



Title of Report:	Pitch Strategy 2020-25: Mid-Term Review Report
Committee Report Submitted To:	Leisure & Development Committee
Date of Meeting:	20 February 2024
For Decision or For Information	For Decision
To be discussed in Committee	NO

Linkage to Corporate Strategy (2021-25)	
Strategic Theme	Healthy & Engaged Communities
Outcome	Citizens will have access to a range of leisure, recreational, green and play environments which support better physical and mental health and wellbeing
Lead Officer	Head of Sport & Wellbeing

Budgetary Considerations	
Cost of Proposal	N/A
Included in Current Year Estimates	YES/NO
Capital/Revenue	Capital
Code	
Staffing Costs	

Legal Considerations	
Input of Legal Services Required	NO
Legal Opinion Obtained	NO

Screening Requirements	Required for new or revised Policies, Plans, Strategies or Service Delivery Proposals.		
Section 75 Screening	Screening Completed:	Yes/No	Date: 2019/20
	EQIA Required and Completed:	Yes/No	Date: 2019/20
Rural Needs Assessment (RNA)	Screening Completed	Yes/No	Date: 2019/20
	RNA Required and Completed:	Yes/No	Date:
Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA)	Screening Completed:	Yes/No	Date:
	DPIA Required and Completed:	Yes/No	Date:

1.0 Purpose of Report

The purpose of this paper is to update Members on a Mid-Term Review of the Pitch Strategy 2020-25 and request approval of the recommendations to be actioned over the remaining term of the strategy.

2.0 Background & Approvals to Date

In March 2019, Members received a report on the draft Pitch Strategy. This report was deferred for approval subject to a Members Workshop. This approach provided the opportunity for consultation with each DEA councillor grouping, allowing for Members' input and agreement of the proposals relevant to specific geographical areas of responsibility.

In October 2020, the strategy was updated following Section 75 consultation, Rural Needs Impact Assessment and Members feedback and approved by Council. The strategy was subsequently published on Council's website and has been a key reference document in the development of multiple Business Cases for new projects delivered in recent years. An overview of the original Pitch Strategy is provided below for ease of reference.

3.0 Pitch Strategy 2020-25

Council commissioned independent sports sector specialists, Otium Leisure Consultancy to undertake a Facility Audit and Pitch Strategy to include 8 different outdoor facility types: Association football, Rugby, Gaelic games, Cricket, Tennis, Hockey, Outdoor bowls, Multi-use games areas/small sided games/kick about areas.

The key outputs for the Pitch Audit and Strategy were summarised as follows:

Part 1 – Audit of Existing Provision: Audit the design, distribution, demand/supply information and condition of each of around 100 sites hosting Council and community/club owned outdoor 'pitches' and associated changing facilities in the Borough. This audit is to include all natural turf and synthetic 'pitches' for association football, Gaelic games, rugby, hockey, tennis, cricket, athletics, outdoor bowls, multi-use games areas and small sided games/kick about areas. Make recommendations and provide indicative costs in relation to any identified remedial works or further technical investigations necessary.

Part 2 – A Pitch Strategy: Review the current hot and cold spots for pitch provision identified in the Facilities Strategy 2015 and combine this with additional condition and use pattern research to make recommendations for a prioritised 'pitch' (and associated changing provision) investment strategy for the Borough and provide indicative cost estimates.

The Pitches Strategy should set out a 5-year plan and make area specific recommendations and provide cost estimates in relation to a range of options. The Strategy recommendations should also take account of levels of deprivation and barriers to access such as disability or rurality etc.

The following tables deal with facility developments at Council-owned sites that will be Council-led. Each recommendation is given a priority rating based on the extent of its impact on adequacy of provision and related issues such as the cost of maintenance and the potential to benefit health & well-being of the community.

The total indicative capital cost for 22 priority recommendations is £9.925m* summarised as follows:

Priority 1 – Years 1 to 3		
Item No	Description	Indicative Capital Costs
2.	Consider existing pitches across the Borough that have playability issues for remedial work to the playing surface and/or changing accommodation.	£500k
3.	Extend the existing changing accommodation at Riada Playing Fields.	£800k
5.	Implement an appropriate Pitch Usage Policy and maintenance programme.	n/a
7.	Develop additional floodlit 3G provision where need is evidenced.	£1.55m
8.	Identify Council sites surplus to requirements and consider their future use.	n/a
9.	Depending on the long term future of the club there is a need to replace the changing accommodation at Armoy and complete drainage work on the pitches. Council to explore construction options for changing accommodation, including modular options.	£540k
10.	Consider the development of a changing pavilion in Riada Playing Fields adjacent to the AstroTurf pitch, especially suited to the requirements of female hockey players.	Ref Item 3
11.	Replace the ageing surface on the AstroTurf pitch at Quay Road, Ballycastle.	£150k
13.	Consider the value of a continuing tennis presence in Portrush in view of the proposed re-development of Portrush Recreation Grounds.	n/a
14.	Carry out upgrade to the tennis pavilion in Ballycastle, including toilet provision and maintenance issues.	£100k
22.	Support clubs in their aspirations for improved club-based facilities. This could be delivered through the Council's capital and minor grants programmes.	Capital grants
Sub Total		£3,640,000

Priority 2 – Years 2 to 4		
Item No	Description	Indicative Capital Costs
1.	Ensure existing Council facilities for association football in the Limavady area are used to their full potential; consider the potential to increase the quality, capacity and flexibility of the facilities at Scroggy Road and Roe Mill Playing Fields.	£1.5m
6.	Develop additional grass pitch facilities in the Dungiven area.	£800k
12.	Consider the development of improved tennis provision in the Coleraine area in respect of scale of provision and playing surfaces.	£975k
16.	Consider the design of future indoor facility developments regards their suitability for indoor cricket practice.	CLC budget
18.	Consider a new approach to supporting lawn bowls including the provision of synthetic greens.	£410k
19.	Consider the development of MUGA's at Cushendall, Limavady, Dungiven, Castlerock, Dervock, Cloughmills and Portrush. The development of smaller MUGA's has some crossover with the work of the Council's Play Strategy.	£1.2m
21.	Consider re-development of the Council's shale pitches where this is possible.	£500k
Sub Total		£5,385,000

Priority 3 – Years 3 to 5		
Item No & Description		
Item No	Description	Indicative Capital Costs
4.	Consider the potential to improve grass pitches in line with evolving grass pitch technologies, such as <i>sand fibre natural grass</i> .	£400k
15.	Consider supporting cricket clubs with specialist equipment to assist the delivery of training sessions and in maintenance of grass surfaces. This could be achieved through the capital grants programme.	Capital grants
17.	Develop perimeter walking/jogging paths (with lights) at a range of club and Council facilities. Also consider Quay Road Playing Fields and a section of the proposed Ballymoney-Ballycastle Greenway, Riada Playing Fields and Roe Mill Playing Fields.	£500k
20.	Develop a multi-sport synthetic training area at Rugby Avenue Playing Fields with a high specification synthetic surface suited to a range of sports; approximate size 140m x 90m. Ancillary accommodation (parking, pavilion) to be enhanced.	Refer Item 7
Sub Total		£900,000
Strategy Total		£9,925,000

**Note: The indicative project costs included above are now dated and do not reflect construction hyperinflation during 2021/22.*

4.0 Mid-Term Update

Council commissioned Otium Leisure Consultancy to carry out the mid-term review on the Pitch Strategy. The high level brief for this update was to:

- Conduct a review of strategic recommendations and progress made with the delivery new capital projects despite affordability constraints and the Covid pandemic;
- Carry out site visits on any new facilities developed to determine the overall quality and accessibility of provision;
- Update strategic context for new strategies/legislation e.g. DfC Sport and Physical Activity Strategy;
- Demographic review of population coverage using up-to-date population statistics (2021 census data) to assess and determine current level of need;
- Identify emerging recommendations for consideration e.g. growth in underage and female teams within the high participation sports and new EU regulations regarding use of microplastics in 3G pitches.

As part of this review, Officers provided the opportunity for workshops with each of the political party leads to ensure the needs of local DEA Members were taken into account.

To help understand the aspirations typical of many sports clubs in the Council area, case studies on six clubs are presented in **Annex A**. These case studies supplement the 12 'other provider' clubs which responded to the invitation to update the status of their facility need for this review.

For some years now the use of rubber crumb infill material in third generation sports surfaces has been debated in the European Union and beyond. The debate has focused on two main concerns; (i) the risk of carcinogenic properties and, (ii) the environmental impact of the presence of rubber infill. The environmental impact concern has resulted in legislation which

bans the use of rubber infill, a microplastic, in 3G pitches. **Annex B** presents a short explanation of the position and the longer term implications for Northern Ireland.

The Mid-Term update report was concluded in January 2024 and the full report is included at **Annex C**. A summary of progress against the 22 recommendations is provided below:

1. **Develop additional floodlit 3G provision where need is evidenced** - No additional 3Gs developed, however plans for Ballycastle Shared Education Campus include 2X3G & 1X2G. All three pitches will be floodlit. Community use of these pitches and of the planned four-court sports hall at the campus will be available outside curriculum time. The case studies – **Annex A** – highlight growth in underage participation and the need for a borough-wide review of 3G floodlit facility provision. This should take account of the new EU regulations with regard to the use of microplastic infill material.
2. **Consider existing pitches across the Borough that have playability issues for remedial work to the playing surface and/or changing accommodation** - Estates carry out routine maintenance programme. Extensive drainage remedial work approved by Council for Burnfoot Pitch commencing 2024. The work at Burnfoot includes upgrading changing accommodation.
3. **Extend the existing changing accommodation at Riada Playing Fields** - No progress as yet. An early options appraisal was considered some years ago. The need for changing accommodation remains unchanged. This need has been reaffirmed in the recent case study – see **Annex A**.
4. **Implement an appropriate Pitch Usage Policy and maintenance programme** - No progress as yet. Remains relevant. A Pitches Policy will lead to efficiency improvements and get the most out of the Council's pitches estate.
5. **Identify Council sites surplus to requirements and consider their future use** - No progress as yet. Over time the list of surplus pitches may change therefore it's important to review the list on a regular basis. Remains relevant.
6. **Depending on the long term future of the club there is a need to replace the changing accommodation at Armoy Rugby Club** - Armoy Rugby Club folded with falling numbers, poor accommodation and competition from close-by clubs, the club could not be sustained. The club's site at Lime Park, owned by the Council and now leased to a local community association is currently home to Causeway American Football team, with a walking track created for Park Run events and aspirations for an outdoor recreation/wellbeing location.
7. **Consider the development of a changing pavilion in Riada Playing Fields** – No progress as yet, however it's understood a business case is under development. Recent works to the AstroTurf pitch have upgraded the playing surface and lighting.
8. **Replace the ageing surface on the AstroTurf pitch at Quay Road, Ballycastle** - Since the Pitches Strategy was developed the Council now proposed to develop a new leisure centre for Ballycastle at Quay Road, utilising the footprint of the AstroTurf pitch. A new AstroTurf pitch is proposed for the Ballycastle Shared Education Campus, with community use outside curriculum time.
9. **Consider the value of a continuing tennis presence in Portrush in view of the proposed redevelopment of Portrush Recreation Grounds** - Portrush Recreation Grounds has been redeveloped with LUF and DFC funding and no longer includes tennis courts. Portrush Recreation Grounds now offers inclusive cycling paths, an urban plaza, adventure play, a natural turf bowling green, a half size synthetic bowling green and a modern pavilion whilst vehicle parking has also been enhanced.
10. **Carry out upgrade to the tennis pavilion in Ballycastle, including toilet provision and maintenance issues** - No progress. Routine maintenance continues.

11. **Support clubs in their aspirations for improved club-based facilities** - Council Capital Grants operated 2017-19 with £0.75m budget for sport and community applications, however, the grant programme is presently suspended. The programme has benefited several community organisations, including Eoghan Rua GAC in the development of a second pitch. The need for a capital grants programme remains relevant, as evidenced in Section 7 of the report which presents consultation with other facility providers and in the case studies in **Annex A**. This may be provided in the form of major capital grants and/or technical assistance grants to determine feasibility/business case for investment, as found in other local authorities. Any grant programme should be designed to maximise the potential community benefits, including partnership bids for multi-sport projects that may be eligible to apply to Sport NI funding programmes in the future.
12. **Ensure existing Council facilities for association football in the Limavady area are used to their full potential** - The room formerly used by the pigeon club has been converted to a changing places facility for use by users of the adjoining accessible play area. The need to match changing accommodation capacity to the number of pitches remains. Consideration of additional 3G pitch provision should take account of the training needs of three mass participation sports in Limavady – association football, gaelic games, rugby – in any site assessment process.
13. **Develop additional grass pitch facilities in the Dungiven area** - No progress as yet. St Canice's and St Patrick's clubs continue to grow. Their need for a pitch remains relevant, however, it is understood that the local college and the clubs are currently exploring the possibility of an application to Sport NI/DfCs 'Your School Your Club' funding programme.
14. **Consider the development of improved tennis provision in the Coleraine area in respect of scale of provision and playing surfaces** - One of the two clubs, Coleraine Tennis Club, no longer operates from Anderson Park. There has been recent investment to maintain the playing surface and improve lighting. With only one club now operating from Anderson Park, facilities there are more likely to suit demand.
15. **Consider the design of future indoor facility developments regards their suitability for indoor cricket practice** - No progress as yet. This recommendation could be considered in the design of new sports halls.
16. **Consider a new approach to supporting lawn bowls including the provision of synthetic greens** - A new full size synthetic green has been developed at the Dungiven Sports Centre and a synthetic training green developed at the Portrush Recreation Grounds alongside a full-size natural grass green.
17. **Consider the development of MUGA's at Cushendall, Limavady, Dungiven, Castlerock, Dervock, Cloughmills and Portrush** - Cloughmills Pitch progressed to site acquisition for new full size grass pitch only and more recently a wider review of a potential site for a sports-specified MUGA within the village and a possible application to the 'Your School Your Club' funding programme. The Council has developed some MUGAs, funded by PEACE and/or Small Settlements funding programmes since the strategy was adopted.
18. **Consider re-development of the Council's shale pitches where this is possible** - No progress as yet. The Council's shale pitches are not in use. Remains relevant.
19. **Consider the potential to improve grass pitches in line with evolving grass pitch technologies, such as sand fibre natural grass** - No progress as yet. Remains relevant. (UU Coleraine upgraded a pitch to sand fibre natural grass in 2017).

20. **Consider supporting cricket clubs with specialist equipment to assist the delivery of training sessions and in maintenance of grass surfaces** - No progress as yet. Remains relevant.
21. **Develop perimeter walking/jogging paths (with lights) at a range of club and Council facilities** - Perimeter jogging path included as part of the development of Quay Road site. Also under consideration for Roe Mill site. Council has made a decision not to progress the Ballymoney to Ballycastle Greenway but is considering a route between Portrush and Bushmills.
22. **Develop a multi-sport synthetic training area at Rugby Avenue Playing Fields** - No progress as yet. Remains relevant.

4.0 Key Conclusions

It is important to note that the Pitch Strategy does not commit Council to investment, instead the research/analysis supports the development of project Business Cases that may attract Council funding or new external funding opportunities e.g. UK Government Levelling Up Fund/Community Ownership Fund, DfC/Sport NI, Peace Plus/Small Settlement Fund etc.

As noted above, the Covid pandemic has inhibited progress up to the mid-point of the strategy period. In addition, the Council's more restricted financial position during the early years of the strategy also slowed down progress with pitch projects that could not secure substantial external funding from other sources.

As highlighted above the indicative project costs included above are now dated and do not reflect construction hyperinflation during 2021/22. The indicative investment required of £9.925m could be uplifted by 50% to £14.88m to forecast financial need more accurately.

The original Pitch Strategy highlighted the ongoing need for repair and renewal and adequate lifecycle budget provision to maintain the playability value of the existing 100 pitches. This is essential in covering costs for replacing synthetic surfaces, remedial drainage to grass pitches, replacing fencing, maintenance of changing pavilion, new goal posts etc.

A new Pitch Strategy will be commissioned in 2024/25 and developed for approval in March 2025 to ensure continued planning and prioritisation of investment in sports pitches across the Borough.

5.0 Recommendations

Members are asked to note the Mid-Term update report on the Pitch Strategy and approve the following recommendations to be actioned over the remaining term of the strategy:

- **Remedial Works** - the indicative provision suggested of £0.5m per year should be earmarked for planned preventative repair and maintenance of sports pitches within the Capital Programme;
- **Prioritised Projects** - the Mid Term update report should be used to revisit and inform Council's prioritised list of capital projects for sports pitch provision. The projects highlighted above that have not been progressed could then be progressed to business case subject to affordability and Committee/Council approval;
- **External Capital Grant Programme** – the growing need and demand for 3G provision from underage sports teams should be considered within the design of a new external grant programme subject to affordability and Committee/Council approval; and
- **Policy position on rubber crumb in 3G pitches** – the use of rubber crumb in existing and planned 3G pitches to be kept under review and considered within future business cases and new investment decisions for Committee/Council approval.

Ballymoney Hockey Club

Ballymoney Hockey Club re-formed in 1984 after a period of inactivity, entering the Ulster Women's Hockey Union Minor League. The club 1st XI went eleven years without defeat, gaining promotion for 14 consecutive seasons and winning 6 Cup titles and League winners 13 times. Many of the club's players have represented Ulster and Ireland, including five Irish captains – Lyndsey McVicker, Angela Platt, Bridget McKeever, Meagan Frazer and the current Irish captain Katie Mullan. The club's 'home ground' is the AstroTurf pitch at the Council's Joey Dunlop Leisure Centre which facilitates the club's training sessions and match fixtures.

Facilities

The only 'AstroTurf'¹ artificial turf pitch in Ballymoney is at the Joey Dunlop Leisure Centre, operated by the Council. The hockey club uses the pitch extensively for training and matches – hockey cannot be played on 3G surfaces and shale pitches are no longer recognised as suitable for hockey at any level although shale pitches are still used on some school sites out of necessity. 'AstroTurf' surfaces were developed for hockey, however, they came to be regarded as multi-sport pre-3G. The AstroTurf pitch at Joey Dunlop Leisure Centre is lined both for hockey and football and is used by both sports. The pitch is part of a larger complex of pitches at Joey Dunlop Leisure Centre, a mix of natural grass and artificial turf. Ancillary accommodation includes a changing pavilion with toilets.

Development

The club's 1st XI currently play in the Ulster Premier League, however, they played in the All-Ireland League Division 2 up to last year, competing with much bigger city-based clubs including clubs in Belfast, Dublin, Limerick. The club's playing membership looks like this.

Age	Number
3yrs – U13s girls	150
U9s (mixed hockey)	20
Junior Girls	50
Junior Boys	30
Senior – over 16 yrs (4 teams)	80
Total	330

In recent years the club has introduced boys hockey with approximately 50 boys involved presently. This is a significant development given that hockey has not been offered to boys in the local (Ballymoney) post-primary schools until very recently. The club reports a growing interest in hockey in the North Coast area. Training takes place on the leisure centre pitch from Monday through Thursday evening each week, around 10 hours in total. The ratio of coaches to players is purposely kept small, ensuring every player's needs in terms of skills development are met. Social hockey, for mothers and others returning to the game, is offered during the summer period, however, the club would be keen to extend this throughout the year, pitch time allowing. The club offers a Young Leader's programme for girls interested in developing coaching skills; coaching standards at the club are considered to be of a high standard. Players are attracted to the club from a wide catchment area including Ballymena,

¹ 'AstroTurf' is a brand name, generally used to describe 2G – second generation – artificial turf pitches.

Limavady, Coleraine and Ballycastle. Children who are known to come from a disadvantaged background will be exempt membership fees and have equipment supplied. The club has recently delivered a pilot programme for children with learning disabilities. The club views itself as a shining light for community engagement through sport.

Constraints

The club identifies a number of constraints in terms of the facilities they use at the Joey Dunlop Leisure Centre.

- ❖ The AstroTurf pitch is lined for hockey and football and used by both sports. Each of these sports puts different stresses on the synthetic carpet and on the lines which are stitched-in. The club feels that dual marking increases wear and tear as the carpet tends to separate from stitched-in lines over time and can lead to a reduced number of years between replacement carpets. The club appreciates the Council's commitment to replacing the carpet when necessary and suggests that hockey-only stitched-in lines are preferable.
- ❖ Apart from the 1st and 2nd XI teams on match days the club tends not to use changing accommodation at the pitches as it is perceived to prioritise football. Generally toilet facilities in Joey Dunlop Leisure Centre are used by the club during training and matches, however, there is no pathway or lighting between the AstroTurf pitch and Joey Dunlop Leisure Centre, therefore the toilet walk is somewhat unsafe.
- ❖ The club has no clubroom base for meetings, storage of records, hospitality, etc.

These constraints tend to impinge on the hockey experience at Joey Dunlop Leisure Centre, however, the club has been able to move forward in recent years with growing player numbers and the introduction of boys hockey.

Bushmills United FC

Bushmills United FC has contacted the Council with regard to the Council pitch at Dundarave Park in Bushmills. In the last five years the club has grown significantly; here's their story:-

- ❖ At the time of the 2017 audit Bushmills United FC was an adult men's team playing its home matches on the grass pitch at Dundarave Park in the Coleraine and District Morning League. It did not have a youth section.
- ❖ In early 2018, recognising the need to involve young people, the club introduced a youth section. At time of writing the club comprises 14 youth squads in addition to its adult men's team, as follows:-

Age Group	No of Squads	Gender	
		Male	Female
Under 6	1	✓	✓
Under 7	2	✓	✓
Under 8	3	✓	✓
Under 9	1	✓	✓
Under 10	2	✓	✓
Under 11	2	✓	✓
Under 12	1	✓	✓
Under 11 (girls)	1		✓
Under 13 (girls)	1		✓
Adult	1	✓	
Total	15 squads		

The club puts the youth section's growth down to being inclusive – every child gets a game of football. Its catchment, initially the Bushmills area, now reaches to outlying towns and villages in the borough.

- ❖ Approximately 180 children, split 80% boys, 20% girls are now registered with the club.² The club reckons this number will continue to grow as more underage squads are formed over the next two years; for example, the Under 13 squad presently has 22 players which points to unmet demand for a second squad at that age group. As the club's youth section has grown so has the cohort of coaches and parent volunteers; presently the club has approximately 20 coaches of which 4 are female. Each squad has a representative (not a coach) on the club's committee. The club organises training for coaches and parent volunteers which recently included children's safeguarding, delivered at the club by the IFA. The club was awarded the IFA Grassroots Club of the Year and the IFA Grassroots Coaching Club of the Year for 2022. The club's youth section presently competes in the Harry Gregg Foundation Youth League, however, it's also considering entering other youth leagues due to the growing number of squads.

² The 2017 audit of all the association football clubs in the borough evidenced a 89%/11% male/female split in membership.

- ❖ The club has a strong community focus. A recent survey of parents confirmed the club's vision of 'Children, Coaches, Club'. Recently, the club organised a major one-day football tournament to commemorate the death of a local young person; the event involved over 400 children in 48 teams and resulted in a significant donation to Sandelford Special School.
- ❖ Presently the club's squads attend mid-week training in several venues in the borough, including the Council's facilities at Rugby Avenue (Coleraine) and Joey Dunlop Leisure Centre (Ballymoney), school facilities at Dalriada School (Ballymoney) and community facilities at Bushmills Community Centre. This spread of venues necessitates transport, time and cost and poses a constraint to club's future growth. Members of the youth section pay a monthly fee of £15.00 and the club reports it is financially stable and sustainable. In addition to adding to the number of squads, the club plans to start a female adult squad and a disability squad.

The club is asking the Council to consider redeveloping the grass pitch at Dundarave Park as an artificial turf pitch with floodlighting. The club feels this would facilitate competition and mid-week training for its present number of squads and allow it to consider future growth. Bushmills United FCs experience of growth in under-age football may also be seen in other clubs throughout the borough. As the Council considers the request from Bushmills United FC it's recommended that the growth in under-age participation across the borough in football and other sports, and how this impacts on the Pitches Strategy as a whole be reviewed.

Cushendall GAC

Cushendall GAC was founded in 1906. The club's modern era of competition success and development in hurling and camogie dates from the early 1980s. From that time the club has won 15 County titles, 12 Ulster titles and reached the All-Ireland final in 2016. The club is presently preparing for an All-Ireland hurling semi-final in mid-December 2023. The club is located in a particularly rural area, primarily serving the village of Cushendall but drawing players from the neighbouring villages of Cushendun and Glenariff for camogie as the gaelic games clubs there don't offer camogie. The club is of the opinion that the three gaelic games clubs – Cushendall, Cushendun, Glenariff – will eventually amalgamate within a single club with the possibility of Cushendall becoming the hub for gaelic games across the three villages. The club sees the main cause of this as being the housing situation wherein young people looking to buy a house generally move away due to lack of affordable housing.

Facilities

Cushendall GACs grounds has:-

- ❖ Full size gaelic (140m x 90m) grass pitch with keep/catch nets and floodlights
- ❖ A former association football pitch
- ❖ A clubhouse (1970s construction) with a multi-purpose hall, kitchen, bar area (no bar licence currently), 2 meeting rooms, 4 team changing rooms, a gym
- ❖ A small (approx. 40m x 20m) all weather/3G pitch including a ball wall and floodlights

Across the road from the club's ground is the former St Aloysius Secondary School, closed for some years. The school's grass pitch has been maintained and used by the club since the 19080s. The pitch is not level neither is it full size, however, it is used by the club for training – the pitch has keep/catch nets but no floodlights.

Development

Cushendall GACs playing membership for hurling and camogie looks like this.

Age	Number	Teams
Underage teams (boys and girls)	500 approx.	18
Seniors – hurling	70	3
Seniors – camogie	55	3
Social hurling	30	n/a
Total	655 approx	

The biggest growth in recent years is in camogie, attributed mostly to the gradual amalgamation of camogie in the three local clubs to be centred at Cushendall. The club reports that the under-age camogie teams have been very successful in competitions in recent years. The club anticipates that player numbers in under-age hurling will increase in the coming years as the amalgamation of the three local clubs continues. The club works with the local primary school – St Mary's Glenann – and the local post-primary school – St Killian's Garron Tower – by providing coaching support in hurling and camogie.

The club has a strong community presence. Its Health & Wellbeing programme, a governing body initiative across all gaelic clubs, has achieved the Gold Standard, one of only two clubs in County Antrim recognised to this level. The programme, as delivered by Cushendall GAC, includes an on-site Men's Shed, walking groups, flower arranging, first aid training, a women's group, a Mothers & Toddlers group and Irish language classes.

Constraints

With a healthy and growing playing membership the club feels it is constrained in a number of ways both in terms of facilities and its programme of community activities.

- ❖ The club's clubhouse -1970s construction – is dated and unattractive. It falls short in terms of providing sufficient and satisfactory accommodation for the club's present community activity programme and constrains it from expanding the programme. The club notes that the village's youth club, which presently meets in the hall of the former St Aloysius school, will need to relocate when the school building is sold for development at some point in the future.
- ❖ With only one match-size pitch, the club's camogie and hurling teams have to share the former school pitch for training when matches take place. During the playing season there is a match on the main pitch on every night during the week. The former association football pitch on the club's ground runs alongside the main gaelic games pitch and it cannot be used during matches.

Vision

The club is in the early stages of developing a master plan in terms of facility developments, to include:-

- ❖ Develop the pitch at the former school into a full size gaelic games pitch and a smaller 3G pitch with ball wall. The development could include a building for club and community use with changing accommodation and a multi-purpose hall.
- ❖ Re-develop the existing clubhouse, either complementing the proposed development on the former school site or instead of it.

The club sees potential for it to host an expanded community activity programme, including a youth club, in new or refurbished accommodation. The club has approached the local parish with a view to purchasing or leasing ground on the former school site and awaits a response.

Gaelic games clubs, especially those clubs operating in rural areas, provide a service to their community beyond sport. Cushendall GAC is one such club, evidenced in a vibrant Health & Wellbeing programme which complements a busy sports programme for upwards of 600 playing members. The club's vision for facilities development has the potential to benefit rural communities beyond Cushendall.

Glenullin GAC

Glenullin GAC will celebrate its centenary year in 2025. It is based at John Mitchel Park – the club is also known as John Mitchel’s GAC, Glenullin – in a rural setting outside Garvagh. The club offers mixed football to age U12, boys and minor football to age U19, men’s adult football, camogie. Whilst the club is primarily a sports club, offering gaelic football and camogie, it has a strong community ethos evidenced in a range of community services, activities and events. The club has reached a stage in its development wherein their facilities cannot adequately accommodate the needs of their playing membership neither can they satisfactorily accommodate the demand for the introduction of ladies gaelic football. Looking to the future the club has invested heavily to prepare for the development of new facilities that will add to their existing estate of indoor and outdoor accommodation. Over the years the club has expanded indoor and outdoor accommodation at John Mitchel Park largely through the efforts of club members. Now poised for a major capital project the club has approached the Council for support and advice, including a recent open night at the club attended by elected members from across the political spectrum.

Facilities

The club operates a range of indoor and outdoor accommodation comprising; (i) a full size floodlit gaelic games pitch, natural grass; (ii) a 110m x 80m floodlit artificial turf pitch – 3G – used for training; (iii) a multi-purpose community hall; (iv) a social area with kitchen and bar; (v) a gym, used for strength and conditioning; (vi) 4 team changing rooms; (vii) car parking. These facilities are heavily used both by the club and the local community and are regarded as a community hub as much as a sports club. Whilst the club is fortunate to have a 3G training pitch in addition to their grass pitch, gaelic games clubs much prefer natural grass on which to play matches; of the 28 gaelic games in the Council area³ 21 clubs have at least two grass pitches, either full size (approx. 140m x 90m) or a combination of full size and youth size. In recent years the growth in player numbers in a number of sports, including gaelic games presents a challenge for sports clubs in being able to adequately and safely accommodate the demand for training and competition.

Development

The club has a membership of approximately 500, about half of which are under that age of 18. Here’s a breakdown of the playing membership.

Age Group	Gender		Approx No
	Male	Female	
Pre-School 3-4 yrs	✓	✓	50
Mixed U6 – U12	✓	✓	90
Under 14 – Under 19	✓		120
Adult Men’s Football	✓		45
Camogie		✓	190
		Total	495

In the period pre-pandemic the club operated ‘Dads and Lads’ football, however, pressure on facilities has put this on hold. The club is keen to introduce Ladies Football given the surge in interest in recent

³ Pitches Condition Survey & Strategy; Causeway Coast & Glens Borough Council; April 2018

years across the gaelic games family; at present they are only able to offer Ladies Football in a limited way. Presently, girls play football as a mixed gender activity up to age 12 beyond which they have to go to other clubs to continue their sport. The club is pro-active in working with local schools including St Joseph's & St Patrick's Primary School where the club provides and pays for a gaelic games coach who also takes PE lessons. This sort of outreach by sports clubs into local schools is not uncommon given the dearth of primary school staff trained in PE, however, it evidences clubs' commitment to their local community and to the development of player numbers through linkages between school and club.

The clubs vision is to be able to fully embrace Ladies Football and to be able to better accommodate their age-level panels with training time. Presently the club has to book off-site pitches – Coleraine Rugby Club, Mid Ulster Sports Arena (Cookstown), Scroggy Road 3G (Limavady) to supplement their on-site facilities. To be able to deliver this vision the club has identified the need for additional accommodation. To this end they purchased ground adjacent to John Mitchel Park and have secured planning permission in early 2023 for a full size floodlit natural grass gaelic pitch, changing accommodation and car parking. The cost estimate to deliver this project is, according to the club, in the order of £1.5million - £2million.

The club has a strong community ethos within its rural hinterland⁴. They operate an on-site grocery store and the Eagle Glen Community Partnership is based at the club. Examples of activities include visits by Farming Families (a health check service for local farmers), Ladies Nights, senior citizens meals, fundraising events for local groups. The club also delivers a range of Scór activities that promote traditional Irish cultural activities.

Constraints

The club is constrained by its present estate in not being able to satisfactorily accommodate all the training needs of its growing player base and being prevented from fully embracing Ladies Football. Changing accommodation is limited and not conducive to female use. Having to use off-site training facilities is not ideal, presenting the challenge of transport and cost as well as splitting the club across multiple sites.

Glenullin GAC is a community-focused sports club that fully appreciates its role in a rural setting. Its operation evidences how it serves the community and how the community benefits. In identifying the need for additional facilities and investing in land and obtaining planning permission the club is already moving towards their vision of growing the community benefit.

⁴ Garvagh 5km; Dungiven 10km; Ballymoney 20km; Coleraine 20km.

Limavady Cricket, Rugby, Football and Hockey Club

For the purposes of this case study the club is referred to as Limavady Rugby Club given rugby is the study's focus. However, it's noted that the club is multi-sport, bringing together four sports in a single administrative unit. Each sport is represented on the club's committee. Rugby can be viewed as the lead sport as it is the only one of the four sports that has facilities at the club's home base, John Hunter Memorial Grounds, in Limavady town. It is the rugby section of the club that has approached the Council to discuss the possible development of facilities in association with Limavady Wolfhounds GAC. This case study has been researched solely with Limavady Rugby Club.

History

The club traces its history back to 1865 when it was founded as a cricket club, with rugby starting in the town in 1922. In 1968 the two sports amalgamated and the present day pavilion opened in 1972 at the John Hunter Memorial Grounds. Over the years hockey, association football and bowls became an integral part of the club. Each of the five sports remain active in Limavady although cricket and hockey take place elsewhere in the town; indoor bowls is played in the club's general purpose hall.

Facilities

Limavady Rugby Club is based at John Hunter Memorial Grounds. Facilities include four grass rugby pitches, one of which is floodlit, a pavilion with social area, 9 team changing rooms, a conditioning gym and a general purpose hall and vehicle parking. The site is located beside the River Roe from which it is separated by an earthen embankment. Over the years the pitches have flooded in times of prolonged rainfall and some years ago the club installed a water pumping system to help mitigate the risk of the pitches becoming waterlogged or flooding. The club reports that the pumping system has only been partially successful, causing the club to cease training activity on occasion for extended periods during inclement weather in order to 'protect' the pitches for matches. The pavilion's changing accommodation – 9 team rooms – includes a recently built block of four team rooms that are allocated to female players when necessary for competitions.

Development

The rugby section has, like many sports clubs, had ups and downs over the years. However, in recent years it has experienced considerable growth in player numbers. From having only 2 adult teams pre-pandemic the club now has an expanded adult section – men and women. However, it is in underage participation that the club has experienced the most growth. Here's a profile of player membership.

Age Group/Identity	Gender		Approx No
	Male	Female	
Rugby Tots 3yrs-6yrs	✓	✓	50
Mini Rugby P2-U12	✓	✓	100
Girls U10, U12, U14, U16, U18		✓	70
Boys U12, U14, U16	✓		70
Adult men; 3 teams + U20 + Social	✓		120
Ault Women; 1 'social' team		✓	20
		Total	430

Through the work of two part-time Club Community Rugby Officers – total 30 hours between them – the club delivers rugby coaching in a number of schools in the area including Limavady High School, Limavady Grammar School, local primary schools, St Patrick’s College (Dungiven). The Club Community Rugby Officers are part-funded by IRFU Ulster Branch but around 90% of the employee costs are met by the club. It is likely that the work of these officers, along with several club coaches, is responsible for the surge in player numbers over the past few years. The club reports that some local schools wholly rely on the club to organise and deliver the rugby programme in the school. The club has clearly identified this as an opportunity which it has been able to avail of, benefiting the schools, the club and the sport.

The club’s vision for the future is ‘One Club One Community’, through which it offers rugby to everyone for fitness and mental health. Delivery of the vision has had particular success in engaging with local gaelic games clubs which sees gaelic players playing for Limavady Rugby Club in gaelic’s close season; the gaelic clubs include clubs in Claudy, Banagher, Drumsurn. Kevin Lynch’s GAC in Dungiven has involved several players in Limavady Rugby Club with two gaelic football players now involved in Ulster Rugby’s Pathways programme. In terms of performance the club aspires to play in rugby’s All Ireland League; they currently compete in Championship Two division.

Constraints

With recent growth in player numbers the club holds training sessions throughout the week and at weekends, however, it cannot facilitate training at the club’s home ground. This necessitates booking training facilities elsewhere, including synthetic surfaces at Greysteel and Dungiven. The club reports that the Council’s 3G multi-sport pitch at Scroggy Road in Limavady is fully booked on weekday evenings by association football clubs, although a Friday evening slot is booked by the club. Limavady Rugby Club is not alone in sports clubs having to travel to off-site facilities for training, however, it raises challenges on a number of fronts including transport costs, child safety and cost. The club reports anecdotally that parents are often reluctant to involve their children in an activity which is not on their doorstep.

The Way Ahead

The club has identified the need for a 3G floodlit pitch to accommodate its training needs. To this end they have met with Wolfhounds GAC, a Limavady-based gaelic games club. Whilst discussion is at an early stage there appears to be a shared vision for a 3G pitch in the town that will serve both rugby and gaelic for training and junior competition. The clubs are exploring taking forward a business case for the project, recognising that external funding in addition to club funds will be needed to deliver the project.

Limavady Rugby Club is experiencing significant growth in player numbers, especially in female participation and in youth participation generally. This has created a problem for the club’s training programme given the generally poor condition of the grass pitches at the club’s John Hunter Memorial Grounds. The solution identified by the club is somewhat visionary, that is to develop a 3G pitch in partnership with Limavady town’s gaelic games club, Limavady Wolfhounds GAC. At this point in time the club is seeking advice on how best to take this project forward.

The Heights FC

The Heights FC was formed in Coleraine West in 1986 to provide sporting and social opportunities for children living in the Heights area of the town, one of two Neighbourhood Renewal Areas – NRAs – in Coleraine⁵. At its formation the club focused on adult players, however, they have recently re-introduced the Heights Youth Section for children from aged 7 upwards. The club's adult teams play their matches at The Ropewalk pitch in Coleraine West.

Facilities

The club's 'home ground' is the grass pitch at The Ropewalk, adjacent to West Bann Community Centre. There is a multi-use games area beside the pitch, approximately 35m x 25m, fenced with a tarmac surface and lighting. The West Bann Community Centre, recently built, has two team changing rooms and a stand-alone officials room. The Ropewalk facility suits the club for matches, however, midweek training takes place on the Council's Rugby Avenue 3G pitch where the senior teams train or at Ulster University's grass and 3G pitches where the youth sections train.

Vision

The club's vision is to improve facilities at The Ropewalk to the point where they meet the IFAs Joint Grounds Criteria for entry to Intermediate football. In addition they are keen to see the on-site MUGA (tarmac surface) developed as an artificial turf pitch to facilitate midweek training and games development. The club feels these facility improvements will result in more player numbers, especially within the youth section; the club reports they have a waiting list of children to join the club that would double the present youth section player numbers. The club reports a high level of community interest in and support for their activities; Saturday afternoon matches regularly attract spectators in excess of 100 people whilst Super Cup matches in 2023 at The Ropewalk pitch attracted an estimated 6,500 spectators across the week of the competition.

Development

The club recognises its role in providing a service for the Heights community through sport and community activity. Some years ago the club's youth section folded, however, the present day committee identified the need to offer accessible opportunities for football, not least to children from socially and economically deprived backgrounds. This led to the formation of the Heights Youth Section in 2022 which already involves 85 children under 15 years of age. Here's the clubs membership profile.

Age	Approx No
U8 – U15 mixed (5 teams)	85
Adult Men (2 teams)	40
Total	125

In re-introducing a youth section the club determined that no child would be excluded due to cost. This led to a decision not to charge membership to any child and to supply kit to every child free of

⁵ *The Department for Communities identified 36 neighbourhoods across Northern Ireland in the most deprived 10% of wards which receive targeted interventions.*

charge. The club sustains this through the work of a sponsorship manager (voluntary) who secures sponsorship and funding. The club has a community ethos, evidenced in assisting elderly residents with shopping, quiz nights, seasonal draws and social evenings.

Constraints

The Heights FC has created a demand for youth football within the community it serves by offering and facilitating accessible opportunities to local children. It's likely that further demand is constrained by having to train the youth sections elsewhere, incurring travel and facility hire costs.

Position on Use of 3G Infill

Introduction

For some years now the use of rubber crumb infill in third generation (3G) artificial turf pitches has been debated. The debate has focused on two main concerns; (i) the risk of carcinogenic properties and, (ii) the environmental impact of the presence of rubber infill. There is also a concern around the fibre loss of microplastics which relates to all artificial turf pitches. The environmental impact concern has resulted in legislation which bans the use of rubber infill, a microplastic, in 3G pitches. Sport NI has prepared an information paper on the situation, 'Synthetic Turf Pitches and Microplastic Pollution (<http://www.sportni.net/facilities/microplastics/>). The Sport NI website summarises the paper as follows:-

1. What are microplastics?

Microplastics are defined as non-biodegradable polymeric (rubber or plastic) materials that are 5mm or less in size. Microplastics may be intentionally added to products or unintentionally occur through wear and tear, or through the breakdown of discarded polymeric products.

2. What microplastics are used on 3rd Generation synthetic pitches?

Polymeric infills, which includes rubber infill used on 3rd Generation Synthetic Surfaces, meets the definition of an intentionally added microplastic.

3. How does rubber infill cause pollution?

Rubber infill can migrate from 3rd Generation synthetic pitches in several ways. This includes:

- On maintenance equipment, especially brushes.
- Migration to side of pitches and beyond, following use and maintenance.
- On players' clothing and footwear.
- Surface water run-off.

When rubber infill mixes with natural or waste materials outside a pitch, or when it is disposed of inappropriately, it becomes an environmental pollutant.

4. What can be done to reduce microplastic pollution?

The [Sport & Play Construction Association](#) (SAPCA) and [European Synthetic Turf Council](#) (ESTC) have developed technical reports describing procedures that should be used to control infill migration. These controls have been found to reduce microplastic pollution by up to 98%.

5. What happens next?

The proposal of the European Commission will be discussed in the European parliament sometime in 2023. If the EU Commission votes to introduce a ban on microplastic infills, Northern Ireland will enter an 8-year transition period as soon as the ban is adopted in legislation.

6. What does this mean for Northern Ireland?

Although part of the United Kingdom, under the Northern Ireland protocol, Northern Ireland will remain subject to EU law on microplastics (unlike England, Scotland, and Wales). If the EU Commission votes to introduce a ban on microplastic infills, Northern Ireland will enter the 8-year transition period as soon as the ban is adopted in legislation. However, installation of synthetic pitches with rubber infill can still happen during the potential eight-year transition period. After

the eight-year transition, it is unlikely that the EU Commission will require all existing 3rd Generation pitches to be replaced with a suitable alternative, but it will be illegal to source rubber infill from within the EU member states. From a Northern Ireland perspective, any attempt to source rubber crumb infill from within Great Britain (where it may remain legal) would be a breach of European law.

The Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) commissioned a project to review the emissions of 'intentionally added microplastics'. The review will consider the risks to the environment and to human health and will inform any future regulatory action for the United Kingdom. The transition period under consideration, formerly six years, is now eight years. The intention of the transition period is to give time for research into alternative infill material that is sustainable in terms of its impact on the environment and human health. The Football Foundation in England is presently carrying out research.

According to Sport NI¹, it would appear that existing and any new 3G pitches constructed within the eight year transition period will not be required to replace rubber crumb infill with an accepted alternative at the end of the transition period; rather, as 3G carpets come to be replaced with new carpet and, therefore, new infill, it will be illegal to use rubber crumb material beyond the transition period. UEFA is lobbying for the eight year transition period to be extended. Sport NI is included in UK-wide discussion on the matter.

Technical reports by the Sport & Play Construction Association and others advise that the movement of rubber crumb from the pitch to other areas can be significantly reduced by containment measures, including ground level timber boarding fixed to surround fences and grids at machinery access points.

Hybrid pitch options, such as sand fibre, offer an alternative to 3G, however, carrying capacity, whilst up to 3 times more than a standard grass pitch, does not match 3G. A shorter synthetic fibre pile, with no infill, is presently being trialled at the St George National Training Centre in England.

In conclusion, and according to Sport NI advice, it remains acceptable to construct 3G pitches with rubber crumb infill and to use rubber crumb infill to rejuvenate existing pitches presently. This situation is unlikely to change for the duration of a transition period. Beyond the transition period, the use of rubber crumb infill or any 'intentionally added microplastics' will be illegal in Northern Ireland and EU countries. It is anticipated the rest of the UK will follow suit.

¹ Telephone call with Stephen McIlveen.



**Causeway
Coast & Glens
Borough Council**

Pitches Condition Survey & Strategy

16 January 2024

Mid-Term
Review



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Appendix

1. Sports Club Case Studies
2. Position on use of 3G infill

1. Introduction

Causeway Coast & Glens Borough Council has commissioned a mid-term update on its Pitches Strategy. The strategy, informed by an extensive audit, was prepared in 2017 and adopted by the Council in 2018. Its term is five years. It addresses eight sports; association football, athletics, cricket, gaelic games, hockey, lawn bowls, rugby, tennis – and multi-use games areas. Otium Leisure Consultancy has been invited to prepare this mid-term update. The brief includes the following elements:-

- Conduct a review of strategic recommendations and update as necessary
- Update strategic context for new developments
- Update census data

The backdrop to the years since the Pitches Strategy was adopted by the Council is dominated by uncertainty regarding capital works and challenges posed by the pandemic. However, projects such as the community sports facilities at Ballycastle Shared Education Campus, the redevelopment of Portrush Recreation Grounds, a new leisure centre in Ballycastle and improved provision for bowling in Dungiven are evidence of forward movement in the Council's planned provision for leisure and sport even in the face of multiple and significant constraints.

The Council is not the sole provider of community sports facilities; the borough's sports clubs are constantly reviewing what they offer to their communities to address changing needs, not least the growth in participation amongst young people, females, older people, those from disadvantaged background and people with a disability. To help understand the aspirations typical of many sports clubs in the Council area, case studies on six clubs are presented in an appendix. These case studies supplement the 12 'other provider' clubs which responded to the invitation to update the status of their facility need for this review. The six case studies are:-

- ❖ Ballymoney Hockey Club
- ❖ Bushmills United FC
- ❖ Cushendall GAC
- ❖ Glenullin GAC
- ❖ Limavady Cricket, Rugby, Football and Hockey Club
- ❖ The Heights FC

For some years now the use of rubber crumb infill material in third generation sports surfaces has been debated in the European Union and beyond. The debate has focused on two main concerns; (i) the risk of carcinogenic properties and, (ii) the environmental impact of the presence of rubber infill. There is also a concern around the fibre loss of microplastics which relates to all artificial turf pitches. The environmental impact concern has resulted in legislation which bans the use of rubber infill, a microplastic, in 3G pitches. Appendix 2 presents a short explanation of the position and the implications for Northern Ireland.

2. A Reminder

It's useful to look back to the key information gathered in the 2017 audit. Firstly, the audit afforded an opportunity to present a profile of participation across the eight sports in terms of the number of clubs, teams and players, as recorded in the following two tables.

Clubs and Teams by Sport							
Sport	No of Clubs	Male		Female		Total	
		Teams	%	Teams	%	Teams	%
Association Football	46	190	33	21	11	211	27
Gaelic Games	28	289	50	146	74	435	56
Rugby	4	48	8	0	0	48	6
Hockey	4	8	2	24	12	32	4
Tennis	5	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Cricket	5	19	3	0	0	19	3
Athletics	5	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Lawn Bowls	11	22	4	7	3	29	4
Totals	109	576	100%	198	100%	774	100%

Participants by Sport						
Sport	Male		Female		Totals	
	Junior	Adult	Junior	Adult	Participants	%
Association Football	2,393	1,243	379	81	4,096	29
Gaelic Games	2,715	1,528	1,541	686	6,470	46
Rugby	630	198	28	0	856	6
Hockey	90	24	481	159	754	5
Tennis	138	136	89	118	481	3
Cricket	248	85	31	0	364	3
Athletics	92	163	97	176	528	4
Lawn Bowls	27	445	8	150	630	4
Totals	6,333	3,822	2,654	1,370	14,179	100%

It was considered important to prepare an inventory of all pitches across the eight sports in all ownerships – Council, education, clubs/community. There are 299 'pitches' across the sports, including grass (full size and youth size), artificial turf (3G and AstroTurf), shale, bitmac, polymeric, presented as follows:-

Summary of All Pitches								
Sport	Grass		ATP (3G, AstroTurf)		Other			Totals
	Full	Youth	Full	Youth	Shale	Bitmac	Polymeric	
Association Football	75	8	5	2	0	0	0	90
Gaelic Games	43	15	2	1	0	0	0	61
Rugby	24	9	-	-	-	-	-	33
Hockey	-	-	5	-	12	-	-	17
Tennis	6	-	16	-	0	42	8	72
Cricket	11	-	-	-	-	-	-	11
Athletics	-	-	-	-	2	-	0	2
Lawn Bowls	13	-	0	-	-	-	-	13
Totals	172	32	28	3	14	42	8	299

Ownership of the pitches is as follows:-

Owner	No of Pitches
Causeway Coast & Glens Borough Council	113
Education Sector	99
Club/Community/County Board	87
Total	299

The audit and consultation¹ with all the clubs in each of the eight sports was analysed using a Sport England model to determine *adequacy of provision*, either over-supply or under-supply, as follows:-

Adequacy of Provision	
Sport	Adequacy of Provision
Association Football	+ 21 pitches (Sat pm matches)
Gaelic Games	- 8 pitches
Rugby	+ 2 pitches
Hockey	even
Tennis	Surplus hours across all sites
Cricket	+ 1 pitch
Athletics	No modern athletics track in CC&G
Lawn Bowls	Surplus hours across all sites

¹ Consultation with the clubs included a survey which gathered detailed information on the number of teams and participants in each sport.

3. The Approach

The approach to the review is in four parts:-

1. Strategic Recommendations

The 22 strategic recommendations relating to Council operations are presented within three priorities according to the timing of the recommendation.

Priority 1 – Years 1 to 3

Priority 2 – Years 2 to 4

Priority 3 – Years 3 to 5

Additionally, the audit process that informed the strategy revealed a considerable number of sports clubs and other providers identifying a need/aspiration for facility developments at their sites; a total of 36 facility developments projects by other providers were identified through the audit process. For each of the 22 strategic recommendations the review considers progress and comments on continuing relevance or otherwise. Work included liaising with Council officers. Factors affecting progress, such as financial strictures and the pandemic are considered. The review also considers other factors that may have affected the rationale for the recommendation, either increasing or reducing need.

2. Strategic Context

Since the Pitches Strategy was completed there has been a number of significant developments in the strategic approach of key stakeholder organisations. These developments are reviewed, paying particular attention to the need to create multi-sport facilities that are accessible to all sections of the community.

3. Census Analysis

Participation profiles in sports can be used, alongside census data, to demonstrate demand for and popularity of sports. For each of the team sports – association football, gaelic games, cricket, hockey, rugby – Team Generation Rates (TGRs) are calculated in accordance with Sport England's 'Towards a Level Playing Field. A TGR is the ratio between the number of teams within a defined area and the total population within a given age range for that area. TGRs can assist in modelling future demand for facilities.

4. Other Providers

It's deemed important to review the plans and aspirations of other providers – clubs, education sector – for facility developments. A total of 36 other providers noted their plan and/or aspiration for the development of facilities at their site. These included pitches, changing accommodation, trim trails, indoor halls, multi-sport air dome, site improvements. Recognising that local authorities are not the sole provider of sports facilities it's important for local authorities to be fully aware of what other providers' needs are for facility developments and the status of their plans. This avoids

duplication between local authority provision and other providers provision whilst enabling the local authority to determine how they can best support other providers in their facility development projects. To help understand the aspirations typical of many sports, case studies on six clubs from the four mass participation sports – association football, gaelic games, hockey, rugby – are included as an appendix.

4. Strategic Recommendations

The review of the strategic recommendations re-presents each recommendation in the order they appeared in the Pitches Strategy report and according to the priority given to them – numbering of the recommendations is as it appears in the report. Indicative capital costs are also presented as they appeared in 2018 recognising that cost estimates will need to be updated to take account of global and other influences experienced in the construction industry since 2018; in the Council’s Play Strategy an indicative capital uplift of 50% is suggested to take account of construction industry hyperinflation 2021-2022.

STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS – PRORITY 1				
Item No	Description	Indicative Capital Costs	Comment/Link to Audit	Mid-Term Update
1.	Develop additional floodlit 3G provision where need is evidenced.	£1.55m	<p>The demand for mid-week training accommodation in the Coleraine area exceeds supply. Added to this, small sided games activity at the University of Ulster has reportedly outstripped supply. An additional 3G pitch in the Coleraine area could potentially address both mid-week training requirements and act as a second site for small sided games on Saturday mornings (see Item 20 for more detail on location and cost).</p> <p>There is a limited provision for mid-week training in the Portrush/Portstewart area. Club development is being constrained; efforts by clubs to develop more participation, not least amongst females and young people are hampered by the lack of suitable facilities for training.</p>	No additional 3Gs developed, however plans for Ballycastle Shared Education Campus include 2X3G & 1X2G. To be part-funded by Council and construction to commence March 2024. One of the two 3G pitches will be a full-size (approx. 140mx90m) multi-sports pitch. All three pitches will be floodlit. Community use of these pitches and of the planned four-court sports hall at the campus will be available outside curriculum time. The case studies – Appendix 1 – highlight growth in underage participation and the need for a borough-wide review of 3G floodlit facility provision. This should take account of the new EU regulations with regard to the use of microplastic infill material.
3.	Consider existing pitches across the Borough that have playability issues for remedial work to the playing surface and/or changing accommodation.	£500k	The Council has 57 grass pitches (full size and youth size) of which 11 are judged to be of <i>standard</i> quality and 4 of <i>poor</i> quality, the remainder being <i>good</i> quality, in accordance with Sport England’s Non-Technical Assessment system. The need is to bring all Council	Estates carry out routine maintenance programme. Extensive drainage remedial work approved by Council for Burnfoot Pitch commencing 2024. The work at Burnfoot

Item No	Description	Indicative Capital Costs	Comment/Link to Audit	Mid-Term Update
			pitches up to <i>good</i> quality, so enhancing the playing experience and minimising the risk of match cancellations. In some cases it is poor changing accommodation that risks pitches not being used to their full potential.	includes upgrading changing accommodation.
4.	Extend the existing changing accommodation at Riada Playing Fields.	£800k	Riada Playing Fields offers 7 grass pitches, a 3G pitch and an AstroTurf pitch. The present changing pavilion has 6 team changing rooms which falls short of the need for changing on a busy Saturday. An assessment of the ideal number of changing rooms, to suit existing and future demand, should be carried out. Riada Playing Fields is a major sporting hub in the Borough. The AstroTurf pitch is 'home' to Ballymoney Hockey Club (ladies), therefore, changing accommodation should consider the needs of female players.	No progress as yet. An early options appraisal was considered some years ago. The need for changing accommodation remains unchanged. This need has been reaffirmed in the recent case study – see Appendix 1.
6.	Implement an appropriate Pitch Usage Policy and maintenance programme.	n/a	A programme of routine and major maintenance activities across the pitches estate, devised in liaison with user groups and clubs, will assist in enhancing the quality and playability of the pitches.	No progress as yet. Remains relevant. A Pitches Policy will lead to efficiency improvements and get the most out of the Council's pitches estate.
8.	Identify Council sites surplus to requirements and consider their future use.	n/a	The audit that informed the Pitches Strategy evidences a number of Council-owned grass pitches that are no longer in use, most likely due to changing demographics over time. Examples include pitches at Drumsurn, King's Lane, Armoy and Mosside. Gaelic games clubs are particularly challenged by a shortfall in training facilities. An exercise to match clubs with surplus pitches in their local area may assist in addressing this shortfall. Clubs availing of this	No progress as yet. Over time the list of surplus pitches may change therefore it's important to review the list on a regular basis. Remains relevant.

Item No	Description	Indicative Capital Costs	Comment/Link to Audit	Mid-Term Update
			opportunity may be able to raise/source funds to carry out upgrading work as necessary.	
9.	Depending on the long term future of the club there is a need to replace the changing accommodation at Armoy Rugby Club and complete drainage work on the pitches. Council to explore construction options for changing accommodation, including modular options.	£540k	Club no longer in operation.	Armoy Rugby Club folded some three years ago. With falling numbers, poor accommodation and competition from close-by clubs, the club could not be sustained. The club's site at Lime Park, owned by the Council and now leased to a local community association is currently home to Causeway American Football team, with a walking track created for Park Run events and local aspirations for an outdoor recreation/wellbeing location.
10.	Consider the development of a changing pavilion in Riada Playing Fields adjacent to the AstroTurf pitch, especially suited to the requirements of female hockey players.	Ref Item 4	The present changing pavilion for Riada Playing Fields is some distance from the AstroTurf pitch. The audit reveals that accommodation in this pavilion is inadequate, not least for females. Female participation in sport is often constrained by inadequate changing accommodation. As the business case is developed, consultation with Ballymoney Hockey Club and other female sports clubs is advisable to determine a best fit solution.	No progress as yet, however it's understood a business case is under development. Recent works to the AstroTurf pitch have upgraded the playing surface and lighting.
11.	Replace the ageing surface on the AstroTurf pitch at Quay Road, Ballycastle.	No longer required	Since the Pitches Strategy was developed the Council now proposed to develop a new leisure centre for Ballycastle at Quay Road, utilising the footprint of the AstroTurf pitch. A new AstroTurf pitch is proposed for the Ballycastle Shared Education Campus, with community use outside curriculum time.	The AstroTurf pitch will be the site for the construction of new Ballycastle Leisure Centre with LUF funding over next few years.

Item No	Description	Indicative Capital Costs	Comment/Link to Audit	Mid-Term Update
13.	Consider the value of a continuing tennis presence in Portrush in view of the proposed redevelopment of Portrush Recreation Grounds.		Portrush Recreation Grounds has been re-developed with any tennis courts. Consultation with local tennis clubs for the Pitches Strategy indicated that the exposed nature of Portrush Recreation Grounds made it increasingly unattractive to tennis. Portrush Recreation Grounds was unlikely to ever become 'home' to a tennis club. The audit found there was an over-supply of tennis courts across the Borough.	Portrush Recreation Grounds has been redeveloped with LUF and DFC funding and no longer includes tennis courts. Portrush Recreation Grounds now offers inclusive cycling paths, an urban plaza, adventure play, a natural turf bowling green, a half size synthetic bowling green and a modern pavilion whilst vehicle parking has also been enhanced.
14.	Carry out upgrade to the tennis pavilion in Ballycastle, including toilet provision and maintenance issues.	£100k	Pavilion accommodation offers only one female toilet whilst showers and changing areas are dated with poor lighting. Ventilation would appear to be inadequate. The roof reportedly leaks.	No progress. Routine maintenance continues.
22.	Support clubs in their aspirations for improved club-based facilities. This could be delivered through the Council's capital and minor grants programmes.	Capital grants	Financial pressures across local government in Northern Ireland The rationale for this budget has not changed; many clubs serve communities where Council-supported opportunities for participation in sport and physical activity may be limited. With over 14,000 playing members across 109 clubs in the eight sports, improved club-based facilities will result in increased participation, not least among young people in general and females in particular. The Council could consider making available grants to clubs to explore the feasibility of capital projects at club sites.	Council Capital Grants operated 2017-19 with £0.75m budget for sport and community applications, however, the grant programme is presently suspended. The programme has benefited several community organisations, including Eoghan Rua GAC in the development of a second pitch. The need for a capital grants programme remains relevant, as evidenced in Section 7 of this report which presents consultation with other facility providers and in the case studies in Appendix 1. This may be provided in the form of major capital grants and/or technical assistance grants to determine feasibility/business case for investment, as found in other local authorities. Any grant

Item No	Description	Indicative Capital Costs	Comment/Link to Audit	Mid-Term Update
				programme should be designed to maximise the potential community benefits, including partnership bids for multi-sport projects that may be eligible to apply to Sport NI funding programmes in the future.
	Sub Total	£3,490,000		

STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS – PRIORITY 2

Item No	Description	Indicative Capital Costs	Comment/Link to Audit	Mid-Term Update
2.	Ensure existing Council facilities for association football in the Limavady area are used to their full potential; consider the potential to increase the quality, capacity and flexibility of the facilities at Scroggy Road and Roe Mill Playing Fields.	£1.5m	One example of a Council site not used to its full potential is at Roe Mill Playing Fields. Here the pavilion has 6 changing rooms however one room is given over to a local pigeon club whilst two other rooms, due to their small size, are needed for a single team. Effectively this means only 4 teams (2 pitches) can be accommodated simultaneously. There are 4 pitches at Roe Mill Playing Fields requiring 8 changing rooms. A new pavilion and further improvements to the existing grass pitches are required. A play park has been developed at Roe Mill Playing Fields. There is some potential to develop a 3G training area at the Roe Mill site, ensuring it is not located on the flood plain.	The room formerly used by the pigeon club has been converted to a changing places facility for use by users of the adjoining accessible play area. The need to match changing accommodation capacity to the number of pitches remains. Consideration of additional 3G pitch provision should take account of the training needs of three mass participation sports in Limavady – association football, gaelic games, rugby – in any site assessment process.
7.	Develop additional grass pitch facilities in the Dungiven area.	£800k	Two local clubs have each expressed the need for increased access to pitches (St Canice’s – men’s football and Kevin Lynch – hurling) whilst two other clubs (St Canice’s – ladies football and St Patrick’s – camogie) have no	No progress as yet. St Canice’s and St Patrick’s clubs continue to grow. Their need for a pitch remains relevant, however, it is understood that the local college and the clubs are

Item No	Description	Indicative Capital Costs	Comment/Link to Audit	Mid-Term Update
			<p>'home' pitch. The new 3G pitch (approximately 90m x 60m) at Dungiven Sports Centre has helped with the need for mid-week training, however, is not suitable for matches. The nearby County Derry GAA centre at Owenbeg has multiple pitches, however, County squads are given priority.</p>	<p>currently exploring the possibility of an application to Sport NI/DfCs 'Your School Your Club' funding programme.</p>
12.	<p>Consider the development of improved tennis provision in the Coleraine area in respect of scale of provision and playing surfaces.</p>	£975k	<p>Presently two clubs in Coleraine share a single site – 4 courts with a bitmac surface unsuited to inter-club competition. This is unsustainable in terms of tennis development.</p> <p>Consultation identified local aspirations for an indoor tennis facility but it is considered likely that the lack of a fit for purpose outdoor facility is a greater limiting factor to the development of tennis in the area. The site at Anderson Park has a flood risk, however, the provision of artificial grass tennis courts in the Coleraine area will encourage more participation in tennis.</p>	<p>On of the two clubs, Coleraine Tennis Club, no longer operates from Anderson Park. There has been recent investment to maintain the playing surface and improve lighting. With only one club now operating from Anderson Park, facilities there are more likely to suit demand.</p>
16.	<p>Consider the design of future indoor facility developments regards their suitability for indoor cricket practice.</p>	CLC budget	<p>As a sport cricket is constrained by being viewed as taking place in the summer months. None of the 5 clubs in the Borough have indoor facilities; 4 of the clubs are clustered in the Limavady area. Coleraine Leisure Centre has a projectile net on a single badminton court which has not been used for cricket practice in recent years due to the risk of balls damaging the ceiling. Roe Valley Leisure Centre's Minor Hall (3 badminton courts) projectile net was removed some years ago, however local clubs have used the hall during the summer for</p>	<p>No progress as yet. This recommendation could be considered in the design of new sports halls.</p>

Item No	Description	Indicative Capital Costs	Comment/Link to Audit	Mid-Term Update
			children's cricket sessions using adapted equipment.	
18.	Consider a new approach to supporting lawn bowls including the provision of synthetic greens.	£410k	High maintenance costs (at least £10k per year per green) and low club membership numbers at the Council's greens point to the need to review how the Council continues to support participation whilst achieving best value from its assets. Synthetic greens greatly reduce the maintenance costs and may be seen as encouraging greater participation through increased playability. The Pitches Strategy put forward three main options for the future of the Council's bowling greens; (i) clubs take on maintenance; (ii) convert to synthetic; (iii) asset transfer.	A new full size synthetic green has been developed at the Dungiven Sports Centre and a synthetic training green developed at the Portrush Recreation Grounds alongside a full-size natural grass green.
19.	Consider the development of MUGA's at Cushendall, Limavady, Dungiven, Castlerock, Dervock, Cloughmills and Portrush. The development of smaller MUGA's has some crossover with the work of the Council's Play Strategy.	£1.2m	The audit shows gaps in the provision of MUGA's in these areas. Community consultation (reported in the audit) supports the need for these facilities, however as each one is considered the Council will need to carry out further consultation to determine their purpose and the type/design best suited to the agreed purpose, not least the surface. Local need will help determine the primary purpose of a MUGA project – sport or play – and the design solution for the need.	Cloughmills Pitch progressed to site acquisition for new full size grass pitch only and more recently a wider review of a potential site for a sports-specified MUGA within the village and a possible application to the 'Your School Your Club' funding programme. The Council has developed some MUGAs, funded by PEACE and/or Small Settlements funding programmes since the strategy was adopted.
21.	Consider re-development of the Council's shale pitches where this is possible.	£500k	With the advent of synthetic turf technology shale pitches are effectively redundant. Re-development will assist in realising value from the asset.	No progress as yet. The Council's shale pitches are not in use. Remains relevant.
Sub Total		£5,385,000		

STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS – PRIORITY 3

Item No	Description	Indicative Capital Costs	Comment/Link to Audit	Mid-Term Update
5.	Consider the potential to improve grass pitches in line with evolving grass pitch technologies, such as <i>sand fibre natural grass</i> .	£400k	The recommendation remains highly relevant in the development of multi-sport natural grass surfaces that have a much greater playing capacity than a standard or a sand-mattress natural grass pitch. The challenge is to re-designate an existing pitch as multi-sport rather than single sport.	No progress as yet. Remains relevant. (UU Coleraine upgraded a pitch to sand fibre natural grass in 2017).
15.	Consider supporting cricket clubs with specialist equipment to assist the delivery of training sessions and in maintenance of grass surfaces. This could be achieved through the capital grants programme.	Capital grants	The recommendation could be achieved in part through the work of the Council's sport development team and small grants.	No progress as yet. Remains relevant.
17.	Develop perimeter walking/jogging paths (with lights) at a range of club and Council facilities. Also consider Quay Road Playing Fields and a section of the proposed Ballymoney, Ballycastle Greenway, Riada Playing Fields and Roe Mill Playing Fields.	£500k	Whilst noting these developments there is a continuing need for more safe jogging paths/routes in urban areas. Walking/jogging paths are a simple yet effective way to encourage more people to get active and lead healthier lifestyles. In this regard it's noted that Ulster University has an aspiration to develop a 400m synthetic track at its Coleraine campus.	Perimeter jogging path included as part of the development of Quay Road site. Also under consideration for Roe Mill site. Council has made a decision not to progress the Ballymoney to Ballycastle Greenway but is considering a route between Portrush and Bushmills.
20.	Develop a multi-sport synthetic training area at Rugby Avenue Playing Fields with a high specification synthetic surface suited to a range of sports; approximate size 140m x 90m. Ancillary accommodation (parking, pavilion) to be enhanced.	Refer Item 1	Local clubs have a particular need to access full-size training facilities in the winter pre-season period; club-based grass pitches are over-used in this period, partly due to clubs having more teams than they can accommodate on club facilities. The development of a third multi-sport synthetic training area at Rugby	No progress as yet. Remains relevant.

			Avenue will complement the existing AstroTurf pitch and 3G pitch. It will help to further reduce the under-supply of one hour mid-week training slots for association football. Gaelic games particular need in the Coleraine area is for more training facilities, most notably for Eoghan Rua GAC.	
	Sub Total	£900,000		
	Strategy Total	£9,775,000		

5. Strategic Context

The Pitches Strategy was set in the context of key strategic approaches pertaining in 2017. Since then there has been a number of significant developments in the strategic approach of several sports organisations, partly the result of funding programmes, partly the result of new government strategies. Three key strategies are reviewed.

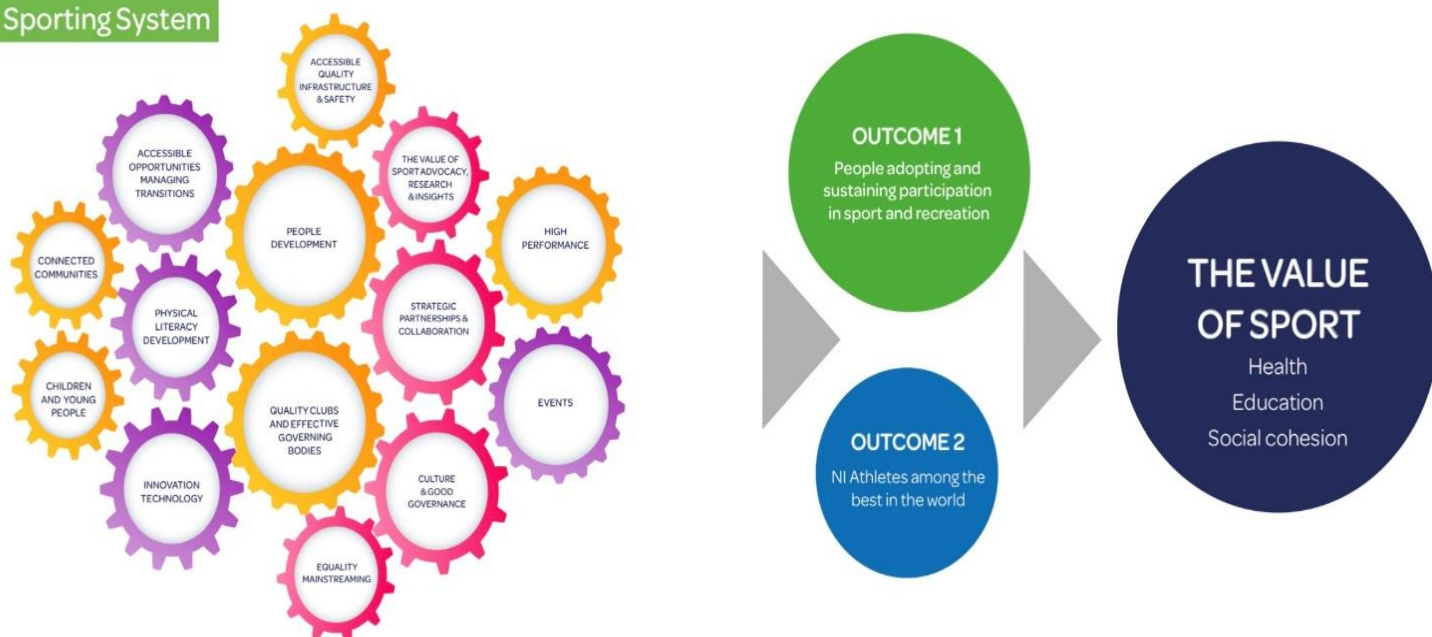
‘The Power of Sport’: Corporate Plan 20231-2026; Sport NI

Sport NIs Corporate Plan effectively underpins Programme for Government and the Department for Communities Sport and Physical Activity Strategy. Many of the challenges identified in earlier strategies still remain, however, the sporting landscape is changing; community planning, COVID-19, rising levels of obesity amongst children and participation in sport and recreation outside the sports club structure present new challenges and new opportunities for organised sport. The draft plan presents learning points resulting from consultation, each worthy of being highlighted here:-

- ❑ The provision of accessible sport and physical recreation opportunities needs to transition effectively into connected pathways within the sporting system, in order to sustain participation generally and for underrepresented groups;
- ❑ A warm, welcoming, inclusive environment and quality coaching is key to sustaining participation, along with a diverse product offering to meet people’s changing needs;
- ❑ Physical literacy in young people and others needs to be improved;
- ❑ People development is central to an effective sporting system;
- ❑ Equality and inclusion needs to be mainstreamed throughout the sporting system;
- ❑ The administrative burden on volunteers needs to be alleviated, to allow an increased focus on culture and practice;
- ❑ A holistic view is needed to achieve the best outcomes for all who participate in sport and physical recreation, so that we can celebrate all of the sporting achievements.
- ❑ There needs to be business planning, modernisation and improved utilisation of digital technologies to adapt to a dynamic and challenging environment.

It’s also useful to understand the *sporting system* that Sport NI identifies as the landscape within which it works, leading to two outcomes and a view of the value of sport.

The Sporting System



Alongside government, Sport NI is moving towards an evaluation of *outcomes* rather than outputs in their capital and programme interventions; in other words, *what did we do, how well did we do it, what difference did it make*. Social outcomes through increased participation are more important than ever before as explained by Sport England²:-

‘Right now the opportunities to get involved in sport and activity – and reap the rewards of being active – depend too much on your background, your gender, your bank balance and your postcode. For too long, people with the most to gain from being active have been the least able to take part. Providing opportunities to people and communities that have traditionally been left behind, and helping to remove the barriers to activity, has never been more important. Sport and physical activity has a big role to play in improving the physical and mental health of the nation, supporting the economy, reconnecting communities and rebuilding a stronger society for all.’

It’s clear that sports’ social conscience has been awakened and that local authorities as facility providers and delivery agents have an important role to play in making a difference. Causeway Coast & Glens Borough Council’s strategy for the future development of pitches and ancillary accommodation will, through the provision of accessible, high quality facilities, greatly assist in making the difference put forward by Sport NI.

A New Sport and Physical Activity Strategy for NI; Department for Communities

The strategy has been developed on behalf of all the departments of the NI Executive to *‘provide a flexible strategic framework for a cross-departmental, ambitious and comprehensive approach to*

² *Uniting the Movement 2021-2031; Sport England.*

promoting participation and excellence in sport and physical activity. The strategy (published March 2022) presents a sports and physical activity continuum that spans all ages, from fundamental movement skills in children to physical activity and social sport in middle and older age for all abilities.

The strategy was researched during the period of the COVID-19 pandemic and the pandemic is reflected in the six key themes that are proposed:-

- ❖ Recovery from the impact of the pandemic on sport and physical activity;
- ❖ Promoting participation, inclusion and community engagement;
- ❖ Promoting excellence in sport;
- ❖ The importance of partnership and integration;
- ❖ Providing inclusive and shared spaces and place; and
- ❖ Promoting the benefits of sport and physical activity.

These themes and the language of the strategy point to a change in mindset regarding the importance of sport and physical activity to individuals and to society as a whole. For example, the *providing inclusive and shared spaces and places* theme suggests that making sports and physical activity infrastructure inclusive and attractive and, where possible, integrating it with active travel plans, will encourage people to be less reliant on the car, so contributing to government's net zero carbon targets.

Looking at the *'importance of partnership and integration'* theme the strategy concludes that *'the principles of partnership and integration should be at the centre of all future investment decisions in new and refurbished sports and physical activity facilities and programmes.'* Specific mention is made of better integration delivering more shared facilities across clubs, schools and communities.

The strategy presents *'recovery from the impact of the pandemic on sport and physical activity'* as the platform for the strategy's successful implementation. Research for the new strategy identified the sector as being weakened and demoralised by the pandemic and the subsequent need to make the sector more resilient to potential future shocks. The strategy recognises the need to have a recovery process that will give the sector a strong foundation as it seeks to rebuild.

This new strategy is an important step forward for sport and physical activity, fundamentally changing how government and its agencies think about the sector and how best to provide support. Collaboration across government departments and the statutory, voluntary and community sector with the aim of achieving maximum effect is emphasised throughout.

A Road Map for Football; Irish FA Corporate Strategy 2022-2027

The relevance of reviewing the IFAs new five year plan lies in its inclusion of 'Participation', 'Facilities' and 'Women's and Girls' as three of seven strategic pillars. The strategy also evidences the IFAs understanding of the 'health, fitness and wellbeing qualities' of football. Delivery of each of the three strategic pillars necessarily includes actions at a local level in the 'everyday' game.

- ❖ In 'Participation' the objectives include 100,000 young people and 50,000 adults participating in football by 2025. If this objective is achieved around 8,000 young people

and 4,000 adults will be involved in football in the borough by 2025.³ It's not clear how this objective will be achieved at a local level however, it's useful to highlight that the 2017 audit of sports clubs in the borough, which included all 46 football clubs, recorded 2,772 young people (boys and girls) and 1,324 adults participating in football clubs, a total of 4,096 players.

- ❖ In 'Facilities' the objectives speak of *'best in class minimum standards for spectator experience at all top level clubs'* and *'support ambitious clubs while ensuring continuous improvement and availability of facilities at the everyday game level'*. These objectives are supported by a capital funding programme, the Grassroots Facilities Investment Fund, provided by the UK Government (Department for Digital, Culture Media & Sport) and administered by the IFA. The aim of the funding programme is to improve grassroots infrastructure. The 2023-2025 phase of the programme will *'focus on delivering quality pitches and improving existing pitches that are not fit-for-purpose, as well as addressing the deficit in pitch supply throughout NI.'* With £5.6 million of funding available, the minimum award will be £100k and the maximum £400k.
- ❖ In 'Women's and Girls' the objectives emphasis the need to better encourage girls and to involve more women in coaching, officiating and administration. This looks to build on the global growth of women's football and *'achieve record levels of interest and participation'* in Northern Ireland.

It's clear the IFA will be supporting grassroots football through this strategy, not least in making funding available for significant capital projects. The Council's 2017 audit will be important evidence to help support local clubs' applications to the Grassroots Facilities Investment Fund. Importantly, the 2017 audit points to a good supply of pitches for adult football yet a poor supply for youth football. It is in the provision of training facilities that the borough's football clubs highlight a significant shortfall.

Other Strategy/Policy Updates of Relevance – Rathlin Island

Whilst not a key strategic development, Council has been made aware of a NI Executive Policy and Action Plan for Rathlin Island. Led by DfI, the plan has a key role to play in ensuring the island community has access to necessary services and infrastructure.

The Rathlin Development & Community Association has recently approached Council for support in developing a strategic case for investment in sport and wellbeing facilities on the island.

³ Based on Causeway Coast & Glens Borough having approximately 8% of Northern Ireland's total population.

6. Census Analysis

For each of five of the seven sports addressed in the strategy it's possible to assess Team Generation Rates (TGRs), that is, the ratio between the number of club-based teams in the borough (within a given age range) and the total population within the same age range. The resulting TGR is the number of people it takes to generate a team. The usefulness of TGRs is in assessing the level of demand for a sport within a defined age range; the lower the ratio the greater the level of participation. In the following table the TGRs for Causeway Coast & Glens area are presented and compared with two other local authorities; those with the highest TGRs are emboldened.

Team Generation Rates			
Sport/Category	Causeway Coast & Glens TGR	Derry City & Strabane TGR	Lisburn & Castlereagh TGR
Association Football			
Mini game – mixed (U7-U11)	1 team per 85 people	1 team per 66 people	1 team per 86 people
Junior – Boys (U12-16)	1 team per 126 people	1 team per 59 people	1 team per 85 people
Junior – Girls (U12-16)	1 team per 547 people	1 team per 591 people	1 team per 1,065 people
Adult – Men (19-40)	1 team per 352 people	1 team per 264 people	1 team per 283 people
Adult – Women (19-40)	1 team per 6,083 people	1 team per 4,010 people	1 team per 9,070 people
Gaelic Games			
Mini Gaelic – mixed (U7-U11)	1 team per 43 people	1 team per 105 people	1 team per 231 people
Junior Gaelic - Boys (U12-18)	1 team per 68 people	1 team per 78 people	1 team per 243 people
Junior Gaelic – Girls (U12-18)	1 team per 104 people	1 team per 100 people	1 team per 457 people
Adult Gaelic – Men (18-45)	1 team per 362 people	1 team per 762 people	1 team per 3,462 people
Adult Gaelic – Women (18-45)	1 team per 999 people	1 team per 1,939 people	1 team per 6,332 people
Cricket			
Junior – Boys (U12-18)	1 team per 735 people	1 team per 193 people	1 team per 757 people
Junior – Girls (U12-18)	0 teams	1 team per 1,934 people	0 teams
Adult – Men (18-55)	1 team per 3,814 people	1 team per 939 people	1 team per 3,030 people
Adult – Women (18-55)	0 teams	1 team per 5,483 people	0 teams
Hockey			
Junior – Boys (11-15)	1 team per 902 people	1 team per 4,928 people	1 team per 213 people
Junior – Girls (11-15)	1 team per 264 people	1 team per 426 people	1 team per 318 people
Adult – Men (16-45)	1 team per 8,941 people	0 teams	1 team per 1,736 people
Adult – Women (16-45)	1 team per 3,355 people	1 team per 6,063 people	1 team per 3,023 people
Rugby			
Junior – Boys (7-17)	1 team per 110 people	1 team per 811 people	1 team per 1,459 people
Junior – Girls (7-17)	0 teams	1 team per 3,576 people	0 teams
Adult – Men (18-45)	1 team per 3,555 people	1 team per 3,851 people	1 team per 8,079 people
Adult – Women (18-45)	0 teams	1 team per 28,284 people	0 teams

The comparison informs a number of observations relating to the popularity of and demand for these sports in the borough;

Association Football

- (i) The mini game (U7-U11 mixed) clearly has a high demand in the borough with a TGR of 1 team per 85 people. It's likely that the Harry Gregg Foundation Small Sided Games programme accounts for a good deal of the demand; this age group accounts for over one third of all football participants in the borough although girls are heavily under-represented, making up only 15% of the age category participants.
- (ii) For Junior Boys (U12-U16) the TGR is high although not as high as in the comparator local authorities.
- (iii) The Causeway Coast & Glens Borough leads the way in the TGR for Junior Girls (U12-U16) at one team per 547 people. Recognising it is a good deal lower than the Junior Boys TGR it is reflective of the imbalance between boys and girls playing football.
- (iv) For Adult Men the borough's TGR is slightly lower than for the comparators yet still relatively high. For Adult Women the TGR is predicably low at one team per 6,083 people.

Gaelic Games

- (i) The audit evidenced high participation in gaelic games in the borough with 6,470 players across 435 teams and 28 clubs. The TGR for Mini Gaelic shows the highest demand closely followed by Junior Gaelic (U12-U18) for boys at one team per 68 people and Junior Gaelic (U12-U18) for girls at one team per 104 people. These TGRs are higher than those for neighbouring Derry City & Strabane.
- (ii) The high TGR trend observed in the under-age categories continues to be seen in both adult categories with the Adult Men's TGR substantially lower than for both Derry & Strabane and Belfast. A similar picture is seen in Ladies Gaelic.

Cricket

The reality for cricket in the borough is the absence of girls and women's teams. This is also the case in Lisburn & Castlereagh and Belfast. However, cricket is traditionally strong in the Strabane area although the TGRs for junior cricket in Derry City & Strabane area a good deal higher (ie, it takes more population to generate a team) than for other sports.

Hockey

In Causeway Coast & Glens hockey is the only sport (of the five analysed for TGRs) with more female than male participants at all age categories. There is one men's hockey club and hockey is generally not played by boys in secondary education.

Rugby

The sport of rugby in Causeway Coast & Glens has a high TGR for Junior Boys (7-17) at one team per 110 people which is not dissimilar to football. However, as with cricket, no girls teams at either junior or adult age categories were recorded in the 2017 audit.

The Team Generation Rates here presented for Causeway Coast & Glens can be used to help inform the future development of facilities, both Council-operated and other providers, and sports development programmes. TGRs pose questions as to why a sport has age-related high demand in one local authority but not in another.

7. Other Providers

A total of 36 ‘other providers’ that is, other than Council, noted facility development projects in the strategy either in progress or as aspirational to address need. These providers were emailed and given an opportunity to update the status of their project. A total of 12 responded⁴. Here’s what they recorded for this mid-term review.

Provider	Project and Status Update
<p>O’Brien’s Foreglen GAC</p>	<p>In the short-term, floodlights and trim trail - in the long-term a second pitch.</p> <p>We have completed our trim trail which is lit at night to ensure safe access for all through the winter. A MUGA has been installed and club has installed lighting here to ensure a safe play environment for all throughout the year. We have levelled and sowed out a second grass pitch.</p> <p>Our membership numbers have more than doubled, for example in the last 6 years the numbers at our summer scheme have increased from 40 to over 100. We cater for all ages from nursery up, boys and girls. A ‘Mums and other’s team has also been set-up with over 30 regular participants.</p> <p>The future need will include the completion of our second grass pitch (fencing and ball catchers), plus the installation of appropriate floodlighting. Given the increased use of our facilities by ladies, it is necessary to ensure more appropriate changing and showering facilities to accommodate this group.</p>
<p>Naomh Padraig North Antrim</p>	<p>Indoor winter training accommodation</p> <p>The club currently hire facilities for winter training which include:-</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Indoor Sports Hall 2. 3G Floodlit Pitches 3. Gym Facilities <p>Our club membership over the recent 7 year period has risen from 60 to 200 children aged from 3 to 17 year olds. We now cater for girls and boys in this age bracket whereas in 2017 it was solely boys.</p>
<p>Ballymoney RFC</p>	<p>Training Facilities</p> <p>A lack of training facilities continues to be a barrier to growth for Ballymoney RFC. Our pitches cannot cope with the current traffic on a weekly basis.</p> <p>The expansion of pitch facilities is required to ensure sufficient space is available to support the growth of male and female rugby across all age groups from minis to adult. We have 550 players currently using our</p>

⁴ Emails were followed up by telephone calls to encourage responses.

	<p>pitches Monday to Saturday for training purposes and our numbers are continuing to grow year on year across all age grades across the club, both male and female. We do not have the pitches available to offer more than one training session per week for our minis and youth boys and girls.</p> <p>Also, our club is in a high rainfall area and with the increased usage due to growth in our membership base our pitches are overused and unable to sustain this level of activity resulting in the pitches not being at an acceptable standard and forcing us to cancel sessions and limit our usage throughout the year. Upon investigation of alternative arrangements there are no external resources that are fit for purpose within the locality of our club.</p> <p>We have invested in recruiting our own Club Community Rugby Officer (CCRO) and are working in partnership with Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council Give It a Try (GIAT) where rugby will be promoted in 26 schools across the council area. At present we are at our limits and our pitch facilities do not enable us to have sufficient space available to support growth across all age groups from minis to adult.</p> <p>Expansion of our pitches would increase the participation and accessibility of female and girls' rugby. It would also greatly enhance attraction of new players and aid with the retention of existing players. We would have the capacity to double our youth section and offer under 20's rugby. Under 20's rugby would aid the transition for school leavers to adult rugby.</p>
<p>Ruairi Og CLG Cushendall</p>	<p>3G pitch suitable for club and community use Provision of a 3G pitch for club and community use has not progressed any further.</p> <p>Since 2017, Ruairi Og have added a 3G MUGA with ball wall and a new indoor strength & Conditioning Suite to our facilities.</p> <p>Ruairi Og facilities provide for 4no adult hurling teams & 6no. juvenile hurling teams. 2no Adult Camogie teams & 6 no. Juvenile Camogie teams. St. Mary's & Glanaan Primary school teams. St Killian's College teams.</p> <p>Our main need at present is another full size grass/3g pitch to meet the training and playing needs of our teams and local primary and secondary schools. We just do not have enough pitch space to meet the club, schools and community needs.</p>
<p>Eoghan Rua GAC</p>	<p>Second full-size pitch and indoor training hall The club's plans for the second full size pitch were somewhat delayed by the Covid -19 pandemic. To assist with the mental health and fitness of our club membership, the club maintained access to the club facilities while fully respecting the Covid regulations in place at the time. This access was, however, somewhat limited and in recognition of this and the additional financial stresses brought about by the pandemic, the club</p>

	<p>waived all membership fees for 2021. This generated significant interest and much goodwill from the local community and on reopening in 2022, the club’s underage membership rose dramatically to almost 350 juveniles. As part of its community service, the club also felt that it was appropriate that we waive the contributions of our sponsors.</p> <p>In recognition of the increased membership at juvenile level, the club reflected on its priorities and realised that they needed to be fine-tuned to address its needs. In particular, there was a real necessity for a high quality, three quarters sized pitch. This would be appropriate to meet the needs of the evolving composition of the membership and, given the dramatic increased inflationary costs experienced, would also be financially prudent. Such a pitch would facilitate all of the club’s training sessions (senior and underage) and competitive matches (underage). This would not only relieve the pressure on our main pitch but would also reduce our costs for hiring outside training venues.</p> <p>Work commenced on this new facility in early 2023 and the contractors will have completed their work by mid-October 2023. The second pitch will be available for use by the end of August 2024. This new pitch will incorporate a walking path which will adjoin the existing pathway on our main pitch. A hurling/ball wall will also be incorporated into the support structure for the pitch and these facilities will be available for use by the general public at all times. The club has engaged with several voluntary organisations in the area who frequently make use our facilities for meetings and are confident that their membership will make actively use of the walking path for both exercise (fitness) and relaxation (mental health). Once fully operational, will effectively conclude phase 3 of the club’s development plans.</p>
<p>Ulster University</p>	<p>Athletics Track</p> <p>We have developed a new 10 year Sports Action Plan to build our ambition for sport at each campus.</p> <p>At Coleraine the focus will be on enhanced investment to build a better student experience and provide a more flexible use of the facilities by the local community (in off-peak periods).</p> <p>The Sports Action Plan will align closely to academic provision, research opportunity and innovation in sport. This will include maximising the potential of the river, the green-field campus, and natural resources.</p> <p>Academic alignment will include new courses in ‘Adventure Sport’, Nutrition, and Golf.</p> <p>Research enhancement will take place at the Water Sports Centre.</p> <p>Recent developments have included an 18 hole disc golf course, stand-alone 3v3 Basketball courts etc. Pitches and grounds will continue to be</p>

	<p>maintained to international standards and aspirations for future development include;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teaching facilities for golf • Air-dome – multi-sport • External athletics tracks to support the local hinterland.
<p>Kilrea GAC</p>	<p>Storage and disability access</p> <p>This year we have supported our Camogie Club in creating a Ball/Skills wall to create a facility for our players to develop their football, camogie, rounders and handball skills. This work is being finalised with a view to being ready to use later this summer.</p> <p>In 2021 we were able to put a tarmac surface on the car park and entrances to the playing pitches, improving access to all at Pearse Park.</p> <p>2020 – we extended walking path around training pitch, creating a 1km track for members to use, We would like to develop the surface of the track which is currently stone dust finish to match the concrete path around the main pitch or the tarmac surface of the car park. We would also like to replace the old step at the bottom corner of the concrete path on the playing pitch with a ramp to match the ramp access from the training pitch side.</p> <p>With an increasing number of people taking part in games and with Covid bringing a renewed focus on healthy lifestyle and the importance on sport for Mental Well-being, we now offer Ladies football for our underage players and Rounders for our older players alongside our existing offering of GAA and Camogie. This has placed additional demand on our playing surfaces, particularly in Winter Months when wet weather can restrict access to the existing surfaces. As a club we have additional land that has not been developed into a playing surface and we would welcome assistance in providing a 4G playing surface to allow us to continue supporting our increasing number of teams.</p> <p>Storage continues to be a challenge, and if there was some assistance to help fund a small and secure storage building it would be welcomed.</p>
<p>St Patrick’s Camogie Club, Dungiven</p>	<p>Pitch</p> <p>St Patrick’s Camogie Club last year marked its 75th Anniversary and this year (2023) we plan to recognise that achievement with a series of events for patrons, past and present. Over the years, leaders off and on the pitch have been tenacious in ensuring that camogie not only survives in Dungiven but thrives for the young people and community that it serves. Having no ‘home’ or facilities of our own, we continue to be in the position of seeking assistance from other clubs and schools for facilities in order to make this possible.</p> <p>In this year, 2023, we currently have nine age groups entered into competitions and Go Games. We currently have 204 registered members, an increase from 95 in 2019 for context. We have more recently added a</p>

	<p>Reserve Senior team to the list, with many girls seeking to play the sport for a more recreational purpose and those wishing to play after Senior retirement. Throughout the year we have many competitive home games, a three day summer camp for the youth, blitz competitions among many other events. Unfortunately, each and every event has to be meticulously planned and some events cannot come to fruition due to no home facilities.</p> <p>At present, we are grateful and indebted to Kevin Lynch Hurling Club, St Canice's GAC and Páirc Na Nóg for use of the facilities when they are available. Like our club, these clubs have also grown over the years with many additional members and age groups, additional fixtures and events, and it is becoming increasingly more difficult to book one of their pitches. There are four codes of GAA operating in Dungiven at present, and only three pitches to facilitate. Derry facilities at Owenbeg are not a viable option either given the schedule of county teams. We have in the past sought use of the Dungiven Sports Centre 4G pitch, however the cost of hire is substantial, and the pitch is not suitable for matches.</p> <p>We continue to base all of our trainings between St Patrick's College pitches and Gaelscoil Neachtain and whilst we are extremely grateful, these facilities are not fit for purpose given no access to toilets and unsuitability for matches.</p> <p>There is no doubt that St Patrick's Camogie is in need of adequate facilities for training and matches now more than ever. The facilities that we currently use are never guaranteed and unfortunately our club does not take priority for bookings leaving us in the position of sometimes having to play home games away to other clubs. Any support in ensuring stability for our club would be more than appreciated and go a long way in ensuring the continual promotion of female sport in our area.</p>
<p>Dalriada School</p>	<p>Need for an on-site Artificial Hockey Facility at Dalriada School</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our need still exists, we have no facilities to play Hockey (Our main sport for Girls) on site. Our school population has now grown to approx. 910 pupils, and in relation to 2017 that need is now much greater. • Hockey is played at all age groups throughout the school from Year 8 (age 11) through to Year 14 (Age 18). There is also a demand from boys' parents for the opportunity to play hockey. This is impossible with no appropriate facility at school. • To play hockey our girls have to travel to and from the Joey Dunlop LC to access a hockey facility with an appropriate surface. They participate, train and play matches against other schools on a weekly basis. We have teams at all age groups and in some we field two sides such is the demand. Without a doubt the lack of on-site facilities coupled with the amount of time put into the travel through the town has over the course of time had an effect on the girls sporting development.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The contrast between what the male section of our schools’ population has with their on-site access to suitable playing surfaces for rugby and football can only be viewed as an equality issue. • In terms of progress, we have actively sought renewed planning permission, set up a Fundraising group, raised to date over £30K from a mixture of Corporate, Community and pupil (sponsored events, bun sales, regular Supermarket door collections by the girls) • The school has developed its other facilities over the years and enjoys a high level of community use, through its 3G football training area and Indoor Halls (Volleyball, Cricket, Badminton) and our Grass pitches (Rugby, Football and Cricket). • It ought to be noted that our female hockey players and the teams they make up do suffer detriment particularly as a high percentage of the schools we play hockey with have their own on-site facility for hockey with many of them in conjunction with their local council.
<p>St Mary’s GAC, Rasharkin</p>	<p>Indoor 3G community facility - applied for PEACE IV funding Due to being unsuccessful with the Peace IV funding process and lack of other available funding we have been unable to commence our facility.</p> <p>We are still committed to building an indoor facility and have full planning permission available and are in a state of readiness to start works when suitable funding becomes available.</p> <p>Due to the lack of funding and our ambition to provide suitable facilities to our community we have self-funded a small outdoor 3G facility through fundraising only, no grants or funding through 3rd parties or local authorities was used.</p> <p>We offer more coaching and games at underage level than previous and we don’t have the current facilities to meet the demand.</p> <p>We have stopped Bingo in early 2023 on a Monday night as we currently don’t have suitable facilities to continue this and provide a suitable environment to host for the stakeholders’ requirements.</p> <p>We operate a healthy club with many health and wellbeing initiatives but again these are reduced or restricted due to the lack of facilities and there is a clear need within the community to provide.</p>
<p>Dalriada Hockey Club</p>	<p>Need for an on-site Artificial Hockey Facility at Dalriada School Dalriada Hockey Club - affiliated with Ulster Hockey 9 teams - 7 junior teams & 3 senior teams (100+ participants) U12 (3x 8 a side teams) U13 (2x 11 a side teams) U14 (2x 11 a side teams)</p>

	<p>U15 (1 x 11 a side team) U18 (2 x 11 a side team) (Females aged 11 - 18 girls) - compete in Junior & Senior Schools Cup/Super-league Schools Competition</p> <p>Representative Players Current U18 Irish school girl - Eva Gaston Current Ulster U17 schoolgirl - Rebecca Ross 2 x current Ulster U16 School girls - Bonnie Connor-Boyd & Molly Brown</p> <p>Aspirations to start boys hockey if pitch secured on school site - currently not an option due to lack of pitch facilities.</p> <p>Girls currently have to play on school gravel pitches which is outdated and unsuitable!</p> <p>Only one astroturf pitch in Ballymoney town is no longer suitable- numbers of participants has outgrown the facilities. Girls are being disadvantaged by having to play on a shale surface. We need a second pitch at Dalriada to facilitate the growth of both schools (female & male) and club hockey in Ballymoney.</p>
<p>St Canice's Ladies GFC, Dungiven</p>	<p>Pitch Our Club's needs/aspirations remain the same. We are not aware of any progress on the site at Hass Road for local Ladies' Gaelic and Camogie Clubs. St Canice's Ladies still rely on heavily used local GAA club facilities for competitive matches at U14, U16, Minor and Senior level, when available (and we are grateful) but often have to give up home advantage and play our games at an away pitch when local GAA pitches are being used by the men and boys.</p> <p>However, it is our underage players who are most deprived, yet their numbers continue to increase every year. We have 150 girls at U6, U8 U10 and U12 playing Ladies Gaelic, training on school pitches with no toilet or changing facilities -a safeguarding issue/not appropriate in 2023.</p>

This review of the status of other providers' facility development projects or aspirations is useful as it informs the Council of how providers have fared since the Pitches Strategy was published and to be aware of what other providers are planning to develop, especially with regard to facilities. Here's summary points:-

- ❖ *Membership numbers* in gaelic games clubs have increased, in some cases more than doubling. Some of the increase is in more female participation, both juniors and adults. However, more players puts pressure on existing facilities.
- ❖ *Sports development activities* in the sports clubs have also increased in the past few years, eg, 'Mums and Others'. One club, Ballymoney RFC, has invested in a Club Community Rugby Officer⁵ and works alongside the Council to promote rugby in

⁵ Ulster Branch IRFU assist in funding community officer posts.

schools. It would appear that sports clubs are increasingly aware of the need to be well organised in terms of the product they offer to members and prospective members. Other providers who adopt this approach are much more likely to grow and be sustainable than those who simply exist to field a team(s). This observation lends weight to the rationale for giving sports development criteria high priority in assessing funding programmes. A good example is Ulster University developing a 10 year Sports Action Plan which, at the Coleraine Campus, focuses on a 'better student experience and more flexible use of facilities by the local community in off-peak periods'. It's useful to note that many providers reference activities linked to mental health; this reflects providers' understanding of opportunities to develop the whole person, not just the sports person.

- ❖ Whilst some *facility developments* have taken place since 2018, many 'other providers' have not been able to progress with facility developments as they would wish. Examples of providers moving ahead with facility developments include O'Brien's Foreglen GAC completing a trim trail with lights, Eoghan Rua GAC commencing work on a second pitch (with £250k funding support from the Council), Kilrea GAC developing a ball/skills wall, upgrading car park and vehicle entrance surfacing and extending a walking path around a training pitch. Examples of providers not being able to progress facility developments include St Patrick's Camogie Club and St Canice's GAC (Dungiven), both in need of a home pitch and Dalriada School, in need of an on-site Astro-Turf pitch for hockey development. At least one provider – St Mary's GAC, Rasharkin had applied, unsuccessfully, to the PEACE IV funding programme in relation to their plan to build an indoor facility.

It's clear that other providers across the Council area approach their operation with vision and commitment. This makes them ideal partners for the Council in terms of operating facilities and delivering activities in the pursuit of shared strategic outcomes that are central to the Council's Community Plan.

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