the design brief	8
Facility design team	9
References	10

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Purpose of this guide

Designed to supplement the South Australian Regional Level Recreation and Sport Facilities Planning Guidelines this resource has been developed to assist local government officers and others responsible for the planning, development and operation of regional level recreation and sport facilities understand the general principles that need to be considered when designing recreation and sport facilities.

"Quality is not a 'bolt-on' option, and needs clear aims, a realistic budget and the right process to carry the project through" (Better Places for Sport, A client guide to achieving design quality, Sport England)

Background

Facility design is an important part of the facility planning and delivery process. A poorly designed facility can alienate users, create management challenges and increase operational costs. Moreover, trying to fix these problems post construction can be expensive and difficult to do. It is therefore important to spend the time and energy at the design stage to ensure positive outcomes for stakeholders and user groups.

Regional Level Recreation and Sport Facilities – a facility (either single purpose or community sporting hub) of regional significance which because of its location and characteristics attracts users from a large council area and/or across multiple council areas and meets the standards required to host major Regional/State level competitions, events and/or training.



Facility design considerations

Well-designed sports and recreation facilities are welcoming, functional and sustainable places that support active participation for all people. The following are some key design principles that should be considered to help guide the planning, design and development of facilities. The list provided is not exhaustive and should be adapted to the specific requirements of each project.

Stakeholder engagement and needs assessment:

- Engage users early – participants, facility managers, to inform programming and facility development needs and spatial requirements.

Practical and affordable for the long-term:

- Regional level recreations and sport facilities are long term assets that generally require large amounts of public money to develop, operate and maintain. It is critical that the design process -be considerate of this and aim to deliver the highest possible standard of facility balanced against funding realities including life-cycle costs.

Multi-functionality and flexibility:

- Ensure facilities are designed to meet compliance requirements such as appropriate run-offs or field-of-play dimensions including consideration of spectator and official traffic flow to cater for concurrent use by multiple sports.
- Design adaptable spaces (e.g., convertible courts, movable partitions) to support various sports, events, and community activities.
- Plan for future-proofing— design spaces to be flexible, adaptable and able to be re-invented to cater for changing community needs (e.g. ageing population).
- Where possible the design should accommodate potential future expansion options (permanent for future needs and/or temporary for event purposes).

Accessibility and inclusivity (universal design):

- Facilities should be accessible for all and compliant with the Disability Discrimination Act and Universal Design Principles which includes providing accessible pathways, ramps, and amenities for people with disabilities and consider cultural inclusivity and gender equity in design (e.g., change rooms, toilets).
- Ensure inclusive design considers diverse cultural, gender, and age group needs.

Financially sustainable:

- Aim to deliver the highest possible standard of facility balanced against funding realities including maintenance and lifecycle costs.
- Develop an Asset Management Plan and budget for long-term facility management including determining operational, maintenance and upgrade/replacement costs and funding sources to avoid future financial strain.

Fit-for-purpose facilities:

- Design facilities to meet the specific needs of intended users. Align with state sporting body standards for dimensions, lighting, and amenities (e.g., changerooms, toilets (accessible), adequate storage, spectator areas such as shaded seating).

Climate resilience and sustainability:

- Incorporate environmentally responsible design features, such as energy-efficient lighting, water-saving fixtures, and sustainable materials into the core design and explore renewable energy options (e.g. solar panels, batteries).

Parking and access:

- Provide sufficient parking for community use. Also, consider active transport options (bike racks, pedestrian pathways) and ensure there are clear routes for ambulances and emergency vehicles.

Safety and security:

- Integrate safety measures into the design: non-slip finishes, good lighting, monitoring systems (CCTV), emergency response planning, secure access controls.
- Incorporate CPTED principles (Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design) for lighting, sightlines, and secure/controlled entry points.
- Consider digital booking systems and smart lighting to support efficient shared use.

Community integration and co-location:

- Co-locate active spaces with amenities like cafés, plazas, schools, and parks to build social hubs.

Quality materials and operational efficiency:

- Use durable, low-maintenance materials and robust equipment to reduce lifecycle costs.
- Optimise layout for effective traffic flow, equipment storage, staff operations, and maintenance routines.

Compliance with standards and regulations:

- Adhere to governing body specifications for court and field dimensions, safety zones, spectator seating.
- Ensure compliance with relevant building codes and accessibility legislation (e.g., ADA, Equality Act, local guidelines).

Ease of navigation and wayfinding:

- Provide clear signage, logical circulation routes, accessible lifts/ramps, and contrasting finishes to aid users with sensory or cognitive challenges.
- Where possible facilities should be situated in locations that are site appropriate, with links to major road networks and connections to public transport, cycling and pedestrian routes, community facilities and services.
- Other things to consider:
 - Design social spaces such as cafés to interface with the public realm (e.g. outdoor play spaces).
 - Provide safe drop-off/pick up areas and pedestrian access for centre users.
 - Have adequate parking, including parking for buses and bicycles.
 - Provide opportunities for shade where outdoor spaces are intended for spectators, families etc.
 - Prioritise materials that are resistant to vandalism and are easy to maintain.

Design stages

All building projects go through a similar design process irrespective of the building type.

Initial Concept (Schematic) Design

Early design concepts developed based on community engagement, site analysis, feasibility testing and exploration of conceptual approaches.

- **ASSESS – consultation and concept review.**
- **DECISION POINT – revise, restart or approve and proceed to the Developed Design phase.**

Developed Design

More detailed drawings, layouts and technical inputs; elemental cost estimates developed.

- **ASSESS – consultation and design, costing review.**
- **DECISION POINT – revise or approve and proceed to the Detailed Design phase.**

Detailed Design phase

Full technical resolution of architecture, engineering and specifications to tender-ready level.

- **ASSESS – documentation review.**
- **DECISION POINT – revise or approve for next stage.**

Construction Documents

Final documentation refined after tender outcomes and site considerations; construction-ready drawings.

- **ASSESS – review final package.**
- **DECISION POINT – approval for construction.**

Key things to consider:

- If the design is not going the way you want remember it's OK to STOP, REVIEW and if required START the process again.
- Look at design compromises carefully –will they still allow you to achieve the desired outcomes for the facility?

Establishing the facility design team

Developing the design brief:

A design brief will help you articulate what the user and community needs are into a set of design specifications that the design team can work with. The key elements of the design brief are:

- A description of the project and the project history.
- The purpose of the facility.
- How the facility is proposed to be managed.
- Site details and any clearing constraints (e.g. tree removals and/or demolition works).
- A schedule of specific requirements including the design principles that need to be considered in the design.
- Details of any environmental issues that need to be addressed.
- The standards of quality and finishes required.
- Accommodation schedule (number and type of users, groups, needs of the groups, hours of operation).
- Existing council masterplans or open space strategies.
- Project budget and cost limit.
- Key dates for the commencement and conclusion of construction.



Facility design team:

The design brief will help inform the type and level of expertise required for the design team. Although the make-up of the team will depend on the scope, size and scale of the project, generally for medium to large scale projects the following appointments are considered:

Profession	Role
Project Manager	Manage the activities of the design team through construction and where appropriate practical completion.
Planner	Planning, development approval and codes/ standards advice.
Architect	Develop architectural plans and design drawings.
Structural engineer	Project engineering advice.
Civil engineers	In-ground services, stormwater and consent requirements.
Cost planner or quantity surveyor	Project costing estimates.
Traffic Consultant (if appropriate)	Parking issues, road layouts, intersection designs.
Landscape architect (if appropriate)	Landscape design.
Acoustics consultant (if appropriate)	Acoustic design.
Energy/Water Engineer (if appropriate)	For complex aquatic or high energy use facilities.

Key things to consider:

- Wherever possible to save money you should identify and co-opt in-house expertise to assist in the design phase.
- Membership of the project team should be merit based and reflect gender equity.
- It is important to consult widely. Design workshops should be undertaken to ensure direct and potential users and stakeholders needs are considered and included in the design.
- Consult with experienced facility managers to ensure functional and operational considerations are embedded into the facility design.
- For a facility to be sustainable, building and ongoing recurrent costs needs to be carefully managed.
- Consider setting the broad capital and recurrent budget early on and including this information in the design brief.

References

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