



Sinn Féin
**STRATEGY FOR
SPORTING
FACILITIES**
(26 COUNTY)





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Introduction and vision

The island of Ireland has long been a sporting nation. We get behind our teams and our athletes. Whether that be at grassroots, amateur level or supporting our elite athletes and teams wherever and whenever they represent Ireland in competition.

We fill stadiums, we flood the streets and we travel the globe to support our teams and sportspeople. Sport is a large part of our culture, a part of who we are and what we do. Sport in Ireland is reflective of the society that we have created and brings multiple benefits to each individual and community. This is our of this sporting tradition and culture.

Sinn Féin believe that sport and exercise are key elements of building a healthier Ireland and tackling obesity, especially amongst our youth. We recognise that by promoting healthy lifestyles through sport and exercise, we can enable people to live long and active lives.

Investment in sports can be recouped through preventative spending capacity in other areas, such as health and mental health. Sport has a proven role both in post-conflict situations, and as a targeted programme of intervention that contributes to social cohesion. We acknowledge the link between investment in sport and the reduction of child poverty and believe that it can also play an important role in reducing crime and anti-social behaviour.

We recognise the potential of the sporting economy, especially in terms of job creation and increased sports tourism.

Sinn Féin believes that sport can and should be for all, regardless of ability, gender, geography or class.



Background

Over the past decade, successive Governments within this state have talked about a 'National Sports Facilities Strategy' but none have ever gone so far as to develop and enact or deliver such. Previous draft strategies have been confined to sporting facilities in this state only and ignore the reality that most sporting codes operate on a truly national basis across each and every community in the 32 counties of Ireland.

While a truly national strategy for developing sports facilities is needed to benefit everyone on this island and to support all of our national sporting bodies and their participants, this document focuses on the responsibilities/ areas that currently fall to Government departments in Dublin.

A Strategy for Sport Facilities from the Department of Tourism Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media can provide the framework for the future planning, expansion and delivery of sport facilities at a state, regional and local level that are fit for purpose, accessible to all and meet the needs of recreational and elite athletes. However, this strategy must be developed to ensure consistency with existing sports facility plans that exist in the North and proactive measures taken to align plans and strategies especially for communities living along the border region. This is essential given that most sporting codes and pursuits are organised on an all-Ireland basis and enjoyed by people across our island and strategies for developing sporting facilities to sustain them must recognise this to be effective.

Our Approach

To implement a strategy to ensure that sport facilities are developed to meet the needs of our growing population, through an evidence-based assessment. That this strategy will allow and encourage access to the full opportunity to pursue the sporting and physical activities that they desire and to encourage lifelong participation and the development of a healthier community and society, and where the barrier of socio-economic status no longer stands in their way.

A strong level of sport participation is essential in the wellbeing of any society. This will not occur by chance; it requires a strategy for sport development and key to this is a strategy for the development of sporting facilities to meet the needs of communities. Providing a high standard of sporting facilities is a key factor in growth of domestic sport participation levels and our standing within the international sporting community.

As the population of the state continues to grow in coming years, we must have a strategy for how sport facilities will grow and develop. Sporting facilities must also be a true reflection of a diverse population. It has been noted in various reports that those in disadvantaged socio-economic groups are many times less likely to participate in all types of sports while



those living in affluent areas have highest level of participation. This must be addressed.

Government Level

In 2012, the draft 'National Sports Facilities Strategy 2012-2016' was developed by the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport. While this draft was never enacted it was circulated among Local Authorities to be used as a resource in the development of Sports and Physical Recreation Strategy at council level across the state.

The ESRI carried out an evidence-based review of this draft document which provides an insight into the system around sport facilities and its shortcomings, and what improvements could be made.

They said:

"Repeated emphasis is placed within the draft strategy on the need to extend sporting opportunities to more disadvantaged groups. This aspiration is appropriate given evidence showing that participation in sport in Ireland has a very strong socio-economic gradient –those in lower socio-economic groups are many times less likely to participate in all types of sport."

“The draft strategy places emphasis on making more efficient use of existing facilities, opening up single-use facilities to other sporting activities, and better sharing of facilities between schools, third-level institutions and communities. These proposals fit well with evidence regarding how individuals make transitions between sporting activities across the life-course and the impact of attending and leaving educational institutions. In particular, the additional time and opportunities to participate in sport offered by staying on in full-time education has been identified as a key factor in explaining the lower participation rate of adults from lower socio-economic groups. Opening up the facilities enjoyed by more advantaged groups, especially at third-level institutions, to those in less advantaged groups is likely to assist in narrowing the socio-economic sporting gap.”

Furthermore, they concluded that:

“The suggestion that the Sports Capital Programme should continue to operate on an applications basis favours organisations that are already flourishing, and hence able to put together stronger applications, and organisations whose members contain educated professionals, who are better able to negotiate the application process. Offering assistance to applicants without such advantages (recommendation 19) may lessen this problem but won’t eliminate it. There is thus an argument for allocating at least some of the SCP funding via a method that is designed specifically to assist nascent or small organisations and that is more favourable for those in lower socio-economic groups.”

The National Sport Policy 2018 – 2027’, was published in 2018 after almost 10 years since the last policy document had expired. In this Sport Policy a commitment was made to carry out an audit of sports facilities across the state by 2020;

“periodically conduct a nation-wide audit of sports facilities (whether publicly or privately owned), with the first such audit to be completed within 2 years of the publication of this policy. These audits will guide decisions regarding the sport capital projects to be prioritised for public funding and we will also consult with National Governing Bodies in relation to any further actions required. Local Authorities will conduct the audit at a local level, as part of their role in implementing their Local Sports Plans. As part of the audit we will work with relevant stakeholders to develop and maintain a fully accessible, comprehensive and up-to-date national database of sports facilities which will also be translated into a web-based portal to serve the needs of the public.”

Having contacted the Minister for Sport enquiring as to the status of this audit, we were informed that the Government decided that the scope of the envisaged database should be widened beyond sports facilities to include information on, for example, recreational facilities in public spaces and also walking trails.

It is aimed to complete the project, involving the accumulation of information from existing datasets from local authorities, other state agencies as well as National Governing Bodies of sport, by the end of 2023. Given the timeframe that has lapsed since this commitment was first made, we believe that the

Government must expediate this process and aim to complete by end of 2022.

Local Authorities Level

The practice of Local Authorities developing Sport Facility Strategies has been common practice across the EU and indeed in many of the councils across North of Ireland for many years. However, in this State only one of the 31 local authorities have developed such a Sport Facility Strategy.

Dún Laoghaire Rathdown County Council developed a 5 year strategy in 2017, *DLR Sports Facilities Strategy*, the purpose of which is to carry out a coordinated approach by the County Council, on how to provide facilities for sport and physical activity that are well maintained, sufficient in numbers and accessible to as many members of the community as possible.

While this strategy by DLR County Council is a welcome and pro-active approach to sport facilities by a Local Authority, we feel, that for it to only cover a 5-year time period prevents this strategy from reaching its full potential as it does not take into full account the population growth projections for the area. We feel it is especially important to focus on the under 14 age group with these projections, as they are shown to have the highest level of sport participation.



Current funding methods for Sporting Facilities

In this State over €1 Billion has been invested in sports facilities through programmes such as the Sports Capital, Local Authority Swimming Pool Programmes, Large-Scale Sport Infrastructure Fund and separate individual programmes for major sporting projects.

At present there are two main methods for sporting organisations and community leisure centres to obtain state support for further development, the Large-Scale Sport Infrastructure Fund (LSSIF) and Sports Capital and Equipment Programme (SCEP).

State aid in the form of programs such as the SCEP and LSSIF have been critical in the development and modernisation of a vast amount of sport facilities across the state since their inception and has led to increasing the standard of high-level facilities.

Programmes such as the SCEP have given a strong commitment to providing



more funding to projects and organisations within areas of socio-economic disadvantage.

However, these programmes are often viewed as a method for politicians to win support within different groups by the allocating of funds and thus fails to plan strategically for long term development of the sports within the community, and the supply and demand gaps in current provision and future requirements.

Large-Scale Sport Infrastructure Fund (LSSIF)

The Government has provided a capital allocation of at least €100m over the period 2018 to 2027 for the Large-Scale Sport Infrastructure Fund, of which €77.4m has already been allocated to 25 projects.

While this programme is aimed primarily at the 'National Governing Bodies' and Local Authorities it was also open to other bodies, clubs and voluntary organisations to apply but such applications would necessarily have to be made and prioritised by a Local Authority and/or an NGB.

Projects that have so far benefited from this funding range from GAA County Grounds, to swimming pools to Rugby Centre of Excellence across the state.

Sports Capital and Equipment Programme (SCEP)

The Sports Capital and Equipment Programme is the state's primary vehicle for supporting the development of sports facilities and the purchase of non-personal sports equipment. With €40 million being allocated for the latest round of grants and the previous year's allocations listed below.

Year	Total Allocated
2016	€30,585,000
2017	€67,331,000
2018	€3,967,092
2019	€58,190,961
2020	€233,861

Recommendations

■ A state-wide audit is required on all forms of outdoor and indoor sporting facilities in the 31 Local Authorities. The Department of tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media, Sport Ireland, Local Authorities along with both Department of Education and Department of Higher Education will play a central role in the carrying out of this audit. This audit will allow us to gain a full understanding of the current capacity and level of use that each facility has. This audit will cover the following three categories.

- **State-wide Sports Facility:** a sports facility developed to international specifications and designed by the national governing body as its primary competition and/ or training venue.

- **Regional Sports Facilities:** a sports facility which attracts users across several counties, conforms to technical regulations of the national governing body and/or incorporates a range of sport facilities suitable for training at the highest international level, in a single location or cluster sites.

- **Local Sports Facility:** an indoor or outdoor facility, either publicly or privately owned, used by the local community/ clubs for sports and recreational participation, including primary, secondary and higher education facilities.

■ An audit on the current usage of sports facilities that fall under the above three categories.

■ These audits, alongside data on projected population grown in each Council Authority in the state over a 10 to 15-year period, will allow us to forecast what deficit/surplus or shortfall may occur among the different facilities.

■ To carry out a process of consultation with the stakeholders to identify their current and future projected facility needs.

■ To undertake a supply and demand assessment to identify gaps in current provision.

■ To develop a facility framework reflecting identified current and future community needs.

■ To develop a set of strategic principles and key priorities that will underpin all future investment in sports facilities.

■ To align and integrate this strategy with current strategies that exist in the North to ensure a consistency of planning and delivery especially in the border regions.

Conclusion

According to research published by the Federation of Irish Sport, for every €100 invested in sport by the Irish Government, the Exchequer receives up to €195 back through taxes on sports-supported expenditures and incomes.

Expenditure on sport is important for social and economic development of the country given the benefits associated with sporting activities, such as health and wellbeing, social and cultural development, tourism and the economy, to list just a few.

Without a strategy that aims to develop an agreed and integrated approach to planning, funding, provisions of management of sporting facilities, the gaps in the provision of facilities will continue to grow across the State.

This strategy will allow and ensure that future provision of facilities will avoid duplication of services and ensure that value for money is achieved.

It will also place an emphasis on the importance of tracking and analyzing what has been achieved and of putting in place a strategy to ensure the state has a sporting infrastructure that meets international standards and the demand of an ever-growing population.

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