

Love Mayor, Members of Council,

There is increasing concern about obesity and lack of exercise in our population, especially among children and young people, with ominous implications for their future health.

Before the recent Olympics the Secretary of State for Sport wrote to local authorities about "a new vision" for sport, to "increase opportunities for all people to participate."

Leeds City Council has announced that it will spend millions of pounds, refurbishing sports centres.

Yet our inner-city area is woefully short of sports fields where future Olympic champions could be developing their talents, and all children could be keeping healthy and happy, both in and out of school hours.

Some figures show how serious the situation is.

Within 1.5 miles of Hyde Park Corner are five primary schools and one high school, with many pupils from homes without gardens, from families who, for reasons such as economic hardship or lack of transport, find it difficult to take their children to sports activities.

The Education (School Premises) Regulations of 1999 lay down minimum requirements for school playing pitch provision. You will be shocked to hear how far short of these requirements our local schools fall.

City of Leeds High should have 35,000 sq.m. It has just over 13,000 sq.m.

Spring Bank and Shire Oak Primary Schools should have 5,000 sq.m. each. Spring Bank has just over 1,500, Shire Oak has just under 2,000 sq.m. That's a total shortfall of more than 6,500 sq.m. (I should point out that the space which these two schools have is grassy play area, not actual sports pitches.)

But the most shocking figures are for the three primary schools where the majority of pupils qualify for free school meals, generally an indicator of social and economic deprivation.

Brudenell, Rosetank and Quarry Mount have no playing field space, nought square metres, although Brudenell and Rosetank should each have 5,000 sq.m and Quarry Mount should have 2,500.

Instead, all sports activities take place on hard-surface playgrounds, adjacent to roads and traffic.

To summarise, these schools need 40,846 square metres more playing field space, according to legal requirements.

The Primary School headteachers wrote some time ago to the Executive Board, explaining their problems in trying to provide adequate sports activities for their pupils.

At Shure Oak and Spring Bank, rugby and cricket coaching have to share space with PE classes. Track and field athletics activities cannot be developed.

At Quarry Mount, all sports have to take place in the school hall or on the sloping concrete playground — not conditions likely to produce marathon runners or high-jump champions.

Similarly at Brudenell and Rosetank where the range of sports activities is severely limited, where rugby tackling cannot be taught and running is not feasible, to give two examples. Incidentally, the only grass area close to Rosetank is generally unsafe for children to use, due to dog faeces and weed syringes.

And yet the teachers of these schools desperately want their pupils to have the best chances for health and sporting success.

Our area is the second worst in Leeds for open green-space provision.

We are lucky to have Woodhouse Moor — which we value as a natural green space for all. But it is the most intensively-used park in Leeds, especially when the universities, with over 50,000 students, are in session, so it can in no way be regarded as part of the sports provision for schools.

Because of Headingley and Hyde Park's lack of playing fields the UDP in 2001 gave NG protected status to the remaining playing fields, although since then, development has actually happened at the former Leeds Boys' Grammar School site and at the former Spring Bank Teachers' Centre.

Yet any evening around the terraced streets of our area you can see children kicking footballs around because they have nowhere else to play.

We ask, therefore, that you, the Council, do all in your power to bring the playing pitch provision for local schools up to the standards laid down by the Education (School Premises) Regulations, for the sake of our children's health and future.