



**Specialising in architecture and sports and education project development, LK2 offers a wide range of skills under one roof. We talk to directors Dale Lui and Gary Johnson.**



Dale Lui

#### **What differentiates LK2 from its competitors?**

LK2 comprises two companies, chartered architects and sport and leisure consultancy, which gives us a wide range of skills. We've also worked as a developer for 12 years, so have a very broad understanding of how development works. Having all of these skills under one roof means we can have really good, constructive discussions about our schemes and every project we work on is deliverable. We're very pragmatic about that; we're in the game of delivering successful projects.



Gary Johnson

#### **How did LK2 get into sport and leisure?**

We launched the architectural practice 20 years ago. Our directors originally worked for Benoy, so we have a strong background in retail, although each of us also specialises in different areas such as mixed use development, higher education and residential. We set up the sports and leisure business five years ago after delivering the new headquarters for Lincolnshire FA in Nettleham. The turnkey solution included a new purpose-built facility with a spacious boardroom that

doubles as a conferencing and training suite allowing for extra revenue generation. We managed the entire process from end to end; including land sourcing and providing temporary accommodation to ensure seamless integration and business continuity during the span of the contract. We're not being precious, but you do need a unique blend of skills to be able to deliver projects like these.

#### **Which sports and leisure projects are you working on?**

We're currently working with approximately 15 county football associations across the country in a variety of ways from asset transfers, scheme appraisals and business planning through to delivering purpose built headquarters. We're also delivering projects in line with the Football Association, Football Foundation and Sport England. We are now working with a number of London Boroughs to put their sites into community ownership to ensure a sustainable future. We have delivered a number of high profile schemes including significant park regeneration schemes, asset transfer proposals through to the full refurbishment of Market Road, Islington for the London Borough of Islington Council, which has seen a £2.5m transformation of the first artificial grass pitches in London. We are very excited about some of the work we're doing with developers and asset managers to integrate sport and leisure into retail and commercial residential schemes, particularly developing large urban extensions.





We recently worked with commercial developers VBR Investments on a mixed used scheme helping to optimise the development proposal by increasing the residential allocation, while demonstrating efficiencies in the Section 106 contribution from £2m to £1.2m and significantly enhancing the sports and leisure facilities in the scheme, including significant grant aid to the new sports facility. The original master plan consisted of significant commercial, residential, retail and infrastructure improvements with minimal improvements to local sports facilities. We have been able to demonstrate and justify the need for improved sports and leisure facilities, this has resulted in a £2.2m refurbishment of the existing site to include three glass back squash courts, 9x9 floodlit football turf pitch, sports pavilion consisting of six changing rooms and ancillary facilities to meet the local community needs, in line with improvements to the existing grass pitches.

#### What key trends are you seeing in sports development?

Gone are the days when the grant aid organisations invested significantly in one or two pitch sites. These days, a facility needs to demonstrate long term commercial viability and this almost certainly means taking a multi-sports approach. Facilities need to be able to offer a wide range of sport, leisure and recreational activity including spaces for activities like soft play and social clubs to make sure they are used from nine o'clock in the morning to 10 o'clock at night. Sites can no longer stand empty during the week; they've got to work 24/7.







### Are shared facilities the way forward for community sport facilities?

Absolutely. Having a mix of facilities shared by different parties helps to underpin the viability of a project, ensures sustainable business planning, attracts wider users and ensures better use of the facilities in the long term.

This is exactly how the new sports facilities for clients Burghley House Preservation Trust (BHPT), New College Stamford and Stamford AFC work. Stamford AFC were negotiating to relocate to a new, purpose built stadium, to allow BHPT to regain use of the land the existing stadium stood on, with SAFC seeing the benefits of a new stadium. This was initially set to be a developer-led scheme that would see part of the new stadium funded by the sale of land to be used for

the new housing.

We were requested by the FA and Stamford AFC to support and advise on the relocation of the club and the concept and scope of a new stadium. We looked at the overall football plan and it immediately struck us that it didn't have a sustainable future. However, our scoping and feasibility studies showed that facilities were lacking in Stamford. New College Stamford in particular was delivering its services on a number of campus sites, which was costing them a lot of money, and its sports facilities were no longer fit for purpose. The new facility now caters for all of the college's sports facilities on one sport specific site, while also meeting the needs of Stamford AFC and the wider community, ensuring a sustainable future.

### Project profile: Gloucestershire FA

LK2 was instructed by Gloucestershire FA to provide a full service to develop and enhance the facilities at its headquarters in line with FA and Football Foundation criteria. The work undertaken by LK2 alongside Gloucestershire FA enabled significant grant aid to be sourced for a new 3G football turf pitch to replace the existing stadium grass pitch. The project included refurbishment of the changing rooms, an extension to provide external toilet provision and a new kitchen/servery to support the existing and new facilities onsite.





## Project profile: Stamford Sports Centre

LK2 delivered the £6m sports centre and stadium in Stamford for Stamford AFC and its partners New College Stamford and Burghley House Preservation Trust (BHPT). The firm designed the centre and also enhanced the project significantly through extensive research, collaborative working and a smart approach to funding. Through creating a comprehensive shared facility, LK2 achieved a better provision of sports facilities in Stamford and ultimately attracted multi-million pound grant aid, with reduced long-term financial risk.

This sustainable multi-sport project was initially part of a developer-led scheme, which was intended to be self-funded through the sale of land for new housing to deliver a stand-alone football stadium for the relocation of Stamford AFC.

LK2 conducted detailed study to assess potential grant aid the project could receive, in line with the strategic aims and objectives of the Football Association and Sport England. LK2's analysis highlighted local organisations which would benefit from improved sports and education facilities, resulting in New College Stamford joining the project as a key partner alongside Stamford AFC and BHPT.

LK2 acted as an interface between the partner organisations and the grant funding bodies over the course of the project, ensuring that the maximum amount of grant aid was achieved and securing around £3m of partnership funding towards the delivery of the scheme.

The new centre comprises a four-badminton court sports hall, sports science facilities, three multi-functional teaching rooms, a function room, management suites, a third generation football turf pitch, bistro and cooking facilities, football kitchen prep areas, physio and meeting rooms, a full-size grass first team pitch and stadium, a fitness suit, community grass pitches, parking and ancillary space.

The Stamford sports centre is the largest FA single funded project outside of National Centre at St. Georges Park.

## How are the needs of sports clients changing?

The UK has done a good job of raising the profile of sport over the last 10 years, with the Tour de France, Commonwealth Games and the Olympics and as a result, expectations are higher than they've ever been. Both the public and our commercial clients want more from their sports and leisure buildings, which is fantastic, but there needs to be a realisation of what is achievable.

## What are the key challenges facing sports development today?

Sport England is currently too far down the line in the decision-making process to have any real and meaningful impact on projects. If they were involved earlier, the whole process could be quicker and much more efficient and would ensure sites get the sports and leisure facilities they really need. It's something we come across time and time again. What we really need is for all parties from developers and local authorities to landowners and Sport England to sit around a table at the outset and discuss the right sports and leisure facilities for that particular site. So many times developers just follow a generic formula and place token grass pitches on their developments, which are not necessarily suitable for the site and can lead to issues later for whoever has to manage these facilities. A great deal of work that we undertake at the moment is looking at asset transfer. Local authorities

are increasingly looking to reduce their costs in a bid to balance the books. One solution is to optimise the use of open space, playing pitches and leisure facilities which may include a number of options including developing other sports sites and facilities and providing enhanced facilities on more appropriate sites.

## Are you optimistic about the future of community sport?

We are increasingly enthusiastic about the way sport and leisure is going. There's been a huge change in the mindset of local authorities when looking at their assets and providers are considering sport on a much wider perspective than before – they're not just thinking about football on a Saturday afternoon. People are thinking in more detail about what they can deliver and where.

The future is positive. We're confident that the sports and leisure sector will continue to thrive in the future. With the current health and wellbeing agenda, and campaigns like Sport England's This Girl Can and the Parklife Initiative, it's becoming accepted that sport and activity is key to looking and feeling good. We'll need more high quality, modern sports facilities in the right places to service this need in the future. At LK2 we've been pivotal in the delivery of mixed use retail, commercial and leisure facilities as destinations to provide more whole life engagement. ■

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